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REMOTE WORK CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The unprecedented acceleration of remote work adoption, catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has fundamentally transformed how multinational enterprises manage their global workforce. This systematic literature review synthesizes existing research on remote work culture and its influence on employee engagement across international contexts. Drawing upon 127 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2024 from Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO databases, this review employs bibliometric analysis and thematic synthesis to identify key antecedents, outcomes, and moderating factors affecting engagement in remote work environments. The findings reveal that remote work culture operates through a dual pathway mechanism—enhancing engagement through increased autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance while simultaneously threatening it through social isolation, communication barriers, and weakened organizational identification. Cross-cultural dimensions, particularly individualism-collectivism and power distance, significantly moderate these relationships, with implications for how multinational corporations design and implement remote work policies across diverse national contexts. This review contributes to international management theory by integrating the Job Demands-Resources model with Hofstede's cultural framework, proposing a comprehensive model for understanding remote work engagement in global settings. The paper concludes with a future research agenda addressing emerging themes including digital leadership, virtual team diversity, and hybrid work models in the post-pandemic era.

KEYWORDS: Remote Work, Employee Engagement, Organizational Culture, Cross-Cultural Management, Virtual Teams, International Human Resource Management, Job Demands-Resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of work has undergone a seismic transformation in recent years. Remote work, once considered a peripheral arrangement reserved for select knowledge workers, has emerged as a mainstream organizational practice reshaping how multinational enterprises (MNEs) coordinate their international operations (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Gibson, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic served as an unprecedented catalyst, compelling organizations worldwide to rapidly transition from traditional office-based work to virtual arrangements (Barrero et al., 2023). According to recent estimates, approximately 55% of the global workforce now engages in some form of remote or hybrid work, representing a fundamental shift in the employment relationship (McKinsey, 2021; Gallup, 2023).

This transformation carries profound implications for employee engagement—a critical determinant of organizational performance, innovation, and competitive advantage in the global marketplace (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002), has been consistently linked to reduced turnover intentions, enhanced productivity, and superior customer outcomes (Harter et al., 2002; Rich et al., 2010). However, the shift to remote work introduces novel challenges and opportunities that fundamentally alter the mechanisms through which engagement develops and is sustained (Wang et al., 2021).

From an international management perspective, the rise of remote work is particularly consequential. MNEs have historically relied upon physical cross-border exchanges—expatriates, international business travelers, and co-located teams—to transfer knowledge, coordinate operations, and build organizational culture across geographically dispersed units (Froese et al., 2021; Minbaeva et al., 2014). Remote work disrupts these established patterns, enabling virtual collaboration that transcends national boundaries while simultaneously raising questions about how organizational culture can be transmitted and maintained in digital environments (Benitez et al., 2023).

Moreover, the relationship between remote work and employee engagement is likely to be contingent upon national cultural contexts. Hofstede's (1980, 2001) seminal work on cultural dimensions suggests that societies vary systematically in their orientations toward individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and other cultural values. These

dimensions shape employee expectations regarding autonomy, supervision, social interaction, and work-life boundaries—all of which are directly implicated in remote work arrangements (Thomas and Peterson, 2017). Consequently, remote work policies that enhance engagement in one cultural context may prove ineffective or even counterproductive in another (Taras et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of research on remote work, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how remote work culture influences employee engagement, particularly across international contexts. Existing reviews have focused primarily on specific outcomes such as productivity or well-being (Charalampous et al., 2019; Mäkikangas et al., 2022), or have examined remote work within single-country settings (Kossyva et al., 2022). There remains a need for a comprehensive synthesis that integrates insights from international management, cross-cultural psychology, and organizational behavior to develop a holistic understanding of remote work engagement in global settings.

This systematic literature review addresses this gap by pursuing four interrelated objectives: (1) to map the intellectual landscape of research on remote work culture and employee engagement; (2) to identify key antecedents, outcomes, and mechanisms linking remote work to engagement; (3) to examine how cross-cultural factors moderate these relationships; and (4) to develop an integrative framework and research agenda for advancing theory and practice in this domain. By synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying future directions, this review aims to provide guidance for both scholars seeking to advance international management theory and practitioners responsible for designing remote work policies in MNEs.

2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. Remote Work Culture: Definition and Dimensions

Remote work culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that characterize how organizations approach and implement work arrangements outside traditional office settings (Newman et al., 2020; Schein, 1990). Unlike remote work as a structural arrangement, remote work culture refers to the underlying assumptions and behavioral expectations that guide how employees and managers interact, collaborate, and perform in distributed environments (White and Brown, 2021).

Building on organizational culture frameworks (Hofstede et al., 1990; Pettigrew, 1989), it has been conceptualized as remote work culture as comprising

three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension is structural flexibility—the degree to which organizational policies, technologies, and infrastructure support work from locations other than the traditional office. The second dimension is relational connectivity—the extent to which norms and practices facilitate meaningful interpersonal relationships, communication, and collaboration among distributed workers. The third dimension is performance orientation—the emphasis placed on outcomes versus presence, trust versus monitoring, and autonomy versus control in evaluating employee contributions.

2.2. Employee Engagement: Conceptualization and Measurement

Employee engagement has emerged as one of the most widely studied constructs in organizational behavior, though definitional ambiguity persists (Saks and Gruman, 2014; Shuck, 2011). This review adopts the work engagement conceptualization proposed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), which defines engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working; dedication encompasses a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge; and absorption denotes being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

This conceptualization has been widely validated across cultural contexts and has demonstrated predictive validity for outcomes relevant to international management, including task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intentions (Christian *et al.*, 2011; Halbesleben, 2010). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) remains the most commonly employed measure, with short-form versions facilitating cross-cultural research (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

2.3.1. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) provides a robust framework for understanding how remote work influences engagement. The model posits that job characteristics can be classified into demands (aspects requiring sustained effort that may deplete energy) and resources (aspects that facilitate goal achievement, reduce demands, or stimulate growth). According to JD-R theory, engagement emerges through a motivational process whereby job

resources—such as autonomy, social support, and feedback—foster intrinsic motivation and work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2014).

Remote work reconfigures the demand-resource landscape in complex ways. On one hand, it may enhance certain resources such as autonomy, flexibility, and reduced commuting stress; on the other hand, it may introduce new demands including social isolation, technostress, and work-home interference (Sardeshmukh *et al.*, 2012; Gajendran *et al.*, 2024). Recent extensions of JD-R theory have emphasized the importance of personal resources—such as self-efficacy and resilience—in enabling employees to leverage job resources and cope with demands effectively (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

2.3.2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework

Hofstede's (1980, 2001) cultural dimensions theory provides the primary lens for examining cross-cultural variations in the remote work-engagement relationship. The framework identifies six dimensions along which national cultures vary: power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint. Each dimension carries implications for how remote work is experienced and how it affects engagement.

Power distance—the acceptance of unequal power distribution—influences preferences for supervision and autonomy. High power distance cultures may find the reduced managerial oversight inherent in remote work disorienting, while low power distance cultures may embrace the increased autonomy (House *et al.*, 2004). Individualism-collectivism shapes the importance of social relationships at work; collectivist cultures that emphasize group harmony may experience greater difficulties with the social isolation of remote work (Triandis, 1995). Uncertainty avoidance affects comfort with the ambiguity and unstructured nature of remote work environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Search Strategy and Data Sources

This systematic literature review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page *et al.*, 2021; Moher *et al.*, 2009). It has been searched three comprehensive databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO Business Source Complete. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of management, business, and psychology literature, ensuring capture of relevant interdisciplinary research (Donthu *et al.*, 2021a).

The search query combined terms related to remote work ("remote work*" OR "telework*" OR "work from home" OR "virtual work*" OR "distributed work*" OR "hybrid work*") with terms related to employee engagement ("employee engagement" OR "work engagement" OR "job engagement") and cultural/international context ("cross-cultural" OR "international" OR "multinational" OR "global" OR "national culture"). Searches were conducted in titles, abstracts, and keywords.

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they: (1) examined remote work, telework, or virtual work arrangements; (2) addressed employee engagement as an outcome, antecedent, or correlate; (3) were published in peer-reviewed journals between January 2018 and December 2024; (4) were written in

English; and (5) employed empirical methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed). Articles were excluded if they: (1) focused exclusively on freelance or gig workers; (2) examined only student samples; (3) were conference papers, dissertations, or book chapters; or (4) did not provide sufficient methodological detail.

3.3. Screening and Selection Process

The initial search yielded 2,847 records. After removing duplicates ($n = 634$), it has been screened 2,213 titles and abstracts, excluding 1,892 records that did not meet inclusion criteria. Full-text assessment was conducted on 321 articles, resulting in the exclusion of 194 articles that did not focus substantively on the remote work-engagement relationship or lacked empirical rigor. The final sample comprised 127 articles for analysis.

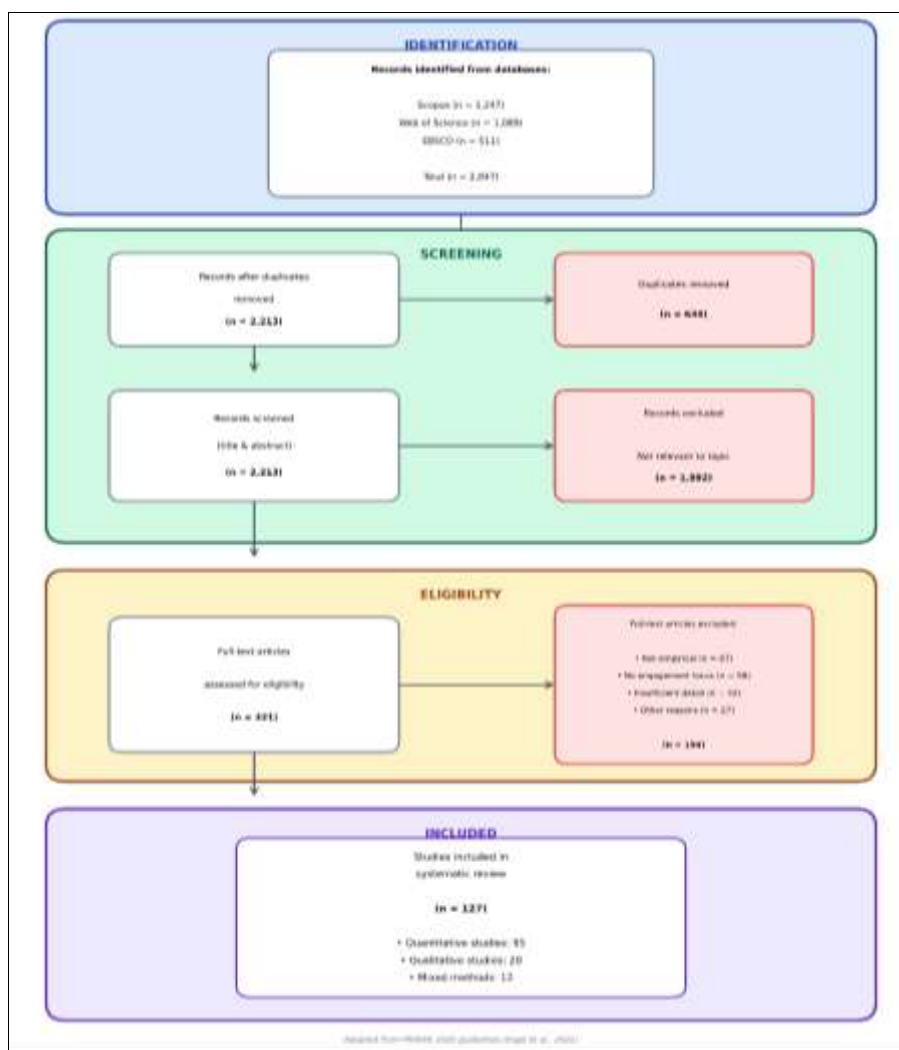


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram.

3.4. Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction captured: author(s), year, journal,

theoretical framework, research design, sample characteristics (country, industry, size), operationalization of remote work and engagement, key findings, and cultural/international dimensions examined. Two researchers independently coded articles, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Inter-rater reliability exceeded 0.85 across all coding categories.

It has been employed a combination of

bibliometric analysis and thematic synthesis. Bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer software (van Eck and Waltman, 2010) mapped co-citation networks, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co-occurrence to identify intellectual structure. Thematic synthesis followed established procedures (Thomas and Harden, 2008) to identify, code, and organize findings into descriptive and analytical themes.

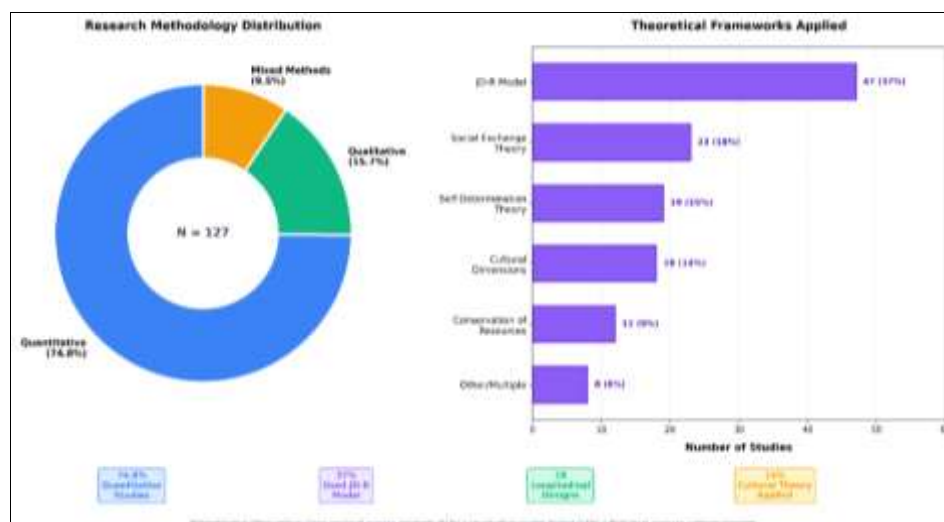


Figure 2: Methodology Distribution.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive Overview

4.1.1. Publication Trends

The 127 articles were distributed across 67 journals, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of

remote work engagement research. The most prominent outlets included the Journal of Applied Psychology ($n = 12$), Human Resource Management ($n = 12$), Journal of Occupational Health Psychology ($n = 9$), International Journal of Human Resource Management ($n = 7$), and Journal of International Business Studies ($n = 6$).

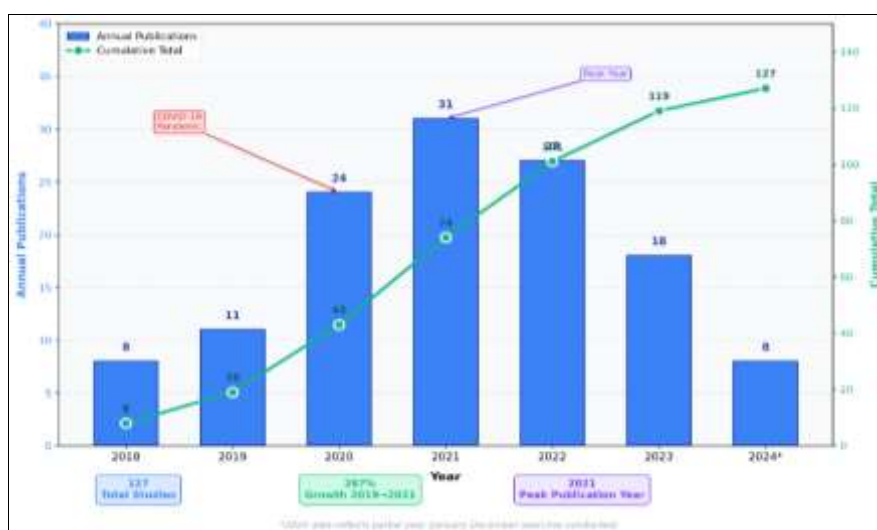


Figure 3: Publication Trends and Cumulative Growth (2018-2024).

Publication volume increased dramatically over the review period.

Articles per year rose from 8 (2018) to 11 (2019), then surged to 24 (2020), 31 (2021), 27 (2022), 18 (2023), and 8 (2024, partial year). This pattern reflects the pandemic-driven acceleration of remote work research interest, with a gradual normalization as remote work became institutionalized.

4.1.2. Geographic Distribution

Studies were conducted across 42 countries. The

United States dominated the sample ($n = 34$, 26.8%), followed by the United Kingdom ($n = 14$, 11.0%), Germany ($n = 11$, 8.7%), China ($n = 9$, 7.1%), and the Netherlands ($n = 8$, 6.3%).

Multi-country studies accounted for 18 articles (14.2%), enabling cross-cultural comparisons. Underrepresented regions included Africa ($n = 3$), Latin America ($n = 4$), and South Asia ($n = 5$), representing opportunities for future research.

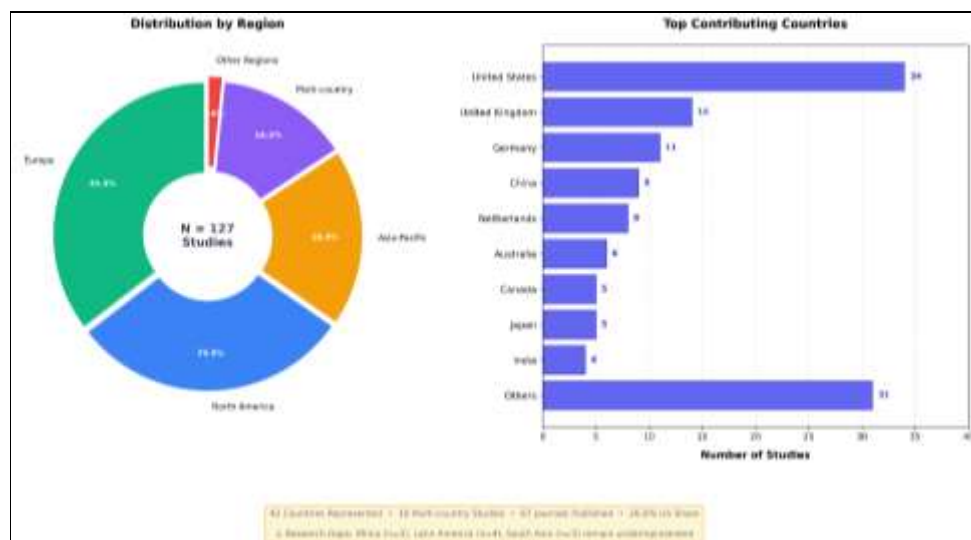


Figure 4: Geographic Distribution by Region and Top Contributing Countries.

Table 1: Summary of Reviewed Studies by Region and Methodology.

Region	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed	Total (%)
North America	29	6	3	38 (29.9%)
Europe	32	8	5	45 (35.4%)
Asia-Pacific	18	4	2	24 (18.9%)
Multi-country	14	2	2	18 (14.2%)
Other Regions	2	0	0	2 (1.6%)
Total	95	20	12	127 (100%)

4.2. Thematic Findings

4.2.1. Antecedents of Employee Engagement in Remote Work Settings

The reviewed literature identifies three categories of antecedents affecting engagement in remote work contexts: individual factors, organizational factors, and job design factors.

Individual Factors Personal resources emerged as critical enablers of engagement in remote settings. Self-efficacy for remote work—defined as confidence in one's ability to effectively perform job tasks while working remotely—consistently predicted higher engagement levels (Cho et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Employees with strong digital literacy and comfort with technology-mediated communication demonstrated superior adaptation to remote

arrangements (Carillo et al., 2021). Personality traits, particularly conscientiousness and emotional stability, buffered against the isolating effects of remote work (Amano et al., 2021).

Organizational Factors Organizational support emerged as the most frequently cited organizational antecedent. Perceived organizational support for remote work—including technology provision, policy flexibility, and managerial backing—was positively associated with engagement across multiple studies (Bentley et al., 2016; Kohont and Ignjatović, 2022). Leadership behaviors, particularly transformational leadership characterized by inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, proved especially important in virtual contexts where leaders must work harder to maintain connection with dispersed teams (Contreras et al., 2020; Hajjami and Crocco, 2023).

Job Design Factors Consistent with JD-R theory, job resources including autonomy, skill variety, and performance feedback positively predicted engagement (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012; Gajendran et al., 2024). Autonomy showed particularly strong effects in remote contexts, where employees have greater latitude over when, where, and how they complete work tasks. However, excessive autonomy without adequate structure or support could undermine engagement, suggesting a curvilinear relationship (Parent-Lamarche, 2022).

4.2.2. *The Dual Pathway Mechanism*

A central finding from this review is that remote work operates through a dual pathway mechanism affecting employee engagement—a gain pathway and a drain pathway (Wang et al., 2025). The gain pathway encompasses the positive mechanisms through which remote work enhances engagement: increased autonomy and flexibility allow employees to work during peak productivity periods; reduced commuting saves time and energy; fewer office distractions enable deeper concentration; and improved work-life balance supports overall well-being. Studies consistently found that employees who could leverage these benefits reported higher vigor, dedication, and absorption (Karthika et al., 2024; Huo et al., 2024).

Conversely, the drain pathway comprises negative mechanisms through which remote work depletes engagement. Social isolation emerged as the most prominent drain factor, with remote workers reporting feelings of loneliness, disconnection from colleagues, and weakened organizational identification (Golden et al., 2008; Morrison-Smith and Ruiz, 2020). Communication barriers—including reduced information richness, asynchronous delays, and misunderstandings in text-based exchanges—impeded collaboration and relationship-building (Marlow et al., 2017). Work-home interference, paradoxically, could increase under remote arrangements as boundaries between professional and personal life became blurred (Schieman et al., 2021). Technology-related demands including constant connectivity expectations, information overload, and technostress further contributed to the drain pathway (Schmitt et al., 2021).

4.2.3. *Cross-Cultural Moderators*

Eighteen multi-country studies and 23 single-country studies explicitly examined cultural factors, providing evidence for cultural moderation of the remote work-engagement relationship.

Individualism-Collectivism This dimension

emerged as the most consequential cultural moderator. In individualistic societies (e.g., United States, Netherlands, Australia), remote work's autonomy benefits translated more directly into enhanced engagement, as employees valued independence and self-direction (Nakata and Sivakumar, 1996). Conversely, in collectivistic societies (e.g., China, Japan, South Korea), the social isolation inherent in remote work posed greater threats to engagement, as employees placed higher value on in-group relationships and collective harmony (Taras et al., 2024). Studies from collectivist contexts emphasized the importance of virtual team-building activities and frequent synchronous communication to maintain engagement (Wang and Li, 2020).

Power Distance Power distance moderated the effectiveness of different leadership approaches in remote settings. In high power distance cultures (e.g., India, Malaysia, Mexico), employees expected more directive leadership and clearer performance expectations when working remotely; the absence of visible supervision could create anxiety rather than liberation (House et al., 2004). In low power distance cultures (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, Israel), participative and empowering leadership styles enhanced engagement in remote contexts (Hofstede, 2001).

Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance showed greater need for structured remote work arrangements with clear policies, schedules, and performance criteria. Ambiguity in remote work expectations undermined engagement more severely in high uncertainty avoidance cultures (e.g., Greece, Portugal, Japan) compared to low uncertainty avoidance cultures (e.g., Singapore, Denmark, Jamaica) where employees adapted more readily to flexible arrangements.

4.2.4. *Outcomes of Engagement in Remote Work Contexts*

Engaged remote workers demonstrated positive outcomes across individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, engagement was associated with higher job satisfaction, reduced burnout, better work-life balance, and improved well-being (Mäkikangas et al., 2022). Engaged remote workers reported greater productivity and were more likely to engage in proactive behaviors such as job crafting and voice (Bakker et al., 2023). At the organizational level, team-level engagement predicted innovation performance, customer satisfaction, and reduced turnover intentions (Kwon

and Kim, 2020).

5. INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITIONS

Synthesizing findings from this review, an integrative framework for understanding remote work culture and employee engagement in international contexts has been proposed. The framework, depicted in Figure 2, integrates the JD-R model with Hofstede's cultural dimensions to explain how remote work affects engagement across diverse national settings.

The framework posits that remote work culture influences engagement through the dual pathway of demands and resources. The gain pathway operates through enhanced job resources (autonomy, flexibility, work-life balance) and personal resources (self-efficacy, digital competence). The drain pathway operates through elevated job demands (isolation, communication barriers, technostress, work-home conflict). The relative strength of each pathway – and thus the net effect on engagement – is moderated by national cultural dimensions, organizational factors, and individual characteristics.

Based on this framework, the following propositions for future research have been made;

Proposition 1: Remote work culture enhances employee engagement through the gain pathway (increased autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance) and diminishes engagement through the drain pathway (social isolation, communication barriers, and work-home interference).

Proposition 2: Individualism positively moderates the gain pathway, such that autonomy and flexibility benefits translate more strongly into engagement in individualistic cultures.

Proposition 3: Collectivism amplifies the drain pathway, such that social isolation more severely undermines engagement in collectivistic cultures.

Proposition 4: Power distance moderates the relationship between leadership style and engagement in remote contexts, with directive leadership enhancing engagement in high power distance cultures and participative leadership enhancing engagement in low power distance cultures.

Proposition 5: Organizational practices (e.g., virtual team-building, communication protocols, boundary management support) can buffer the drain pathway and amplify the gain pathway across cultural contexts.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This review makes several contributions to international management theory. First, it has been extended that the JD-R model to remote work contexts by identifying the specific demands (isolation, technostress, boundary violations) and resources (autonomy, flexibility, digital tools) that characterize virtual work arrangements. While prior JD-R research has acknowledged context-specificity, our review provides a comprehensive mapping of demands and resources unique to remote work settings.

Second, cultural dimensions theory has been iterated with the JD-R framework to explain cross-national variation in remote work effects. By specifying how individualism-collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance moderate demand-resource pathways, a theoretical basis for predicting is provided when and where remote work will enhance versus undermine engagement. This integration addresses calls for greater attention to cultural boundary conditions in organizational behavior research (Tsui et al., 2007).

Third, the dual pathway framework advances understanding of why remote work produces inconsistent engagement outcomes across studies. By recognizing that remote work simultaneously activates both positive (gain) and negative (drain) mechanisms, the framework explains how organizational practices and cultural contexts shift the balance toward net positive or negative effects.

6.2. Practical Implications

For multinational enterprises implementing remote work policies across diverse cultural contexts, this review offers actionable guidance. First, a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to optimize engagement; remote work policies should be adapted to local cultural conditions. In collectivist cultures, organizations should invest more heavily in virtual team-building, synchronous communication opportunities, and visible demonstrations of organizational support. In high power distance cultures, clear performance expectations and regular check-ins may be necessary to prevent disengagement.

Second, organizations should implement dual-track strategies that simultaneously amplify the gain pathway and mitigate the drain pathway. Practical interventions include: providing high-quality collaboration technologies; training managers in virtual leadership skills; establishing clear communication protocols that balance flexibility with connectivity; offering boundary management support such as designated no-contact hours; and

creating virtual spaces for informal social interaction.

Third, selection and training of remote workers should attend to individual differences in self-efficacy, digital competence, and boundary management ability. Personal resources can buffer demands and leverage resources, suggesting that organizations should both select for these characteristics and develop them through targeted interventions.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

This review identifies several promising directions for future research. First, longitudinal studies are needed to understand how the remote work-engagement relationship evolves over time. The reviewed literature is dominated by cross-sectional designs that cannot capture adaptation processes or distinguish temporary pandemic effects from enduring patterns.

Second, research on hybrid work arrangements—combining remote and on-site work—represents an important frontier. Hybrid models may offer optimal balance by providing autonomy benefits while maintaining social connections, but optimal configurations likely vary across cultural contexts and individual preferences (Lauring and Jonasson, 2024).

Third, the role of digital leadership in shaping remote work culture warrants investigation. How leaders communicate vision, build trust, and maintain culture in virtual environments remains undertheorized despite its practical importance (Contreras et al., 2020).

Fourth, research in underrepresented regions—particularly Africa, Latin America, and South Asia—is essential to assess generalizability and identify unique challenges and opportunities in emerging

economy contexts.

Finally, multi-level research examining how individual, team, and organizational factors interact to shape engagement in remote settings would advance both theory and practice. Current research operates predominantly at the individual level, missing important cross-level dynamics.

8. CONCLUSION

Remote work has transformed from an exceptional arrangement to an institutionalized feature of the global employment landscape. This systematic review synthesized 127 studies to develop an integrative understanding of how remote work culture influences employee engagement across international contexts. The dual pathway framework reveals that remote work simultaneously enhances engagement through increased autonomy and flexibility while threatening it through social isolation and boundary challenges. Cultural dimensions—particularly individualism-collectivism and power distance—moderate these relationships, with important implications for multinational enterprises implementing remote work policies across diverse national contexts.

This review contributes to international management theory by integrating the JD-R model with Hofstede's cultural framework, offering a comprehensive lens for understanding context-dependent effects of remote work. For practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of culturally-adapted remote work policies and dual-track strategies that amplify benefits while mitigating costs. As remote and hybrid work continue to reshape global employment, understanding these dynamics becomes ever more critical for organizational success in the international arena.

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