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**Dr. Manjula Grover**

Associate Professor,

Department of Commerce,

Shyama Prasad Mukherji

College, University of Delhi,

New Delhi, India

## Remote work in India: Employee work-life balance, productivity and well-being in the post-pandemic era

**Manjula Grover**

### Abstract

The sudden and large-scale shift to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way organisations in India operate, while reshaping employee experiences of work and personal life. This paper presents a systematic literature review examining the impact of remote work on employee work-life balance, productivity, and well-being, drawing on scholarly studies published. Adopting the PRISMA framework, the review synthesises findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and government publications that analyse the Indian context and comparable economies.

The review identifies a nuanced relationship between remote work and employee outcomes. Positive effects include improved time flexibility, reduced commuting stress, and opportunities for greater family engagement, which have contributed to enhanced work-life balance and, in many cases, higher productivity. However, these gains are tempered by challenges such as blurred boundaries between work and personal life, increased technostress, social isolation, and uneven access to digital infrastructure, particularly in non-metropolitan regions. Employee well-being emerges as a complex outcome shaped by organisational policies, managerial support, individual coping strategies, and home-work environment factors.

By integrating insights from diverse studies, this paper offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, organisational leaders, and human resource practitioners to design sustainable remote work practices. The findings also highlight areas for future research, especially the need for longitudinal studies and sector-specific analyses within the Indian economy.

**Keywords:** Remote work, work-life balance, employee productivity, employee well-being, India, post-pandemic work

### 1. Introduction

Remote work, also referred to as telework, telecommuting, or work-from-home, refers to an arrangement where employees perform their job responsibilities outside the traditional office environment, often using digital communication and collaboration tools. The concept of remote work has been around for many decades, however, before the year 2020, it was primarily used by only a few sectors and roles in the Indian employment landscape. Then, COVID-19 presented a never-before-seen pandemic which forced rapid acceleration in uptake of remote work across all sectors, including those sectors and jobs that initially maintained a heavy reliance on physical presence (ILO, 2020) <sup>[8]</sup>.

In the Indian context, the view and uptake of remote work has presented solutions and constraints. It has afforded employees an opportunity for greater flexibility, reduce commuting stress, and perhaps allow for improved work-life balance (Bloom *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[3]</sup>. However, there are gaps related to digital infrastructure recognized, disparities in infrastructure between metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions, and perhaps risks related to a blurred demarcation between professional and personal life (Oakman *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Employee productivity under remote work has arguably led to varied results. For some studies, there were productivity increases at work with employees benefited due to less distractions and creating a better workplace (Choudhury *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[4]</sup>. In the same light, while some noted productivity and work efficiency, there were studies showing weaknesses under remote work in collaboration, innovation, and perhaps even work discipline (Wang *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[15]</sup>. Similarly, employee well-being was raised as an emergent issue with much consideration by some literature in terms of lack of work-life balance and mental health, social connectivity & networks, and organisational support systems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Despite available literature around remote work, including growing literature around the topic of remote work in the context of India, there is not a lot of synthesis of specific evidence within India, including consideration of work-life balance, productivity, and well-being, particularly within an evolving "post pandemic" workplace. A Systematic Literature

**Corresponding Author:**

**Dr. Manjula Grover**

Associate Professor,

Department of Commerce,

Shyama Prasad Mukherji

College, University of Delhi,

New Delhi, India

Review (SLR) can fill this gap, to pull together existing literature, make sense of key findings, identify some common practices, and provide evidence for policymakers, organisations, and the academic world. This study seeks to fill this need through review of scholarly and credible literature that was published until January of 2022, to be relevant to current and ongoing discussions for the socio-economic situation of India.

## 2. Literature Review

In the last twenty years, remote work literature has exploded, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are varieties of views on the implications of remote work depending on the industry it has been studied in, the job type, and the context of the country. This review will focus on studies relevant to the Indian context and other comparable economies in relation to work-life balance, productivity, and employee well-being.

### 2.1 Remote work and work-life balance

Work-Life Balance (WLB) refers to the ability to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family commitments without one consistently overwhelming the other (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) <sup>[7]</sup>. Remote work has been found to improve WLB by eliminating commuting time and providing greater flexibility in scheduling (Bloom *et al.*, 2015; Allen *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[3, 1]</sup>. In India, the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM, 2020) <sup>[10]</sup> reported that over 70% of IT employees working remotely during the pandemic experienced better integration between work and personal life.

However, other studies caution that remote work can blur the lines between work and home, leading to role conflict and extended working hours (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Oakman *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[5, 11]</sup>. For employees in non-metropolitan areas, infrastructural challenges such as unreliable internet connectivity have added stress, reducing the potential benefits of flexibility (KPMG India, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### 2.2 Remote work and productivity

Productivity outcomes of remote work are mixed in literature. Choudhury *et al.*, (2021) <sup>[4]</sup> found a 4.4% increase in productivity in an Indian IT services firm under a work-from-anywhere policy, particularly benefiting employees with long commutes. Global evidence also supports productivity gains when employees have greater autonomy and access to suitable digital tools (Bloom *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[3, 15]</sup>.

Conversely, some research highlights challenges such as reduced collaboration, slower decision-making, and lower innovation rates in remote settings (Gibbs *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>. In the Indian context, smaller firms without robust digital systems reported productivity dips due to coordination difficulties (NASSCOM, 2020) <sup>[10]</sup>. Overall, this suggests that organizational readiness and role fit are key factors relating to productivity outcomes.

### 2.3 Remote work and employee well-being

Wellbeing is an extensive concept, covering physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and overall satisfaction with life (Bakker & Demerouti 2007) <sup>[12]</sup>. Whilst remote work facilitates wellbeing, by eliminating fatigue from commuting and enabling healthier lifestyle choices because individuals have flexibility in their schedule

(Tavares, 2017) <sup>[13]</sup>, ultimately excessive and prolonged remote working with isolation can generate comparatively increased feelings of isolation, technostress, and burnout (Reuschke & Felstead, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Indian surveys examining the effect of the pandemic showed while employees reported they felt more relaxed working from home, notably there were also reports from employees - particularly women - who were simultaneously engaging in domestic responsibilities (ILO, 2020) <sup>[8]</sup>; and these workers also reported a comparatively increased level of stress. These differences demonstrate that wellbeing outcomes will be shaped by the intersection of gender roles, home space and care giving roles, and organisational support systems.

## 3. Research Methodology

This research employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to assess the impacts of remote work upon work-life balance, productivity, and employee well-being in the Indian context. The SLR method was chosen for this research because it permits an exhaustive, transparent, and reproducible process for the identification, appraisal, and synthesis of the research that has a relation to Indian remote work literature, as it examines and synthesizes working practices for potential findings. It is appropriate for providing a synthesis of literature, including literature that may be fragmented in nature, and provides findings based on existing literature rather than an individual case perspective as a researcher.

A framework known as PRISMA or Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses was utilised to guide the review process. PRISMA provided a structure to clearly identify selection, screening, and inclusion of specific literature. The review included articles/studies that:

- Were published in peer reviewed journal articles, industry reports or credible institutional/organisational publications
- Focused upon remote work and at least one of the three dimensions, work-life balance, productivity, and/or well-being
- Explored data and/or context linked to India or comparably structured economies
- Published on or before January, 2022.

Sources were excluded if they were opinion pieces without empirical or conceptual grounding, purely anecdotal accounts, or publications that addressed only technical aspects of remote work infrastructure without linking to employee outcomes. The selection process ensured a balanced representation of both global and Indian perspectives, with an emphasis on findings applicable to the socio-economic conditions of India.

## 4. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to systematically review and synthesise existing literature on the impact of remote work on employee work life balance, productivity, and well-being in the Indian context, using the systematic literature review method. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To examine how remote work arrangements influence employee work life balance in India.
- To evaluate the effects of remote work on employee productivity across different sectors and job roles.
- To explore the relationship between remote work and

employee well-being, including physical, mental, and emotional dimensions.

- To identify the key challenges and enablers that shape the outcomes of remote work in the Indian socio-economic environment.
- To provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, organisational leaders, and academia to support sustainable remote work practices in India.

## 5. Significance of the study

Remote work has moved from being a niche work arrangement to a mainstream organisational practice in India. While this transformation was accelerated by the pandemic, its long-term role in shaping the future of work is now being actively discussed by policymakers, business leaders, and researchers. However, evidence on its effects in the Indian context remains scattered across academic studies, industry reports, and anecdotal observations.

This study is significant as it consolidates and critically analyses existing research on the impact of remote work on employee work life balance, productivity, and well-being in India. By adopting a systematic literature review approach, it brings together findings from multiple sources, ensuring that conclusions are based on a broad and reliable evidence base. The insights generated will help organisations design policies that maximise the benefits of remote work while addressing its challenges.

For policymakers, the study offers guidance on framing labour regulations, infrastructure investments, and digital inclusion initiatives that support equitable access to remote work opportunities. For the academic communities, it identifies gaps in the knowledge at current state and provides directions for future research. Furthermore, by bridging theory and practice, it contributes to developing sustainable and inclusive remote work policies in India's changing economy.

## 6. Research in detail

The systematic literature review explored three key thematic areas in understanding remote work's impact in the context of India namely, work life balance, productivity, and employee wellbeing and the cross-cutting variables that impact all three.

### 6.1 Remote work and work life balance

Work life balance refers to the degree to which an individual is equally engaged in and satisfied with both work and personal life roles (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) [7]. Remote work can positively influence balance by removing commuting time, reducing work-related travel fatigue, and allowing employees greater control over their schedules (Bloom *et al.*, 2015; Allen *et al.*, 2015) [3, 1].

**Indian IT sector example:** NASSCOM (2020) [10] found that IT and BPM sector employees saved between 1.5 and 2.5 hours daily during the lockdown due to zero commuting, with many using the time for family interaction, rest, or skill development. KPMG India (2021) [9] reported that 64 per cent of surveyed employees experienced improved time management during remote work phases.

However, flexibility without boundaries can lead to an "always-on" work culture. Oakman *et al.*, (2020) [11] and Felstead and Henseke (2017) [5] highlight the risk of role blurring when work messages and calls extend beyond regular hours. In India, where many households are

multigenerational, domestic responsibilities often overlap with professional obligations, particularly for women (ILO, 2020) [8].

Some employees also reported that family members did not always perceive remote work as "real" work, leading to interruptions and reduced focus. In rural and semi-urban settings, limited space for a dedicated home office further constrained balance. Thus, while remote work offers structural advantages for balance, cultural expectations and domestic arrangements heavily influence its realisation in India.

### 6.2 Remote work and productivity

Productivity effects vary widely, shaped by job type, individual work habits, and organisational readiness. Choudhury *et al.*, (2021) [4] documented productivity gains in an Indian IT services firm under a work-from-anywhere model, driven by better concentration and reduced commuting fatigue. Globally, Bloom *et al.*, (2015) [3] reported similar gains in a Chinese company, attributing them to quieter work environments and more efficient time use.

**Global benchmarking:** A Microsoft Asia survey in 2021 noted that 41 per cent of Indian employees felt more productive in remote work settings compared to the regional average of 36 per cent, reflecting strong adaptability among Indian professionals in knowledge sectors.

Yet, productivity losses have also been recorded. Gibbs *et al.*, (2021) [6] found that lack of informal knowledge sharing in remote settings reduced problem-solving efficiency. In India, SMEs without robust cloud systems struggled with coordination, leading to project delays (NASSCOM, 2020) [10]. Certain creative and collaborative roles were particularly impacted, as brainstorming and idea generation often benefit from in-person exchanges (Wang *et al.*, 2021) [15].

This indicates that productivity in remote work is contingent on adequate digital tools, streamlined processes, and leadership training in managing distributed teams.

### 6.3 Remote work and employee well being

Well-being encompasses physical health, mental resilience, emotional stability, and life satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) [2]. Remote work can promote physical well-being by reducing exposure to pollution and commuting-related stress. Tavares (2017) [13] observed that flexibility allowed employees to integrate exercise into their daily routines, while home-prepared meals often improved diet quality.

From a mental health perspective, some employees experienced reduced stress due to control over their work environment (Oakman *et al.*, 2020) [11]. Others, however, faced increased anxiety due to isolation, blurred work life boundaries, and fear of being "invisible" to supervisors (Reuschke & Felstead, 2020) [12].

**Gendered impact in India:** ILO (2020) [8] reported that during the pandemic, Indian women in dual-income households often bore a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work, leading to higher stress and fatigue. Employees in smaller towns without ergonomic setups also reported more physical discomfort, such as back pain, eye strain, and repetitive strain injuries.

These findings show that well-being outcomes depend on



organisational support, access to ergonomic resources, and cultural factors affecting household role distribution.

#### 6.4 Cross cutting issues

##### 6.4.1 Digital infrastructure and accessibility

Digital readiness emerged as a key determinant of remote work outcomes. Urban employees in India generally enjoy better broadband speeds, reliable electricity, and access to quality devices, while many rural employees face frequent connectivity breakdowns (KPMG India, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI, 2021) <sup>[14]</sup> reported that as of December 2021, internet penetration in rural areas was only 34 per cent compared to 70 per cent in urban regions. This “digital divide” not only limits productivity but also increases stress for those struggling to meet deadlines due to technical disruptions.

**Corporate example:** Companies like Infosys and TCS have responded by providing high-speed internet reimbursements and device loans to employees, aiming to level the playing field. However, such support is still concentrated in larger firms, leaving employees in smaller companies more vulnerable.

##### 6.4.2 Organisational culture and policy

Organisational culture mediates the relationship between infrastructural factors and outcomes. Supportive leadership, ongoing feedback and performance evaluations that are based on performance maximise the positive aspects of remote work (Allen *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup> while leadership that is intrusive and untrusting only reduces morale and productivity.

**Case example:** Wipro introduced “virtual coffee sessions” and informal team check-ins to retain social connection and inhibit team isolation. Organisations who do not have this practice are seeing turnover intentions among their employees.

##### 6.4.3 Gender and social roles

Social norms concerning caregiving often amplify the demands on women working remotely unless the organization has a flexible hours policy or offers childcare support, these same pressures can erode balance and wellbeing (ILO, 2020) <sup>[8]</sup>.

**Intersection with infrastructure:** In households with limited devices for accessing digital work, men are more often prioritized over women's needs, which worsens gender inequality. The relationship between social norms surrounding caregiving and access to devices highlights the need for comprehensive interventions.

##### 6.4.4 Interdependencies between issues

These cross-cutting themes do not operate in isolation from one another. For example, productivity can be increased by strong digital infrastructure, however, without policies that support productivity connected to well-being, productivity will not be an increase that creates a meaningful benefit to well-being. The same applies to gender inequities - addressing gender inequities needs policy work, culture change, and technology access. Understanding the linkages between these types of issues is important for us as we think and plan our package approaches to share the benefits of working from home to all cohorts of employees.

## 7. Conclusion

The systematic literature review indicates that remote work

has evolved from an emergency response during the pandemic to a credible and in many cases, desirable long-term work format in India. While the switch to remote work was initially grounded in public health principles, developments in the ongoing state of remote work are now underpinned by evolving organisational priorities, employee expectations, and national digital readiness.

Evidence indicates that remote work has the capacity to yield considerable benefits related to improved work life balance, productivity, and employee wellbeing. However, benefits are not necessarily guaranteed, and the range of outcomes is influenced by the intertwining processes of finding infrastructure access, organisational culture and some social norms that can often be either facilitating or constraining. For example, despite urban knowledge workers with reliable internet and thoughtful managers reporting pronounced benefits, employees working in smaller towns or organisations with lower capabilities in the digital economy reported more challenges than positive returns from the change.

One of the more important findings from the review is that India's journey to remote work has been shaped as much by its socio-cultural context as it has been by its technological capability. Multigenerational households, gendered divisions of domestic labour, and varied regional infrastructure quality create an uneven landscape of experience. The cross-cutting issues identified, digital infrastructure, organisational culture, and gender/social roles, interact in complex ways, reinforcing the need for integrated interventions.

If these challenges are addressed through coordinated action by policymakers, industry leaders, and academic institutions, remote work can evolve into a sustainable, inclusive, and productive mode of employment for India's future economy. If neglected, the risk is that remote work will deepen inequalities and limit its transformative potential.

## 7.1 Key insights

- **Work life balance:** Flexibility and the elimination of commuting are widely appreciated, but blurred boundaries and domestic role expectations — especially for women continue to challenge true balance.
- **Productivity:** Knowledge-intensive sectors with strong digital systems benefit most, whereas SMEs and roles dependent on creative collaboration face constraints without deliberate process and technology investments.
- **Well-being:** Reduced travel stress and customisable work environments can support physical and mental health, but risks of isolation, technostress, and ergonomic strain remain.
- **Cross cutting issues:** Digital divides, organisational culture, and gender norms intersect to influence all three outcome areas. Solutions must be holistic, addressing infrastructure, workplace policies, and social equity simultaneously.

## 7.2 Recommendations

### 7.2.1 For the public sector

- Expand digital infrastructure beyond metropolitan centres, with targeted investments in high-speed broadband and reliable electricity in smaller cities and rural areas.
- Update labour laws to protect remote workers' rights,

including the right to disconnect, occupational safety standards, and fair workload distribution.

- Promote digital literacy programmes for employees and entrepreneurs while being inclusive of age, gender, and region.

### 7.2.2 For the private sector

- Implementation of techniques to communicate clear expectations for availability so appropriate boundaries can be established and finding a balance is sustainable.
- Commit to performance-based measures based on deliverables not presence.
- Invest in digital collaboration platforms and train managers in leading and motivating distributed teams.
- Design gender-responsive workplace policies such as flexible hours, caregiving support, and equal access to professional development for all employees.
- Provide ergonomic and technological support through subsidies, allowances, or equipment provision to maintain physical health.

### 7.2.3 For academia

- Conduct longitudinal research to track remote work's evolving impact across sectors and demographics.
- Encourage sector-specific studies in manufacturing, education, healthcare, and informal economies where remote work adoption is uneven.
- Integrate remote work and digital collaboration into management and HR curricula, preparing students for the hybrid future of work.

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