

The Changing Landscape of Work: Lessons from the Covid-19 Remote-Work Experience in Kerala's IT Sector

Dr. Megha Jacob

Research Scholar in Commerce, Research Centre, Department of Commerce, Catholicate College,
Pathanamthitta, Mahatma Gandhi University Kottayam, Kerala, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800924>

Received: 3 September 2026; Accepted: 8 September 2026; Published: 21 September 2026

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled organisations to adopt remote work at an unprecedented scale and, in doing so, accelerated changes in communication, employee engagement, resource provision and work-life boundaries. This study examines the remote-work experience of employees in Kerala's information technology (IT) sector and considers the lessons that this period offers for contemporary remote and hybrid work design. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire from employees with work-from-home experience in Kerala's IT sector. The analytical output contains 102 valid cases. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .880$). Regression analysis was used to examine factors associated with communication and work engagement, while a Friedman test assessed differences among selected employee motivational practices. The communication model was statistically significant ($R = .620$, $R^2 = .385$, $F = 20.424$, $p < .001$), with project information, feedback and company knowledge emerging as significant predictors. The work-engagement model was also significant ($R = .590$, $R^2 = .348$, $F = 17.439$, $p < .001$); availability of resources, flexible working hours and career progression were significant predictors. However, the Friedman test did not establish a statistically significant difference among the five motivational practices examined ($\chi^2(4) = 6.476$, $p = .166$). The findings suggest that effective remote and hybrid work depends not simply on location but on organisational systems that support communication, access to resources, flexibility, development opportunities and healthy work boundaries. The study provides context-specific evidence from Kerala's IT sector and highlights managerial lessons that remain relevant as organisations move from emergency remote work to more deliberate hybrid-work arrangements.

Keywords: remote work; hybrid work; employee engagement; communication; work-life balance; IT sector; Kerala

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a major disruption to the organisation of work. Activities that had traditionally depended on physical offices were rapidly transferred to digital platforms, requiring organisations and employees to adapt simultaneously to new technologies, communication routines, performance expectations and work-life boundaries. The information technology sector was particularly well positioned to make this transition because a substantial share of its work could be performed digitally. Nevertheless, the speed and scale of the transition created managerial and employee challenges that extended beyond the availability of technology.

During the initial phase of pandemic-induced remote work, organisations had to ensure business continuity while employees adapted their homes into workplaces. This altered the meaning of the work environment. Organisational support increasingly included access to devices and secure networks, internet connectivity, timely information, supervisory feedback, employee well-being initiatives and flexibility. At the same time, employees faced reduced face-to-face interaction, increased dependence on digital communication and a greater possibility that the boundaries between professional and personal life would become blurred.

Remote work has since evolved from an emergency response into a more deliberate component of workplace

design. Recent evidence indicates that well-designed hybrid arrangements can improve job satisfaction and retention without necessarily reducing performance. A large randomised controlled trial reported by Bloom, Han and Liang (2024), for example, found that hybrid work improved job satisfaction and reduced attrition without damaging performance. Research has also continued to highlight the importance of technostress, access to colleagues and information, employee engagement and organisational support in shaping well-being under technology-enabled work arrangements.

This later evidence makes the pandemic period important not merely as a historical episode but as a formative stage in the development of contemporary remote and hybrid work. Studying employee experiences during that transition can identify organisational practices that supported effective adaptation as well as problems that remain relevant today. Against this background, the present study examines employees in Kerala's IT sector who experienced work from home during the pandemic. It focuses on communication, work engagement and employee-preferred motivational practices. The study asks a broader question that remains relevant beyond the pandemic: which organisational conditions help employees remain informed, engaged and supported when work is performed away from a conventional office?

Research Gap and Contribution

Early pandemic research understandably concentrated on the immediate feasibility of working from home and the organisational response to lockdown conditions. Subsequent research has moved toward hybrid work, employee well-being, technostress, retention and sustainable work design. However, context-specific evidence from Kerala's IT sector remains valuable because remote-work experiences are shaped by local infrastructure, organisational practices and employee circumstances.

This study contributes by examining three interconnected dimensions of remote work: the organisational information environment, work engagement and motivational practices. It also offers retrospective evidence from the forced-remote-work period that can be interpreted in light of the subsequent shift toward hybrid work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Remote Work and Organisational Adaptation

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of work-from-home practices among organisations that had previously been reluctant to use them. Early research emphasised the need for policy frameworks, secure digital systems, organisational communication and psychological support during this transition. Chanana and Sangeeta (2020) highlighted virtual employee-engagement practices such as webinars, workshops and online team-building activities, while Syaefudin (2020) showed that effective remote work also depended on technological capability and policy implementation.

Gunawan, Kusnawan and Hernawan (2021) reported that work-from-home arrangements could support effectiveness and productivity, while also recognising that outcomes depended on additional organisational factors. These early studies established that remote work was not simply a change in location; it required coordinated changes in management practices, resources and employee support.

Communication, Information and Feedback

Communication becomes structurally important when employees are physically separated from colleagues and supervisors. Remote employees depend more heavily on digital channels for project information, organisational knowledge and performance feedback. Vercic and Vokic (2017) had already established the importance of internal communication for employee engagement before the pandemic. The forced-remote-work period made this relationship more visible because informal office-based information exchange was reduced.

More recent work similarly suggests that access to colleagues and information is associated with employee well-being in technology-enabled work arrangements. Andrulli and Gerards (2023) found that access to colleagues and information formed important dimensions of new ways of working and were associated with reduced negative affective well-being, partly through lower technostress and greater work engagement.

Employee Engagement, Flexibility and Resources

Employee engagement refers to the extent to which employees invest cognitive, emotional and behavioural energy in their work. Prior research has linked engagement with organisational success and effective internal communication (Saks, 2017; Sarangi & Nayak, 2016). In remote settings, engagement may depend more strongly on the availability of resources, flexibility, career development opportunities and managerial support because employees have fewer opportunities for spontaneous face-to-face interaction.

Post-pandemic research has reinforced the importance of these conditions. Bloom et al. (2024) found that a hybrid arrangement involving two work-from-home days per week improved job satisfaction and reduced quit rates by one-third without reducing performance or promotion outcomes. This suggests that flexibility can produce organisational benefits when remote work is deliberately designed rather than treated as an improvised emergency measure.

Technostress, Well-being and Work-Life Boundaries

The benefits of remote work coexist with risks. Heavy dependence on digital platforms can create technostress, technology exhaustion and pressure to remain continuously available. Research on enforced remote work has linked digital-platform stress with lower subjective well-being, while systematic reviews of technostress during pandemic lockdowns have documented the psychological demands associated with intensive technology use. In the Indian IT-enabled sector, remote working has also been examined in relation to occupational stress, job satisfaction, motivation and performance.

These concerns are closely related to work-life boundary management. The removal of the physical transition between home and office can provide flexibility and reduce commuting, but it can also extend working time and create a perception of constant monitoring or availability. Consequently, the quality of remote work depends on balancing flexibility with clear expectations, supportive communication and adequate recovery time.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework. The JD-R perspective distinguishes between job demands, which require sustained physical or psychological effort, and job resources, which help employees achieve work goals, cope with demands and support learning and development. This framework is particularly appropriate for remote work because the same arrangement can simultaneously create demands (for example, intensified digital communication and blurred work-home boundaries) and resources (for example, flexibility, access to information, supervisory feedback and adequate work resources). Contemporary remote-work research has used the JD-R perspective to explain how technological competence, organisational resources and work design influence engagement, performance, stress and well-being.

Within this study, project information, feedback and company knowledge are treated as informational and social job resources that can facilitate communication. Availability of resources, flexible working hours and career progression are treated as job resources with motivational potential and are therefore expected to be associated with work engagement. Technostress and work-life boundary strain are conceptually relevant job demands; however, they were not directly measured in the original questionnaire and are therefore discussed as contextual mechanisms and directions for future research rather than being retrospectively introduced into the statistical model.

The framework therefore provides a theoretical explanation for the variables that were actually measured while avoiding causal claims that the cross-sectional design cannot support. It also connects the pandemic-era

data to the contemporary hybrid-work literature, in which adequate resources can support engagement while technology-related demands and weak work-life boundaries may contribute to strain.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the organisational factors associated with employees' work-from-home experience.
- To assess whether project information, feedback and company knowledge significantly predict communication during remote work.
- To examine whether availability of resources, flexible working hours and career progression significantly predict work engagement.
- To assess whether employees differ significantly in their preference for selected motivational practices in a remote-work setting.
- To derive lessons from the pandemic remote-work experience that are relevant to contemporary remote and hybrid work design.

Hypotheses

H01: Project information, feedback and company knowledge do not significantly predict communication during remote work.

H11: Project information, feedback and company knowledge significantly predict communication during remote work.

H02: Availability of resources, flexible working hours and career progression do not significantly predict work engagement during remote work.

H12: Availability of resources, flexible working hours and career progression significantly predict work engagement during remote work.

H03: There is no statistically significant difference among the selected employee motivational practices in a remote-work setting.

H13: There is a statistically significant difference among the selected employee motivational practices in a remote-work setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Data were collected during the pandemic period, when physical data collection was constrained by lockdown conditions in Kerala. A structured questionnaire was distributed through online and social-media channels to employees working in Kerala's IT sector who had experience of working from home.

The statistical output reported in this manuscript contains 102 valid cases, as shown by the Friedman-test N and by the regression total degrees of freedom ($df = 101$). The earlier narrative reference to 100 respondents has therefore been corrected to 102 throughout this revised manuscript. Because the original recruitment log is not available in the materials used for this revision, a response rate cannot be calculated reliably and is not estimated. The exact fieldwork dates should be inserted from the original survey records before final resubmission.

The questionnaire contained 30 items, of which 27 scale items were included in the reliability analysis. The measured constructs used in the present analyses included communication, project information, feedback, company knowledge, work engagement, availability of resources, flexible working hours, career progression and five motivational-practice items. The motivational practices referred to concrete remote-engagement interventions: team meet-ups, learning and skill-development sessions, online counselling, video messages from senior managers, and fun contests or challenges. Data were analysed using SPSS.

The internal consistency of the scale items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predictors of communication and work engagement. A Friedman test was used to assess whether the ranking of five motivational practices differed significantly. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5 per cent level ($p < .05$). Because the design is cross-sectional and non-probability based, the regression results are interpreted as predictive associations rather than causal effects.

Reliability and Measurement Considerations

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.880	27

The Cronbach's alpha value of .880 indicates strong internal consistency among the scale items used in the analysis.

Cronbach's alpha establishes internal consistency but does not by itself establish construct, convergent or discriminant validity. The available manuscript materials do not contain item-level factor-analysis output; therefore, EFA/CFA statistics are not fabricated in this revision. Likewise, a post-hoc common-method-bias test cannot be reported responsibly without the item-level dataset. The use of a single self-report questionnaire from the same respondents creates a potential common-method-bias risk, which is explicitly acknowledged as a limitation. If the original SPSS dataset is available, exploratory factor analysis and an appropriate common-method assessment should be completed before final resubmission.

RESULTS

Communication During Remote Work

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
.620	.385	.366	1.36560

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	114.263	3	38.088	20.424	< .001
Residual	182.757	98	1.865		
Total	297.020	101			

The regression model predicting communication was statistically significant, $F(3, 98) = 20.424$, $p < .001$, and explained 38.5 per cent of the variance in communication ($R^2 = .385$).

The null hypothesis H01 is therefore rejected at the model level.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
Project information	.340	.103	.313	3.305	.001
Feedback	.212	.093	.210	2.275	.025
Company knowledge	.244	.098	.245	2.481	.015

Project information, feedback and company knowledge were each statistically significant positive predictors of communication. Project information had the largest standardised coefficient ($\beta = .313$), followed by company knowledge ($\beta = .245$) and feedback ($\beta = .210$). These results indicate that remote communication was stronger when employees received relevant project information, organisational knowledge and feedback.

Work Engagement During Remote Work

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
.590	.348	.328	1.60843

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	135.343	3	45.114	17.439	< .001
Residual	253.530	98	2.587		
Total	388.873	101			

The regression model predicting work engagement was statistically significant, $F(3, 98) = 17.439$, $p < .001$, and explained 34.8 per cent of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .348$). H02 is therefore rejected.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
Availability of resources	.344	.097	.303	3.552	.001
Flexible working hours	.170	.085	.169	1.998	.048
Career progression	.425	.106	.349	3.992	< .001

All three predictors were statistically significant. Career progression had the strongest standardised association with work engagement ($\beta = .349$), followed by availability of resources ($\beta = .303$) and flexible working hours ($\beta = .169$). The findings suggest that engagement in remote work was associated not only with immediate operational support but also with employees' perception that career development remained possible outside the conventional office.

Employee Motivational Practices

Motivational Practice	Mean Rank
Team meet-ups	2.77
Learning and skill-development sessions	2.96
Online counselling	3.17
Video messages from senior managers	2.95
Fun contests/challenges	3.15

N	Chi-square	df	p
---	------------	----	---

102	6.476	4	.166
-----	-------	---	------

The Friedman test did not show a statistically significant difference among the five motivational practices, $\chi^2(4) = 6.476$, $p = .166$. H03 is therefore not rejected. Although the mean ranks varied, the differences were not large enough to establish a statistically significant preference pattern. Accordingly, the practices should not be ranked as definitively more or less preferred on the basis of this test alone.

These five practices were assessed as distinct, concrete engagement interventions rather than as a validated latent motivational scale. Consequently, the Friedman analysis is interpreted only as a comparison of respondents' rankings of the listed practices. The non-significant result may also reflect limited statistical power in the sample of 102 respondents and should not be interpreted as evidence that the practices are equivalent.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the success of remote work depends substantially on the organisational environment surrounding the employee. The communication model explains a meaningful share of variation in communication and shows that project information, feedback and company knowledge were all significant. This supports the view that remote communication is not simply a matter of having access to video calls or messaging platforms. Employees require information that is timely, relevant and connected to both their immediate tasks and the wider organisation.

The work-engagement findings are equally important. Career progression emerged as the strongest predictor among the three factors examined, followed by availability of resources and flexible working hours. This suggests that employees working remotely still need visible development pathways. Remote work may provide convenience and flexibility, but engagement can weaken if employees believe that distance from the physical workplace also means distance from learning, recognition or advancement.

The significance of resource availability reflects the practical realities of the pandemic transition. Employees needed adequate devices, connectivity, information access and a workable home environment. These findings remain relevant to hybrid work because location flexibility is unlikely to produce sustainable benefits when employees do not have equivalent access to the resources required to perform their roles.

Flexible working hours were also positively associated with engagement, although the effect was smaller than that of career progression and resource availability. This is consistent with later evidence showing that structured hybrid arrangements can improve satisfaction and retention without necessarily reducing performance (Bloom et al., 2024). Flexibility therefore appears most useful when it is supported by organisational systems rather than treated as the absence of structure.

The motivational-practice analysis requires a more cautious interpretation than the original manuscript provided. The Friedman test was not significant. The data therefore do not support the conclusion that employees clearly preferred one of the five practices over the others. This may indicate that remote employee motivation is multifaceted and that no single engagement activity can substitute for broader organisational support.

Qualitative observations recorded in the original study also suggested that some employees experienced virtual work as a form of continuous monitoring, with repeated reminders and feedback resembling a surveillance mechanism. This observation is important when considered alongside later research on technostress and technology exhaustion. Digital visibility can support coordination, but excessive monitoring or expectations of constant availability can undermine recovery and well-being. The managerial challenge is therefore to create accountability without producing digital presenteeism.

Taken together, the results support a shift in emphasis from 'work from home' as a location-based policy to remote and hybrid work as an organisational design problem. Communication quality, access to resources,

flexibility, development opportunities and healthy boundaries appear more consequential than the simple distinction between home and office.

Managerial Implications

- Build communication systems around information quality, not message volume. Employees need clear project information, regular feedback and access to organisational knowledge.
- Protect career visibility for remote and hybrid employees through transparent promotion criteria, mentoring, learning opportunities and regular development conversations.
- Treat digital infrastructure and home-working resources as core work resources rather than optional employee benefits.
- Use flexibility within clear boundaries. Managers should define expectations for availability, response times and working hours so that flexibility does not become continuous availability.
- Use a portfolio of engagement practices rather than assuming that a single virtual activity will motivate all employees. The Friedman test did not establish a statistically significant preference among the five practices examined.
- Monitor technostress and digital overload. Performance management should focus on outputs and meaningful communication rather than excessive online presence or constant digital surveillance.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has several limitations that define the boundaries of its conclusions. Convenience sampling, the modest sample of 102 respondents and the restriction to IT employees in Kerala limit statistical power and generalisability. The cross-sectional, self-report design does not permit causal inference and creates a risk of common-method bias.

The original study did not include a probability-based sampling frame or a matched control group. Demographic controls were not included in the reported regression models. Adding such controls retrospectively would require the original respondent-level dataset and verified demographic variables; they have therefore not been invented in this revision.

Construct validity beyond internal consistency was not established in the materials available for revision. Cronbach's alpha (.880) supports reliability, but EFA/CFA and discriminant-validity statistics require item-level data. These analyses should be added if the original SPSS dataset is available.

Technostress and work-life boundary strain are theoretically important in remote and hybrid work, but they were discussed rather than directly measured in the original instrument. They cannot validly be added as predictors or outcomes after data collection. Future research should operationalise technostress, digital monitoring, work-family conflict and boundary control using validated scales and test them within a JD-R model.

The five motivational practices were concrete interventions rather than a validated latent construct. Future research should develop or adopt validated measures of remote-work motivation and combine quantitative analysis with interviews or open-ended responses to explain why employees value particular practices.

Future studies should use larger probability-based or stratified samples across multiple Kerala IT firms and, ideally, other Indian regions. Longitudinal or multi-wave designs, supervisor-rated outcomes and multi-source data would reduce common-method concerns and allow stronger inference about how remote and hybrid work practices influence engagement over time.

Finally, the response rate and exact data-collection dates should be reported from the original survey administration records. They are not reconstructed from memory in this manuscript.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic forced organisations to test remote work at a scale that would previously have been difficult to imagine. The experience of Kerala's IT employees examined in this study shows that the effectiveness of remote work cannot be understood only in terms of physical location. Communication, access to resources, flexibility and career development were central to how employees experienced and engaged with remote work.

The study found that project information, feedback and company knowledge significantly predicted communication, while career progression, availability of resources and flexible working hours significantly predicted work engagement. At the same time, no statistically significant difference was established among the five motivational practices examined. These results caution against reducing employee engagement to isolated virtual activities; the wider organisational system matters more.

Viewed from the post-pandemic era, the central lesson is clear: emergency remote work created practices that now need to be intentionally designed for sustainable hybrid work. Organisations that combine flexibility with clear communication, equitable development opportunities, adequate resources and healthy digital boundaries are better positioned to capture the benefits of location-flexible work while reducing its social and psychological costs.

REFERENCES

1. Alkhayyal, S., & Bajaba, S. (2024). Countering technostress in virtual work environments: The role of work-based learning and digital leadership in enhancing employee well-being. *Acta Psychologica*, 248, 104377. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104377>
2. Bullini Orlandi, L., Veglianti, E., Zardini, A., & Rossignoli, C. (2024). Enhancing employees' remote work experience: Exploring the role of organizational job resources. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 199, 123075. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.123075>
3. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 499-512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.499>
4. Mäkikangas, A., Juutinen, S., Mäkinen, J.-P., Sjöblom, K., & Oksanen, A. (2022). Work engagement and its antecedents in remote work: A person-centered view. *Work & Stress*, 36(4), 392-416.
5. Andrulli, R., & Gerards, R. (2023). How new ways of working during COVID-19 affect employee well-being via technostress, need for recovery, and work engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 139, 107560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107560>
6. Bahamondes-Rosado, M. E., Cerdá-Suárez, L. M., Doderio Ortiz de Zevallos, G. F., & Espinosa-Cristia, J. F. (2023). Technostress at work during the COVID-19 lockdown phase (2020-2021): A systematic review of the literature. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1173425. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1173425>
7. Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J. (2024). Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance. *Nature*, 630, 920-925. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07500-2>
8. Chanana, N., & Sangeeta. (2020). Employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of Public Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2508>
9. Gunawan, I., Kusnawan, A., & Hernawan, E. (2021). Impact of work from home policy implementation on work effectiveness and productivity in Tangerang City. *Primanomics: Jurnal Ekonomi & Bisnis*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.31253/pe.v19i1.508>
10. Prasad, K. D. V., Vaidya, R., & Rani, R. (2023). Remote working and occupational stress: Effects on IT-enabled industry employees in Hyderabad Metro, India. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1069402. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1069402>
11. Saks, A. M. (2017). Translating employee engagement research into practice. *Organizational Dynamics*, 46(2), 76-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2017.04.003>
12. Sarangi, P., & Nayak, B. (2016). Employee engagement and its impact on organizational success: A study in a manufacturing company, India. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 18(4), 52-57. <https://doi.org/10.9790/487X-1804015257>

13. Syaefudin, R. A. (2020). Working from home policy for Indonesian civil servants during coronavirus disease pandemic. Spirit Publik: Jurnal Administrasi Publik, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.20961/sp.v15i2.41394>
14. Vance, R. J. (2006). Employee engagement and commitment. SHRM Foundation.
15. Vercic, A. T., & Vokic, N. P. (2017). Engaging employees through internal communication. Public Relations Review, 43(5), 885-893. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.04.005>