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Remote Work: Its Impact on Employee Productivity and Service Delivery in Nigerian Organizations

Part Two

Introduction

The modern office has undergone a significant transformation, driven by globalization, technological advancements, and the internet. This shift has created a new reality for both organisations and employees. Key trends shaping this evolving work environment include increased virtual collaboration and digitalisation, a rise in part-time employment, greater flexibility in work locations—whether from home or elsewhere—and a heightened level of connectivity between employees and their jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic lockdowns have further accelerated the adoption of remote and hybrid work models. This paper will explore the current dynamics of the evolving office, delve into the concepts of remote and hybrid work, and highlight the importance of continuous employee development within the African context, with a specific focus on Nigeria.

However, Remote work relies on integrated and customized information technology (IT) systems that enable companies to facilitate remote operations while monitoring employee productivity. Many organizations in Nigeria and Africa as a continent are increasingly leveraging technology to support their workforce, with 75% of employers reporting an uptick in digital tracking of work activities, computer usage, emails, and internal communications.

This trend highlights the growing significance of IT in business operations, a role that is expected to expand as organizations continue to develop tailored digital solutions. Additionally, IT and engineering professionals are at the forefront of shaping the future of work

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by designing advanced technologies across various platforms, including autonomous systems.

Remote work presents unique challenges and responsibilities for managers. Beyond strong interpersonal skills, managers must be adaptable and equipped with essential soft skills to effectively motivate and support their teams. Additionally, digital literacy is crucial for navigating the technologies that facilitate remote management and communication.

In this evolving work environment, employees increasingly seek transparency from their employers. Clear communication, well-defined expectations, and open feedback channels become essential in fostering trust and engagement within remote teams. Managers who embrace these principles can create a more productive and positive remote work experience for their staff.

Remote work is characterised by a highly flexible environment where telecommuting, virtual collaboration, and distance work are standard practices. It enables employees to perform their tasks from home or any location outside the central office, eliminating direct physical interaction with colleagues except through online communication. Hybrid work, on the other hand, blends remote work with in-office requirements, where employees commute to the workplace at designated times.

While remote work is often perceived as a modern concept, it has existed for decades, particularly in the United States, where approximately 3.9 million employees worked from home before the COVID-19 pandemic. The term "telecommuting" was introduced in the 1970s by engineer Jack Nilles, driven by the oil crisis in the U.S., and the necessity for employees to continue working remotely amid economic constraints.[2]

This mode of work offers flexibility and autonomy, which can be appealing to many employees, but it also presents challenges related to psychological well-being. Research suggests that remote work may blur boundaries between professional and personal life, potentially leading to stress, anxiety, loneliness, and feelings of isolation due to reduced social interaction. However, organisations benefit from remote work by accessing top global talent, offering flexible hours, and minimising workplace disruptions.[3]

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2 Bin Wang, Jing Qian and Sharon K Parker 'Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective', available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33230359/>accessed on 5th May 2025.

3 See: Desere Kokt, and Crispen Chipunza, available on <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364353013_Remote_and_Hybrid_Working_during_Crisis_Challenges_and_Implications_for_Employee_Development_in_Africa> accessed on 5th May 2025.

Impact of Remote Work on Nigerian Organizations

In Nigerian organisations, remote work has had a profound effect on employee productivity and service delivery. The flexibility it provides enables employees to manage their time better, leading to improved efficiency and job satisfaction. Organisations benefit from reduced operational costs, as there is a reduced need for a physical office space and other related expenses.

However, challenges such as unreliable power supply, internet connectivity issues, and a lack of proper remote work policies can hinder its effectiveness. To maximise the benefits of remote work, Nigerian organisations must invest in technology infrastructure, provide adequate support to employees, and implement clear guidelines for remote work arrangements. While remote work offers numerous advantages for both employees and organisations, its success depends on proper implementation, technological support, and a results-driven approach.

Although remote work offers numerous benefits, it is not feasible for certain individuals due to the nature of their work. For instance, drivers, medical staff (including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and laboratory attendants), police, other security forces, and production workers require physical presence to perform their duties effectively.

Manufacturing companies, in particular, cannot operate remotely. All staff are typically required to be physically present at the office or factory to carry out essential tasks such as production, distribution, and marketing of products to clients at various stations or retail outlets.

The Debate Between Remote Work and Office Work

The discussion surrounding remote work versus office work hinges on the nature of the job, employees' needs, and the organisation’s goals. In Nigeria, opinions on this subject vary widely — some employees prefer working from home, while others find it challenging and unfavorable.

Before implementing remote work policies, organizations must ensure that employees have access to the necessary tools and gadgets, such as computers, laptops, printers, reliable phones, and power generators. Unfortunately, many companies are unable to provide these resources but still require staff to work remotely. This creates significant challenges for employees, especially given the current economic hardships in the country.

An office is a designated space where employees perform their regular work. It functions not only as a place for focused tasks but also as a hub for communication, collaboration, and business transactions. Offices can vary in size, employee count, and the tasks performed, depending on the nature of the organization. While the office provides a structured environment with direct interaction among colleagues, it can also come with distractions and commuting challenges.

In contrast, remote work offers employees the flexibility to perform tasks from home or other locations outside of a traditional office. It eliminates commuting time and can offer a more relaxed environment, but it may also lack the immediate communication and collaboration opportunities found in office settings.



[4]

<https://blog.harvardfcu.org/the-costs-of-in-office-work-vs-remote-work> and <https://www.qatarliving.com/forum/working-qatar/remote-vs-office-work-which-better-you>

Advantages of Working from the Office

1. **Collaboration and Teamwork**[5]

   Working in an office provides an environment for collaboration and teamwork. When employees are in the same physical space, it is easier to brainstorm ideas, share feedback, and work together towards a common goal. Bouncing ideas off one another and working through problems as a team can lead to more creative solutions and better results.

   In addition, working in an office promotes a sense of community among employees. Being surrounded by co-workers fosters a sense of camaraderie and a shared sense of purpose. It can lead to higher job satisfaction and stronger loyalty to the company.

2. **Professional Development**

   Working in an office offers numerous opportunities for professional development. This is because employees are able to learn from colleagues and mentors, attend in-person training sessions and workshops, and participate in various professional development programs.

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[4] Qatar Living.com, 'Remote v. In-Office Work- Which is Better for You'? <https://www.qatarliving.com/forum/working-qatar/remote-vs-office-work-which-better-you> accessed on 7th April 2025 and <https://blog.harvardfcu.org/the-costs-of-in-office-work-vs-remote-work> accessed on 6th May 2025

[5] Studio AsA, 'Benefits of Working In An Office Environment' <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/benefits-working-office-environment-studio-asa-designstudioasa/> accessed on 12th March 2025.

Additionally, the office environment allows for more frequent face-to-face interactions with managers, departmental heads, and supervisors. These interactions can lead to more meaningful feedback, enhanced communication, and valuable opportunities for career growth. This not only benefits employees in advancing their careers but also contributes to the overall progress and success of the company.

3. **Routine and Structure**

Working in an office offers a sense of routine and structure that can be beneficial to many employees. Having set working hours and a dedicated workspace contributes to the cultivation of a healthy work-life balance. Additionally, a structured routine can help employees stay organized, focused, and more productive.

In contrast, working from home may present certain challenges such as distractions/lack of concentration, which may reduce efficiency. An office environment provides a designated workspace, free from household distractions, which often results in higher productivity level.

4. **Creativity and Innovation**

Employees often have the opportunity to be innovative and creative while working in an office. Many companies recognize that the physical workspace plays a crucial role in fostering creative thinking and generating innovative ideas, a trend that continues to gain momentum.

Moreover, innovation is the financial outcome of the creative process, resulting from the implementation of imaginative and forward-thinking approaches. It is important to emphasize that innovation is not a one-time effort. Rather, continued collaboration between departments or divisions of the organization is necessary to bring ideas to life.

5. **Access to Resources**

Employees working in an office benefit from access to resources that may not be readily available to those working remotely or from home. For example, office-based employees often have access to specialized equipment, software, and other essential tools required to perform their tasks efficiently. Additionally, they can rely on support staff, such as IT professionals or administrative assistants, who are available to assist with technical issues and other needs as they arise.

6. **Networking Opportunities and Social Interactions**

Working in an office offers significant networking opportunities, allowing employees to connect and collaborate with colleagues from various departments as well as professionals with diverse expertise. This environment provides space for building

valuable connections that can open doors to career advancement. Employees also benefit from learning and gaining insights from senior staff while working on challenging tasks.

Additionally, office settings often facilitate informal networking opportunities, such as casual interactions over lunch or coffee breaks. These moments can foster stronger relationships, create a more positive work atmosphere, and enhance overall teamwork.

7. **Mental Health Benefits**

Employees working in an office often experience mental balance due to the structured environment and routine nature of their jobs. This setup can be particularly beneficial to individuals struggling with anxiety or depression. Employees dealing with depression are able to find relief by being surrounded by colleagues, who can provide support, thereby helping to ease feelings of isolation.

In contrast, some remote workers may face challenges such as isolation and a lack of social interaction, which can negatively impact their mental health. Therefore, it is crucial for employers to offer a variety of options and accommodations to support the mental health and well-being of their employees.

8. **Acquisition of Experience**

Working in an office environment enables employees to quickly gain valuable experience and build momentum in their professional growth. This hands-on experience helps employees develop interpersonal skills and an understanding of workplace dynamics, which can pave the way for career advancement.

In contrast, remote workers may face challenges in acquiring similar experiences. They often rely on AI tools and internet-based resources created by others to gain insights and knowledge for their roles. Although helpful, these tools might not fully replace the real-world learning and personal interactions gained in an office setting.

9. **Time Management**

One of the most significant benefits of an office environment is the structured approach it offers to time management. Employees working in an office typically adhere to fixed working hours, allowing them to focus on their tasks without interruptions. This structure helps maintain productivity and establishes a clear boundary between work and personal life.

In comparison, remote workers often determine their own working hours, which may vary based on their convenience. While this flexibility can be advantageous, it can also lead to potential challenges in maintaining a consistent routine and avoiding distractions.

10. **Comprehensive Communication and Sense of Belonging**

Remote employees benefit from a range of communication tools, such as phone calls, emails, video chats, screen sharing, and direct messaging, allowing them to stay connected with colleagues in the office or working from home. However, employees working in an office setting often experience more comprehensive, face-to-face communication, which fosters teamwork and collaboration.

Office interactions contribute to a strong sense of belonging, where employees feel fully integrated into the organization. When employees are physically present in the office, there's a unique and palpable energy that remote work cannot replicate. This vibrant atmosphere arises from daily interactions and shared experiences, building camaraderie, and enhancing connection.

Challenges of Working from the Office:

1. **Poor Communication in Business Settings**

Effective communication is crucial in business environments. When communication is limited, staff may struggle to carry out their assignments and deliver results as expected. Communication should be a two-way process, fostering agreement and understanding among team members to achieve the organization's goals.

In Nigerian law firms, communication is often conducted through emails, phone calls, and verbal discussion, both in-office and remotely. However, distractions in the office environment can hinder effective communication. Differences in opinions and arguments among staff can disrupt the flow of communication, slowing down work and delaying task completion. Additionally, multitasking can further contribute to communication breakdowns and inefficiencies.

2. **Lack of Motivation**

Many firms in Nigeria are currently unable to motivate their staff due to economic challenges and instability. As a result, organizations struggle to recognize and appreciate employees for their efforts and achievements. This lack of appreciation often leaves employees feeling discouraged and this directly impacts their performance and reduces overall productivity.

3. **Poor Leadership**

When executives or leaders are self-centred and show little concern for their employees, it can severely impact staff morale and performance. A lack of empathy towards subordinates often results in poor employee productivity. Additionally, leadership changes can disrupt workflows, as employees need time to adapt to new leaders, understand their expectations, and align their work accordingly. However,

remote workers may not experience these challenges as directly, given the physical distance and different dynamics of remote work environments

4. **Poor Work-life Balance**

   In Nigeria today, inflation has significantly impacted livelihoods, with poverty reaching unprecedented levels. Although the government is working to address these issues, many workers struggle to focus on their jobs as they seek alternative means of improving their standard of living. Long commutes and rigid office hours further complicate the ability to balance personal and professional life. Traveling frequently for work leads to immense stress, which negatively affects health and personal well-being, often resulting in overwork and burnout.

5. **Insufficient Technological Resources and Outdated Technology**
   The high cost of commodities has made it challenging for many companies to invest in the tools and instruments necessary for employees to work efficiently. This lack of sufficient technological resources, coupled with outdated workplace technology, presents significant obstacles. Employees often struggle to complete their assigned tasks on time, leading to inefficiencies and delays in achieving organizational goals.

6. **Office Distractions**

   Office distractions are elements that disturb staff while at work. For instance, noise in open-plan offices, where multiple employees are working simultaneously, can make it challenging for individuals to focus, ultimately affecting their productivity and output. Additionally, interruptions from colleagues often disrupt in-office workers more than remote workers. Occasionally, urgent issues arise that require immediate attention, delaying ongoing tasks as these problems must be resolved collaboratively before work can proceed smoothly.

   Another notable factor is office politics, which cannot be overlooked. Some employees may seek to gain favor or promotions by currying favor with their supervisors or bosses. This dynamic can negatively impact the focus and contributions of other staff members, creating an environment that hinders effective collaboration and fairness.

   In a nutshell, all these factors do not affect employees working remotely.

<u>Factors that Encourage Staff to be more Productive in Office Design:</u>

1. **Ergonomics**: Comfortable and ergonomically designed furniture can reduce physical strain and fatigue, allowing employees to focus better and work longer without discomfort. Properly designed chairs, desks, and computer setups can also reduce the risk of repetitive strain injuries and musculoskeletal issues.

2. **Lighting**: Natural lighting has been shown to improve mood, energy levels, and overall well-being. Proper lighting reduces eye strain and headaches, creating a more pleasant working environment. Access to natural light and well-placed artificial lighting can boost productivity.

3. **Noise Control**: A well-designed office should minimize distractions from noise. Soundproofing, quiet zones, and noise-canceling elements help create a more focused and productive workspace. While noise machines or designated quiet areas can also help employees concentrate better.

4. **Layout**: The office layout can influence how easily employees can communicate and collaborate. Open-plan offices can facilitate teamwork and spontaneous interactions, while designated quiet areas or private offices can provide spaces for focused work. Flexible layouts that adapt to different tasks can improve overall productivity.

5. **Aesthetics and Ambiance**: An aesthetically pleasing environment can enhance employee morale and creativity. Colors, artwork, and decor can influence mood and motivation. A well-decorated and visually appealing office can make employees feel more engaged and enthusiastic about their work.

6. **Amenities and Facilities**: Having amenities such as break rooms, lounges, and recreational areas can help employees recharge and relax during breaks, leading to better productivity when they return to work. Access to facilities like kitchens and fitness centers can contribute to overall well-being.

7. **Technology Integration**: A modern office should be equipped with up-to-date technology that supports employee tasks. Fast and reliable internet, easy access to power outlets, and seamless integration of digital tools and communication platforms can streamline workflows and enhance efficiency.

8. **Biophilic Design**: Incorporating elements of nature, such as plants, natural materials, and views of the outdoors, can reduce stress and increase feelings of well-being. Biophilic design can lead to higher job satisfaction and productivity.

Guidelines for Effective and Successful Remote Work and Office Work:

1. **Sticking to a Consistent Schedule**: Employees should create a schedule to follow consistently on daily basis, while staying organized and focused. They should also incorporate short breaks between tasks to retain energy for work either at home or in the office.

2. **Defining Clear Objectives**: Employees should try as much as possible to set specific goals to stay on track and measure progress. Breaking down larger goals into smaller,

actionable steps is an effective strategy. Using SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals can help maintain clarity and focus as well.

3. **Transparent Communication**: Employees should keep communication channels open and regular with team or colleagues; encourage feedback and ensure transparent dialogue with colleagues or staff members. Active listening is always a strong tool in communication.
4. **Utilization of the Right Tools**: Employees are advised to use apps or tools tailored to their needs, such as task trackers, communication platforms, or time management applications. They should take advantage of technology to streamline collaboration and productivity at home and among staff members in the office.
5. **Designing a Comfortable Work Area**: Employees should set up a workspace that supports focus and minimizes distractions at home.
6. **Staying Self-Motivated and Disciplined**: Employees should manage their time effectively and avoid procrastination while working from home or even at the office.
7. **Maintaining a Healthy Work-Life Balance**: It is helpful to set boundaries to separate work from personal time, basically for employees working from home or remotely.
8. **Staying Engaged and Motivated:** Employees should celebrate their achievements, no matter how small, and continuously seek learning opportunities to stay inspired. However, they should *keep engaged* by finding ways to stay encouraged and connected to work.
9. **Staying Flexible**: Employees should be adaptable to changing priorities or situations by embracing tasks and changes positively. Flexibility can lead to growth and unexpected opportunities.

Conclusion

In developed countries, many employees prefer remote work or working from home over traditional office-based roles. This preference stems from the availability of the necessary infrastructure and amenities that support efficient remote work. In contrast, many developing countries face challenges such as inadequate or unreliable access to basic utilities, which makes remote work less feasible.

However, some developing nations are making significant strides toward improving these conditions. These countries have implemented policies and infrastructure improvements to support remote workers, making them ideal destinations for professionals seeking flexible work arrangements.

For instance, in Nigeria, many residents experience an average of 12 hours of power outages daily, compelling reliance on expensive alternatives like generators. The cost of running a small generator for an 8-hour workday can be substantial, especially considering fuel prices. In March 2025, Nigeria secured a $200 million agreement with WeLight, a pan-African Distributed Renewable Energy company, to deploy 400 renewable mini-grids and 50 MetroGrids. This initiative aims to provide reliable electricity to an estimated 1.5 to 2 million people in rural and peri-urban areas.[6]

In the same vein, Peru as a country has developed a Community-Led Solar Energy in the Amazon**.** In Alto Mishagua, a remote village in the Peruvian Amazon, a community-driven initiative led by Roxana Borda Mamani established a solar energy system named *Aylluq Q'Anchaynin* ("the energy of the community" in Quechua). This project now powers internet access. Such grassroots renewable energy projects are transforming life in Latin America, particularly in remote Indigenous areas that have long lacked reliable electricity [7]. Also, in Kenya, Companies like SteamaCo have developed platforms allowing households and businesses to prepay for electricity via SMS, monitoring consumption remotely. These microgrids provide a more affordable and reliable alternative to traditional off-grid solutions like diesel generators and kerosene lamps.[8]

Furthermore, most companies leverage remote work for diverse roles, from tech and software engineering to customer service and digital marketing. As remote work has been shown to reduce stress, allow more time for personal interests, and strengthen personal relationships, many workers are increasingly leaning toward this flexible work arrangement.

Beyond personal health and well-being, remote work can also enhance professional relationships. Freed from the distractions and office politics that often accompany in-office settings, both coworkers and managers may experience more harmonious and productive interactions.

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6 See, Temitope, Moronkeji, “Can Remote Work Survive Nigeria’s Power Grid Maze”? available at <https://www.startuplagos.net/post-detail/can-remote-work-survive-nigerias-power-grid-maze?utm_source=chatgpt.com> accessed on 16th May, 2025.

7 See The Guardian ‘A Future on our Terms; How Community Energy is Lighting up Latin America’ available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/may/08/latin-america-community-energy-indigenous-lighting-electricity-solar-pollution-diesel-just-transition?utm_source=chatgpt.com> accessed on 16th May 2025

8 See: Mayowa Jolayemi “ The Challenges of Remote Working in Developing Nations” available at https://www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk/the-challenges-of-remote-working-in-developing-nations/ accessed on 26th May 2025

Ultimately, whether employees work remotely or on-site, the primary goal remains the same: achieving the organization's objectives. Maximizing profitability is essential to ensure that employers can meet employee needs and fulfill client expectations effectively.

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