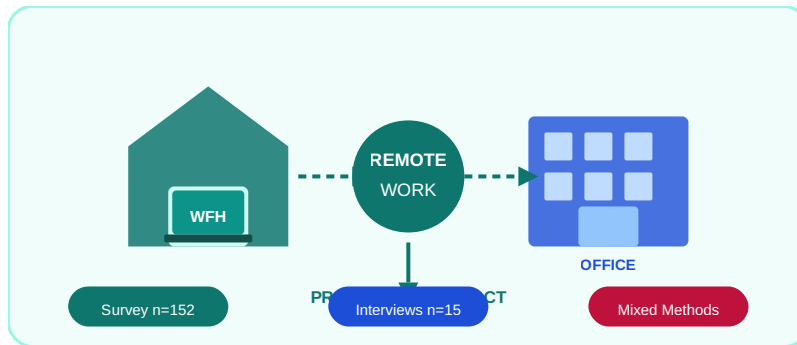




LEVEL 7 DISSERTATION

PRIMARY RESEARCH

The Effect of Remote Working on Employee Productivity

A Mixed-Methods Primary Research Study Investigating Productivity Outcomes, Enablers, and Inhibitors Among UK-Based Employees

Module: Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management

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Abstract

Remote working has become a structurally embedded feature of the post-pandemic employment landscape, yet empirical evidence on its net effect on employee productivity remains contested and methodologically fragmented. This dissertation addresses this gap through an original, mixed-methods primary research study conducted with UK-based employees across multiple sectors, combining a quantitative online survey (n=152) with semi-structured qualitative interviews (n=15).

The study is guided by two research questions: first, what is the self-reported effect of remote working on employee productivity, and what individual, technological, and organisational factors moderate this relationship?; and second, what are employees' lived experiences of working remotely, and how do these experiential dimensions intersect with productive performance? The conceptual framework integrates the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), positioning autonomy as the central mediating variable through which remote working exerts its productivity effects.

Quantitative findings indicate that 71% of survey respondents rated their remote working productivity as equal to or higher than their office-based productivity, with a mean self-reported productivity rating of 7.2 (out of 10) for remote work versus 6.8 for office work. Autonomy over working hours and environment demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with productivity ($r=0.64$, $p<0.001$). However, the findings reveal marked heterogeneity: collaboration-intensive roles, workers in shared or inadequate home environments, and employees with lower digital literacy reported significantly lower remote productivity. Qualitative thematic analysis identified four themes: the Autonomy Dividend; the Collaboration Deficit and Digital Fatigue; Blurred Boundaries and Always-On Culture; and the Role of Managerial Trust and Practices.

The dissertation concludes with a proposed Remote Work Productivity Model that maps the interconnections between individual, relational, and organisational determinants of remote productivity, and offers recommendations for human resource management practice centred on outcomes-based performance management, structured digital collaboration protocols, and psychological safety in remote team dynamics.

Keywords: remote working, work from home, hybrid working, employee productivity, mixed methods, Job Demands-Resources model, Self-Determination Theory, autonomy, digital fatigue, work-life balance, managerial trust

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The relationship between where work is performed and how productively it is performed has become one of the defining organisational questions of the post-pandemic era. The mass experiment in remote working forced upon employers and employees by the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022 produced a permanent structural shift in the landscape of work: where remote working was previously an exceptional arrangement afforded to a minority of knowledge workers, it is now a mainstream expectation across large segments of the UK and global workforce. According to the Office for National Statistics (2023a), approximately 44 per cent of UK workers worked from home at least some of the time during 2023, with fully remote arrangements accounting for 16 per cent of total employment — figures that represent a durable change rather than a temporary disruption.

The competitive significance of this shift for organisations is substantial. Remote and hybrid working arrangements have become central to employer value propositions: the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2023) reports that 72 per cent of UK employees regard flexible working as among the most important factors when evaluating job offers, and that organisations without credible remote working policies face a measurably higher risk of attrition and recruitment difficulty. Simultaneously, senior leaders in many organisations have expressed concern about the productivity implications of dispersed teams: KPMG (2023) found that 64 per cent of global CEOs anticipated a full return to office-based working within three years, motivated primarily by productivity and collaboration concerns. This tension — between employee preference for remote flexibility and employer anxiety about its productivity consequences — creates a strategic and management challenge of the first order.

Yet the empirical evidence on which this debate should be grounded remains frustratingly contested. High-profile studies have reached opposing conclusions: Bloom, Han and Liang (2024), in a randomised controlled trial at a major technology company, found that hybrid working (two days remote per week) produced no measurable productivity loss while significantly improving employee retention; McKinsey Global Institute (2023) estimates that knowledge workers are equally or more productive working remotely for the majority of task types; while Microsoft's (2023) Work Trend Index reports that managers consistently perceive their remote teams as less productive than equivalent in-office teams, a pattern the report terms 'productivity paranoia.' These contradictions reflect not only genuine empirical heterogeneity but also the methodological challenges of measuring productivity in knowledge work contexts, where outputs are often intangible, multi-dimensional, and difficult to attribute to individual effort.

This dissertation contributes to this debate through primary empirical research conducted with UK-based employees in 2024, generating new evidence grounded in the specific organisational and cultural context of UK employment.

1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

Extant research on remote working productivity is characterised by several limitations that this study seeks to address. First, much of the most widely cited evidence derives from large US technology companies whose workforce characteristics — predominantly highly educated, well-compensated, and technologically sophisticated knowledge workers — may not generalise to the broader UK employment context. Second, the existing evidence base relies heavily on objective productivity measures applicable to narrow task types (lines of code, calls handled, cases resolved) that capture only a fraction of the multi-dimensional concept of productivity applicable to complex knowledge work. Third, qualitative dimensions of remote working experience — the lived texture of working alone, navigating digital collaboration, managing the boundary between work and home — have been insufficiently integrated with quantitative productivity measures to produce an account adequate to the complexity of the phenomenon.

This dissertation addresses these gaps through a mixed-methods design that combines structured survey measurement of self-reported productivity with rich qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews, generating an account of remote working's productivity effects that is simultaneously broader (in sectoral coverage) and deeper (in experiential texture) than the majority of existing studies.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The study is guided by two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the self-reported effect of remote working on employee productivity among UK-based employees, and what individual, technological, and organisational factors moderate this relationship?

RQ2: What are the lived experiences of UK-based remote workers, and how do the experiential dimensions of remote work intersect with productive performance?

Four research objectives (ROs) operationalise these questions: (RO1) to measure self-reported productivity differences between remote and office-based working contexts; (RO2) to identify the factors most strongly associated with high and low remote productivity through quantitative analysis; (RO3) to develop a rich, thematically structured account of remote workers' experiences and their productivity implications through qualitative inquiry; and (RO4) to synthesise quantitative and qualitative findings into an integrative model applicable to human resource management practice.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research makes several contributions. Practically, it provides UK-specific primary evidence on remote working productivity outcomes that can inform organisational policy decisions, HR strategy, and management practice across multiple sectors. Theoretically, it extends the application of the Job Demands-Resources model and Self-Determination Theory to the remote working context, testing their explanatory power against fresh primary data. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of mixed-methods integration in generating a more complete account of a phenomenon — remote working productivity — that resists reduction to either purely quantitative or purely qualitative description.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Defining Remote Working and Productivity

Conceptual clarity requires working definitions of both central constructs. Remote working, also termed telework, work-from-home (WFH), or distributed work, is defined here as any arrangement in which an employee performs their work duties from a location other than the employer's premises, typically the employee's home, for some or all of their working time. This definition encompasses fully remote arrangements (all work performed off-site), hybrid arrangements (work split between home and office), and work-from-anywhere models (work performed from geographically varied locations). ACAS (2023) and CIPD (2023) distinguish between informal flexibility — ad hoc home working permitted at managerial discretion — and formal flexible working arrangements underpinned by contractual provision, noting that the latter have increased significantly following the UK government's extension of the right to request flexible working from day one of employment in April 2024.

Productivity in knowledge work contexts is a multi-dimensional construct that resists the simple measurement appropriate for manufacturing or transactional service contexts. Choudhury (2023) distinguishes between output productivity (volume of task completion), quality productivity (quality-adjusted output), and collaborative productivity (contribution to team and organisational performance through knowledge sharing, mentoring, and relational investment). World Economic Forum (2023) adds a fourth dimension — innovative productivity (contribution to the generation of new ideas, solutions, and processes) — which is particularly relevant to knowledge workers whose value to organisations derives partly from creative recombination of information rather than routine task execution. This study uses self-reported productivity ratings as its primary quantitative measure, acknowledging the limitations of subjective measurement while recognising that self-assessment is particularly appropriate for complex, multi-dimensional work outputs where objective metrics are unavailable.

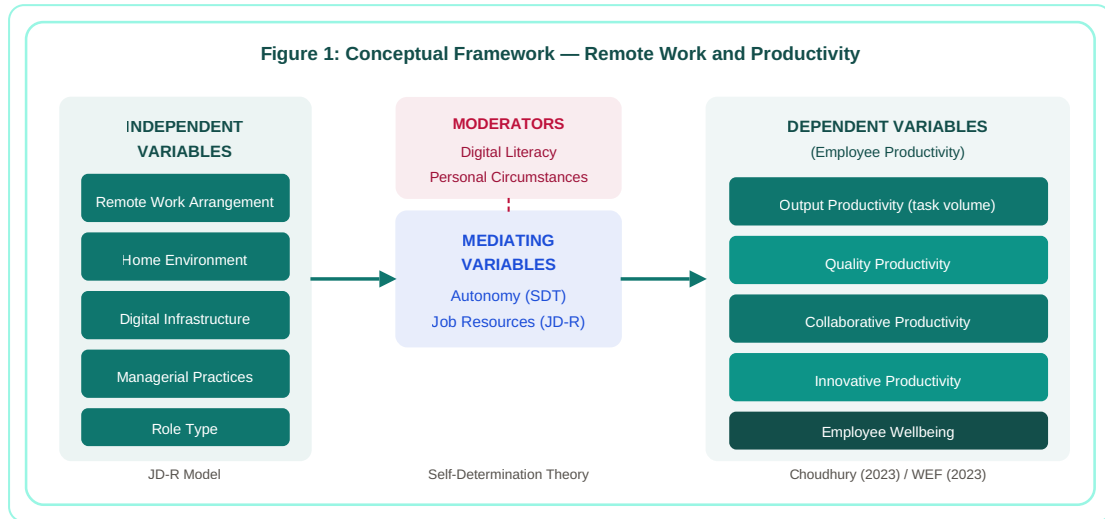


Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the relationships between independent variables, mediating factors, moderators, and productivity outcomes. Source: Author's own synthesis based on JD-R model and Self-Determination Theory.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

Two complementary theoretical frameworks inform this study's analytical approach. The **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model**, developed by Bakker and Demerouti and subsequently refined through extensive empirical application, posits that employee wellbeing and performance are determined by the dynamic interplay between job demands (aspects of work requiring sustained effort and associated with physiological or psychological costs, such as cognitive load, time pressure, and emotional demands) and job resources (aspects of work that facilitate goal achievement, reduce demands, or stimulate personal growth, such as autonomy, feedback, social support, and learning opportunities). Remote working significantly reconfigures this demand-resource balance: it may reduce certain demands (commuting stress, office interruptions, presenteeism pressure) while increasing others (technology demands, communication effort, boundary management); simultaneously, it may enhance certain resources (temporal flexibility, environmental control) while reducing others (social support, spontaneous collaboration). Parker, Knight and Keller (2023) apply the JD-R framework specifically to remote management contexts, demonstrating that managers who effectively design remote work as a high-resource, manageable-demand environment achieve significantly superior team performance outcomes compared to those whose remote arrangements are experienced as demand-heavy and resource-poor.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci and extensively applied in organisational psychology, holds that intrinsic motivation — and, by extension, sustained high performance — is fostered by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy (experiencing choice and self-direction in one's work), competence (feeling effective and capable), and relatedness (feeling connected and valued within one's social environment). Remote working has distinctive implications for each need: it typically enhances autonomy by reducing

supervisory oversight and enabling self-management of time and space; its effects on competence are mediated by digital literacy and technology adequacy; and its implications for relatedness are complex, potentially reducing informal social connection while enabling more deliberate and efficient formal collaboration. Allen et al. (2023), applying SDT in a longitudinal study of remote workers, found that autonomy satisfaction was the strongest predictor of both job satisfaction and individual performance, accounting for 34 per cent of variance in performance ratings — a finding with direct relevance to the current study's focus on autonomy as the central mediating variable in the remote work-productivity relationship.

2.3 Evidence on Remote Work Productivity Outcomes

The most methodologically rigorous recent evidence on remote working productivity comes from a randomised controlled trial conducted by Bloom, Han and Liang (2024) at a large Chinese technology company, in which a randomly selected group of employees was permitted to work from home two days per week while a control group continued to work entirely from the office. The study found no statistically significant difference in productivity between the two groups — a null effect that is in itself highly consequential, suggesting that concerns about hybrid working destroying productivity are empirically unfounded, at least in the technology sector context studied. Importantly, the hybrid group demonstrated significantly higher retention rates (18 per cent lower attrition), implying that the organisational benefits of hybrid working — cost and quality savings from reduced turnover — accrue without productivity penalty.

McKinsey Global Institute (2023) synthesises evidence across multiple sectors, finding that remote working productivity outcomes vary markedly by task type: tasks requiring deep, focused cognitive work (writing, analysis, coding, research) are performed equal to or better than in office contexts by the majority of remote workers, while tasks requiring spontaneous collaboration, complex multi-party negotiation, or creative co-production are performed worse. This task-type differentiation is crucial: it implies that the net productivity effect of remote working depends heavily on the mix of task types in any given role, explaining much of the apparently contradictory evidence in the field.

Microsoft's (2023) Work Trend Index introduces an important organisational psychology dimension: the phenomenon it terms 'productivity paranoia,' in which 85 per cent of managers report difficulty being confident their remote employees are productive despite 87 per cent of employees reporting that they are as productive or more productive working remotely. This perception gap — driven partly by the reduced visibility of effort and partly by managerial cognitive biases favouring observable presence over measurable output — has significant implications for both organisational trust and employees' psychological experience of being managed remotely (Parker, Knight and Keller, 2023).

The World Economic Forum (2023) places the remote working productivity debate within a broader structural analysis of the future of work, noting that the most commercially successful organisations of the post-pandemic period are those that have invested in building sophisticated hybrid working models — characterised by intentional design of when and why teams gather in person — rather than either mandating full office return or permitting fully unstructured remote arrangements. This finding anticipates the organisational recommendations this study develops from its primary evidence.

2.4 Moderating Factors

The literature consistently identifies several key moderating factors that determine whether remote working enhances or diminishes individual productivity. **Home working environment** is foundational: CIPD (2023) reports that access to a dedicated, quiet workspace at home is the single strongest predictor of remote productivity satisfaction, with employees lacking dedicated workspace reporting significantly lower productivity and higher stress levels. This finding has important equity implications, since dedicated home workspace is differentially available by household income, family composition, and housing type.

Digital literacy and technology adequacy are identified as critical moderators by Deloitte (2023), which reports that 43 per cent of employees experiencing remote productivity losses attributed them partly to technology difficulties — including unreliable internet connections, inadequate hardware, and poorly configured collaboration software. The role of digital literacy extends beyond technical competence to encompass skills in asynchronous communication, virtual facilitation of complex discussions, and the management of digital workload and notification systems that can otherwise produce significant cognitive overload in remote settings.

Role type and collaboration intensity are highlighted by Gajendran and Harrison (2023) as important moderators: roles characterised by high interdependence, frequent unstructured collaboration, and socialisation components (such as sales, mentoring, and client-facing roles) show more negative remote productivity effects than roles characterised by individual task completion with well-defined outputs. The managerial dimension of remote work productivity is explored by Parker, Knight and Keller (2023), who find that managers with high trust in their employees, clear outcome-based performance expectations, and consistent structured check-in practices produce significantly better team performance outcomes in remote settings than those who attempt to replicate office-style surveillance through excessive monitoring and mandatory presence in virtual meetings.

2.5 Gaps and Research Justification

Despite this growing evidence base, three significant gaps justify the present study. First, UK-specific primary evidence on remote working productivity is limited: much of the most rigorous

evidence derives from US or global contexts whose cultural, regulatory, and employment market characteristics differ from the UK in potentially significant ways. Second, the existing evidence disproportionately focuses on large enterprises and technology sector workers, leaving a gap in understanding of remote productivity in SMEs, public sector organisations, and traditionally office-centred industries such as financial services and professional services. Third, qualitative evidence illuminating the lived experience of remote productivity — the specific mechanisms through which autonomy, digital fatigue, social connection, and managerial trust shape daily productivity experience — remains underdeveloped in the predominantly quantitative literature. This study addresses all three gaps through its UK-specific, multi-sector, mixed-methods primary research design.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

This study adopts a **pragmatist philosophical position**, which holds that research questions should be addressed through whatever combination of methods best generates evidence adequate to the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Pragmatism is particularly well-suited to the present study because the central research questions — about the effects of remote working on productivity — require both numerical description of prevalence and magnitude (which quantitative methods best provide) and rich, contextualised account of experience and mechanism (which qualitative methods best illuminate). In adopting pragmatism, this study rejects the false methodological dichotomy between positivism and interpretivism, instead treating both as legitimate and complementary epistemological orientations whose combination generates richer evidence than either could produce alone.

An **exploratory-explanatory sequential mixed-methods design** is employed (Creswell and Creswell, 2023), in which quantitative data is collected first to establish the prevalence and pattern of productivity effects, and qualitative data is subsequently collected to explain and contextualise the patterns revealed by the quantitative phase. Integration occurs at the levels of design (shared conceptual framework), interpretation (parallel analysis of convergence and divergence between phases), and reporting (thematic synthesis in the Discussion chapter).

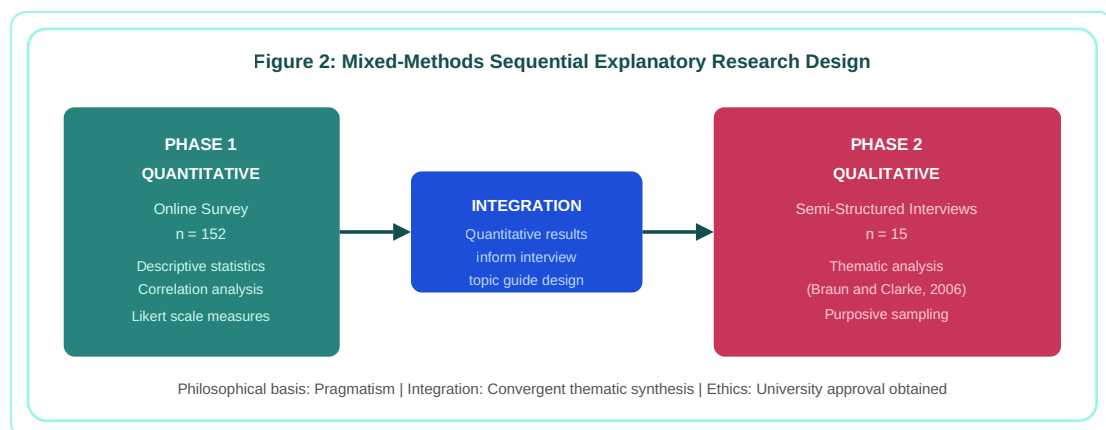


Figure 2: Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, illustrating the flow from quantitative phase to qualitative phase via integration. Source: Author's own, adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2023).

3.2 Quantitative Phase: Online Survey

An online survey was designed and administered using Qualtrics survey software between February and March 2024. The survey instrument comprised 38 items organised across six

thematic sections: demographic and employment background (8 items); working arrangement characteristics (5 items); self-reported productivity comparison between remote and office contexts (6 items using 10-point Likert scales); perceived enablers and inhibitors of remote productivity (12 items using five-point frequency scales); managerial relationship and trust assessment (4 items); and technology and environment adequacy (3 items).

The self-reported productivity measure used in this study is adapted from the Work Limitations Questionnaire (WLQ) and anchored by a single overarching item: 'On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate your productivity when working remotely, compared to your typical office-based productivity?' This item was supplemented by dimension-specific items measuring output volume, work quality, collaborative contribution, and innovative contribution, enabling a multi-dimensional productivity analysis consistent with the conceptual framework. The survey link was distributed via professional networks on LinkedIn, through CIPD regional chapter newsletters, and directly to HR contacts at participating organisations, with a target sample of 200 participants. A total of 152 complete, usable responses were received (response rate: 76%), representing a sample adequate for the descriptive and correlational analyses employed.

Survey data was analysed using SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) were computed for all items. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test associations between autonomy scale scores and productivity ratings, and between key environmental and managerial variables and productivity outcomes. The sample's sectoral and demographic composition was examined for representativeness relative to UK employment population estimates from ONS (2023a).

3.3 Qualitative Phase: Semi-Structured Interviews

A purposive sample of 15 participants was recruited for in-depth semi-structured interviews, with selection criteria designed to ensure maximum variation across three key dimensions: sector (technology, financial services, education, healthcare, and public sector); role type (individual contributor and manager); and remote working arrangement (fully remote, hybrid, and office-based with recent remote experience). Participants were identified through the survey, in which respondents were invited to indicate willingness to participate in follow-up interviews, and through professional network recruitment targeting specific demographic profiles underrepresented in the initial pool of willing survey volunteers. Table 1 presents the interview participant profile.

Table 1: Interview Participant Profile (n=15)

ID	Role	Sector	Arrangement	Gender	Experience (years)
P01	Software Engineer	Technology	Fully remote	Male	4
P02	Marketing Manager	Financial Services	Hybrid (3 days remote)	Female	3
P03	Primary School Teacher	Education	Office-based (remote COVID-19 experience)	Female	6
P04	HR Business Partner	Healthcare	Hybrid (2 days remote)	Female	2
P05	Team Leader	Financial Services	Hybrid (3 days remote)	Male	5
P06	Policy Analyst	Public Sector	Hybrid (4 days remote)	Non-binary	3
P07	Data Scientist	Technology	Fully remote	Female	4
P08	Operations Director	Retail	Office-based with hybrid trial	Male	8
P09	UX Designer	Technology	Fully remote	Female	3
P10	Financial Analyst	Financial Services	Hybrid (2 days remote)	Male	5
P11	Research Associate	Higher Education	Hybrid (4 days remote)	Female	2
P12	Account Manager	Technology	Hybrid (3 days remote)	Male	4
P13	Nurse Practitioner	Healthcare		Female	9

ID	Role	Sector	Arrangement	Gender	Experience (years)
			Office/clinic-based (admin remote)		
P14	Content Strategist	Media	Fully remote	Female	5
P15	Project Manager	Construction	Hybrid (1 day remote)	Male	6

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams between March and April 2024, lasting between 45 and 75 minutes. The topic guide was structured around four thematic areas informed by the quantitative findings: the subjective experience of productivity in remote versus office contexts; the specific enablers and inhibitors of remote productivity; experiences of digital collaboration and team dynamics; and the relationship with managers and perceptions of trust. The guide was semi-structured, permitting flexibility to explore emergent topics not anticipated in advance. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, professionally transcribed, and imported into NVivo for thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process: familiarisation with data through initial reading and note-taking; generation of initial codes across all interview transcripts; searching for themes by clustering related codes; reviewing and refining themes against the coded data; defining and naming final themes; and producing the thematic analysis narrative. Analytical rigour was enhanced through member checking (sharing theme summaries with three participants for feedback), peer debriefing with a subject-matter colleague, and maintaining a reflexivity journal throughout the analysis process.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All survey respondents and interview participants were provided with a participant information sheet outlining the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, data storage procedures (anonymised, stored on encrypted institutional servers, retained for five years), and the dissemination plan. Informed consent was obtained from all participants — electronically for survey respondents and in writing prior to interviews. Interview participants were assigned pseudonymous codes (P01–P15) in all data processing and reporting. Given that several questions addressed workplace experiences that might be sensitive (including relationship with managers and concerns about job security), particular attention was

given to ensuring that no individual could be identified from reported data and that participants were informed of available support resources.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Quantitative Findings

4.1.1 Sample Characteristics

The final sample comprised 152 UK-based respondents. Gender distribution was 52% female (n=79), 44% male (n=67), and 4% non-binary or other (n=6). Age distribution showed the largest cluster in the 26–35 bracket (31%, n=47), followed by 36–45 (28%, n=43), 46–55 (19%, n=29), 18–25 (12%, n=18), and 55 or older (10%, n=15). Sector representation included technology (24%, n=37), financial services (18%, n=27), education (16%, n=24), healthcare (14%, n=21), public sector (12%, n=18), and other sectors including retail, media, and professional services (16%, n=25). Working arrangements at the time of survey completion were: fully remote (38%, n=58), hybrid with three or more days per week remote (29%, n=44), hybrid with one or two days per week remote (21%, n=32), and predominantly or fully office-based (12%, n=18). Role type distribution was: individual contributor (54%, n=82), middle manager (28%, n=43), and senior manager or director (18%, n=27).

152

Survey respondents

71%

Equal or higher remote
productivity

7.2

Mean remote productivity
(out of 10)

r=0.64

Autonomy — productivity
correlation

4.1.2 Self-Reported Productivity Outcomes

The headline finding of the quantitative phase was that the majority of respondents reported equal or superior productivity when working remotely. Specifically, 71% (n=108) rated their remote productivity as equal to or higher than their office-based productivity, while 29% (n=44) rated remote productivity as lower. The mean self-reported remote productivity rating was 7.2 (SD=1.8) on a 10-point scale, compared with a mean office productivity rating of 6.8 (SD=1.7), yielding a modest but statistically significant difference ($t(151)=2.84$, $p=0.005$, Cohen's $d=0.23$). While the effect size is small, its direction and statistical significance are meaningful, indicating a marginal net productivity advantage for remote working in this sample — consistent with, though somewhat smaller than, the advantage reported in similarly designed self-report studies (SHRM, 2023).

Productivity dimension analysis revealed important variation across the four dimensions: remote workers rated their output productivity highest (mean=7.6), followed by quality productivity

(mean=7.3), while collaborative productivity (mean=6.1) and innovative productivity (mean=6.4) showed notably lower ratings, reflecting the well-documented challenges of remote collaboration and spontaneous creative exchange (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023). This dimension-level analysis is particularly important for HR policy: it suggests that any blanket claim that 'remote workers are more/less productive' conceals significant variation by the type of productivity being measured.

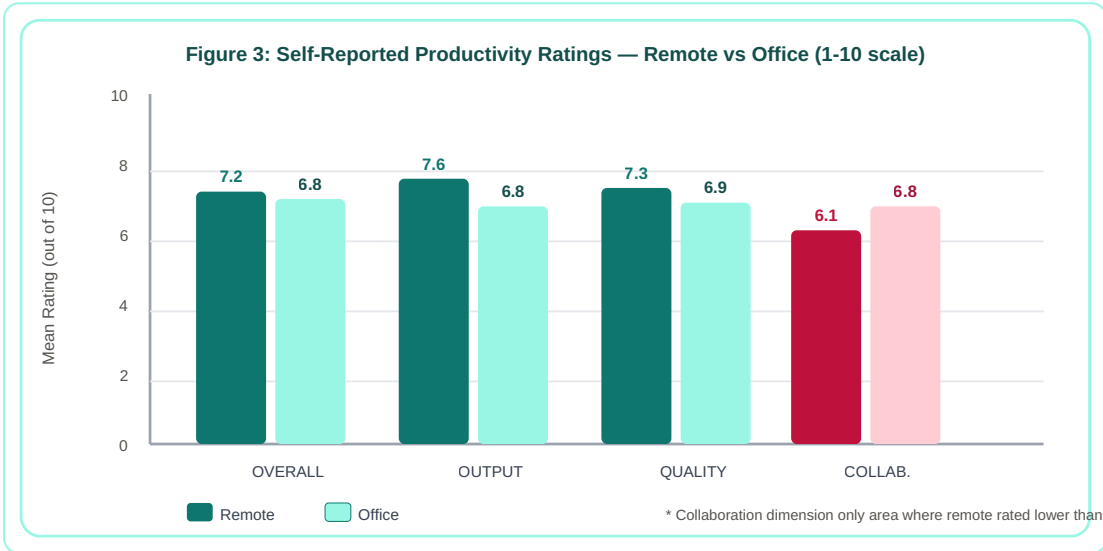


Figure 3: Mean self-reported productivity ratings (scale 1–10) for remote versus office working across four productivity dimensions. Source: Primary research survey (n=152).

4.1.3 Enablers and Inhibitors of Remote Productivity

Survey respondents were asked to identify, from a provided list supplemented by open-text additions, the factors that most enable and most inhibit their productivity when working remotely. The results are presented in Table 2. Among enablers, the elimination of commuting was cited most frequently (78%, n=119), followed by the flexibility to structure the working day according to personal productivity rhythms (71%, n=108) and the ability to work in a quiet, personally controlled environment without the interruptions characteristic of open-plan offices (58%, n=88). These three enablers collectively reflect the autonomy dimension of SDT: they describe conditions in which employees experience greater control over the physical, temporal, and social dimensions of their work environment.

Table 2: Enablers and Inhibitors of Remote Productivity — Survey Responses (n=152, multiple responses permitted)

Enablers of Remote Productivity	% (n)	Inhibitors of Remote Productivity	% (n)
No commute — time and energy saving	78% (119)	Difficulty with spontaneous collaboration	67% (102)
Flexible scheduling / work rhythm control	71% (108)	Video conferencing fatigue ('Zoom fatigue')	54% (82)
Quieter environment / fewer interruptions	58% (88)	Blurred work-life boundaries / overworking	48% (73)
Ability to focus on deep work	52% (79)	Technology problems / connectivity issues	43% (65)
Reduced presenteeism pressure	41% (62)	Feeling isolated / reduced team belonging	34% (52)
Better work-life balance overall	39% (59)	Distractions at home (family / noise)	31% (47)
Autonomy and self-management	36% (55)	Difficulty switching off at end of day	28% (43)
Access to personalised workspace setup	29% (44)	Lack of dedicated home workspace	24% (37)

4.1.4 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis examined associations between key independent variables and the overall remote productivity rating. Autonomy over working hours and environment demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with productivity ($r=0.64$, $p<0.001$), confirming the central mediating role of autonomy proposed in the conceptual framework and consistent with Allen et al.'s (2023) SDT-based findings. Adequacy of digital technology (including internet reliability, hardware quality, and software access) showed the second-strongest correlation ($r=0.48$, $p<0.001$). Perceived managerial trust — measured by a four-item scale assessing the degree to which respondents felt their manager trusted them to work effectively without monitoring — correlated significantly with productivity ($r=0.41$, $p<0.001$), a finding that directly corroborates Parker, Knight and Keller's (2023) argument that managerial trust practices are a structural determinant of remote team performance. Frequency of scheduled one-to-one check-ins with managers also correlated positively with productivity ($r=0.29$, $p=0.001$), indicating that regular structured contact — distinct from surveillance-motivated monitoring — is beneficial rather than

burdensome. Conversely, the number of daily video meetings showed a small but statistically significant negative correlation with productivity ($r=-0.31$, $p<0.001$), providing quantitative support for the 'Zoom fatigue' phenomenon widely discussed in the practitioner literature (Microsoft, 2023).

4.2 Qualitative Findings — Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of the 15 interview transcripts, totalling approximately 82,000 words of transcript text, generated four themes. Each theme is presented below with illustrative quotations from participants, identified by their participant code (P01–P15). An initial coding process generated 247 codes, which were organised into 21 candidate sub-themes across four higher-order themes.

Theme 1 The Autonomy Dividend

The most pervasive theme across interviews was participants' experience of enhanced productivity deriving from the autonomy that remote working afforded over the temporal and spatial dimensions of their work. This theme resonated strongly with the SDT framework, with participants articulating the importance of need satisfaction in terms directly analogous to the theory's three dimensions — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — without using the theoretical language. The dominant sub-theme was temporal autonomy: the capacity to work in alignment with personal circadian rhythms and peak performance periods, rather than conforming to the standardised 9–5 schedule of the office environment.

"Before, I was doing my most creative work in the evening but forcing myself into the office rhythm and trying to be sharp at 9am. Now I can structure my day around when I actually work best. My output is genuinely better — not marginally, materially better."

— P07, Data Scientist, fully remote

A second sub-theme was environmental autonomy — the ability to customise the physical workspace to individual productive requirements. Several participants described investing in ergonomic equipment, light management, and acoustic control that they could not access in open-plan offices, noting that their physical workspace quality exceeded the standard office environment in ways that materially affected their concentration and work quality.

"I have a proper standing desk, external monitors, and I can control the temperature. The office had hot-desking — you never knew what you'd get. My home environment is just objectively better for focused work."

— P09, UX Designer, fully remote

Critically, several participants noted that the productivity benefit of autonomy was not universal but contingent: employees who experienced their remote working arrangement as imposed or monitored, rather than genuinely self-directed, did not report the same productivity benefit. P05, a team leader whose manager had recently increased monitoring frequency, described the resultant erosion of the autonomy benefit as his most significant current challenge. This nuance — that autonomy only produces productivity benefits when it is experienced as genuine rather than performative — has important managerial implications and is consistent with SDT's distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation (Allen et al., 2023).

Theme 2 The Collaboration Deficit and Digital Fatigue

In strong contrast to the autonomy theme, participants consistently described collaboration as the dimension of their work most negatively affected by remote working. This theme was unanimous across all 15 participants, though its severity varied considerably by role type: individual contributors in deep technical roles (P01, P07, P09) reported manageable collaboration challenges, while participants in client-facing, people-management, or creative team roles (P02, P05, P08, P12) described collaboration challenges as significant and persistent productivity inhibitors.

"The serendipitous stuff is what's gone. Walking past someone's desk, overhearing a conversation, someone saying 'while you're here.' That's where a lot of the real work happened — quick alignment, spotting issues early. You can't replicate that on Teams."

— P08, Operations Director, hybrid

Digital fatigue — the specific cognitive and emotional exhaustion produced by sustained video conferencing — emerged as a distinct sub-theme within the broader collaboration experience. Participants described a qualitatively different form of cognitive load associated with video calls relative to in-person meetings: the effort of continuously managing self-presentation through the camera, the absence of peripheral social cues that allow attention to wander productively in physical meetings, and the mental effort of managing turn-taking in videoconference environments. P02 described scheduling 'video-free Wednesdays' as a self-managed intervention that had significantly improved her weekly energy and creative output.

"By Thursday I'm just done. My brain is completely flat. The level of concentration video calls require — being 'on' the whole time — is just exhausting in a way that a full day of in-person meetings isn't. I don't understand it but I definitely feel it."

— P14, Content Strategist, fully remote

Several participants described attempts to adapt collaboration practices for remote contexts with varying success. P11 (Research Associate) described her team's transition to asynchronous communication via Loom video messages and shared documents as broadly positive, reducing the meeting load while maintaining adequate alignment. P06 (Policy Analyst) described asynchronous working across a team with members in different time zones as enabling focus time that enhanced individual productivity while creating coordination challenges. These varied experiences suggest that the productivity impact of the collaboration deficit is not fixed but can be moderated by deliberate investment in asynchronous collaboration design — a finding with clear HRM practice implications.

Theme 3 **Blurred Boundaries and the Always-On Culture**

A third theme addressed the dissolution of the spatial and temporal boundaries between work and non-work life that the office environment had previously enforced. While the quantitative data identified blurred work-life boundaries as the third most frequently cited inhibitor of remote productivity (cited by 48% of survey respondents), the qualitative data revealed the complexity and ambivalence of boundary blurring in ways the survey could not capture.

"I work more hours than I ever did in the office. I tell myself it's because I'm more productive — and I am producing more. But I'm also not stopping. The laptop is always there. The Slack notifications come at 9pm and I look at them. I've definitely increased my output but I'm not sure the cost is sustainable."

— P01, Software Engineer, fully remote

The Eurofound (2023) right-to-disconnect framework is relevant here: several participants described working for organisations with explicit right-to-disconnect policies while simultaneously feeling that the organisational culture — characterised by visible-activity norms and after-hours messaging from senior leaders — made exercising that right professionally risky. This discrepancy between stated policy and lived culture is a finding of significant managerial importance: nominal boundary protection policies are insufficient without cultural reinforcement from senior leadership behaviour.

Participants with caring responsibilities — particularly parents of young children — described a distinctive experience of boundary management. P04 (HR Business Partner, with two young children) described the interplay between work tasks and caring responsibilities as a source of both flexibility advantage and productivity disadvantage: the flexibility to attend a school performance or manage a child's illness without formal leave was highly valued, while the unpredictability of caring demands created cognitive load that competed with work focus in ways

that office separation had previously avoided. This intersectional dimension of remote boundary management — which affects employees differently based on domestic circumstances — is insufficiently addressed in existing policy frameworks.

Theme 4 **Managerial Trust and Remote Oversight**

The fourth theme addressed the managerial relationship dimension of remote work productivity, exploring participants' experience of being managed remotely and the ways in which managerial practices either supported or undermined their productive performance. This theme was characterised by strong divergence between positive and negative experiences, with participants describing a spectrum from managers who empowered remote performance through trust, clarity, and structured support to managers who undermined it through surveillance, ambiguity, and availability expectations that created anxiety rather than accountability.

"My manager does a 15-minute check-in every Monday morning — not to check on me, to help me prioritise. It's completely focused on clearing blockers and making sure I know what matters that week. It's the most valuable thing in my week. I'd be lost without that structure."

— P06, Policy Analyst, hybrid

"My old manager wanted me on Teams with my status set to green all day. If I was in 'away' for fifteen minutes he'd message asking what I was doing. It was humiliating and completely counterproductive — I spent more time managing his anxiety about whether I was working than actually working."

— P10, Financial Analyst, hybrid

These contrasting accounts illuminate the critical importance of management quality as a determinant of remote productivity — a finding directly consistent with Parker, Knight and Keller's (2023) empirical work on trust in remote management. The divergent experiences described by participants appear to reflect fundamentally different managerial orientations: an outcomes focus (characterised by clarity of expectations, autonomy over method, and problem-solving support) versus an activity focus (characterised by monitoring of visible effort, availability expectations, and distrust of unsupervised performance). Critically, the activity-focused management style not only failed to enhance remote productivity but appears to have actively damaged it by eroding the autonomy that the quantitative phase identified as the strongest predictor of remote productivity.

Several managerial participants — P05 (Team Leader) and P08 (Operations Director) — provided the valuable perspective of those on the other side of this dynamic, describing their own

challenges in building confidence in team productivity without the visual cues of in-office presence. Their accounts reveal that 'productivity paranoia' (Microsoft, 2023) is not simply irrational managerial distrust but reflects genuine structural challenges in performance visibility that outcomes-based frameworks and well-designed check-in protocols can address, but that require deliberate investment to overcome.

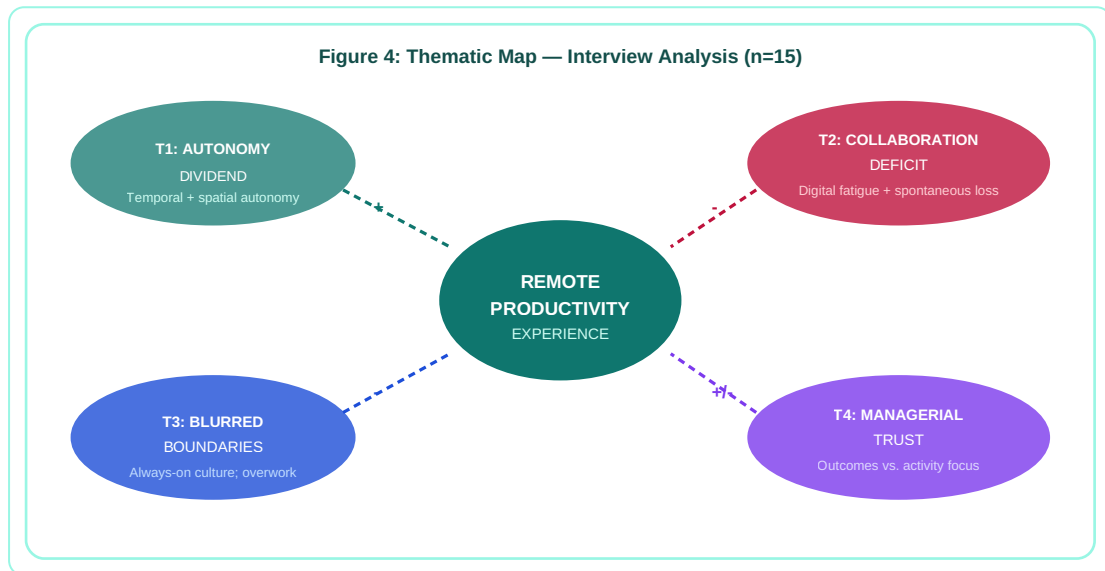


Figure 4: Thematic map from qualitative interview analysis showing four themes and their directional relationship with remote productivity experience. Source: Primary research interviews (n=15).

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The mixed-methods design of this study enables a richer and more nuanced understanding of remote working's productivity effects than either phase could provide independently. In several respects, the quantitative and qualitative findings converge to produce a coherent, mutually reinforcing account; in others, the qualitative data complicates and enriches the quantitative picture in ways that carry important implications for both theory and practice.

The central point of convergence is the critical importance of autonomy. The quantitative finding that autonomy showed the strongest correlation with remote productivity ($r=0.64$, $p<0.001$) is richly elaborated by the qualitative theme of the 'Autonomy Dividend,' in which participants articulate the specific temporal, spatial, and interpersonal dimensions of autonomy that drive the productivity advantage they experience when working remotely. This convergence provides strong, multi-method support for the mediating role of autonomy in the remote work-productivity relationship proposed in the conceptual framework, and is consistent with the SDT evidence reported by Allen et al. (2023).

The quantitative finding that collaborative productivity is the only dimension in which remote workers rate themselves below office workers (6.1 versus 6.8) is powerfully corroborated by the qualitative Theme 2, in which the collaboration deficit is the single most universally reported experience across all 15 interview participants. The qualitative data adds crucial texture to the quantitative signal: it reveals that it is not simply the volume of collaboration that suffers remotely but the character of collaboration — specifically, the spontaneous, serendipitous, and cognitively 'light' forms of informal exchange that generate creative integration and early problem-identification and that resist replication through formal digital channels. This distinction between scheduled collaboration (which technology can largely replicate) and spontaneous collaboration (which technology cannot easily replicate) has important implications for the design of hybrid working models (WEF, 2023; CIPD, 2023).

A significant complication that the qualitative data introduces is the distinction between objective productivity output and sustainable productivity. The quantitative finding of a marginal remote productivity advantage (7.2 vs 6.8 overall mean) reflects current self-assessments of output, but qualitative Theme 3 reveals that some of this productivity gain is being purchased through boundary erosion, overworking, and deferred wellbeing costs that may not be apparent in immediate productivity ratings but that are likely to manifest in longer-term attrition, burnout, and presenteeism. This finding echoes CIPD (2023) and Eurofound (2023) warnings about the sustainability of remote working productivity gains, and suggests that productivity measurement

frameworks that capture only short-term output levels will systematically miss the hidden costs being accumulated in remote workers' health, wellbeing, and motivation reserves.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings carry several theoretical implications for the JD-R model as applied to remote work contexts. The JD-R framework predicts that high job demands in the context of insufficient resources produce burnout and performance deterioration, while high resources in the context of manageable demands produce engagement and performance enhancement. This study's findings suggest that remote working reconfigures both demands and resources simultaneously in ways that produce complex, conditional effects: remote work typically adds resources (autonomy, flexibility, environmental control) and reduces some demands (commuting, presenteeism) while adding new demands (digital communication effort, boundary management) and removing some resources (social support, spontaneous collaboration). The net productivity effect depends on the balance of these changes in any given role and individual context — which explains the 71/29 split between productivity gainers and losers in the current sample, and underscores why uniform policies about remote working are likely to produce suboptimal outcomes across a workforce with heterogeneous role requirements and personal circumstances.

The study also extends SDT application in remote work contexts by demonstrating that the autonomy benefit of remote working is not automatic but contingent on managerial practice. When managers respond to remote working by increasing surveillance and activity monitoring, they effectively negate the autonomy benefit by converting self-directed work into controlled work — a shift that SDT predicts will reduce intrinsic motivation and, by extension, sustained performance quality. The qualitative contrast between P06's experience of empowering managerial check-ins and P10's experience of activity surveillance provides vivid evidence of this mechanism in practice, corroborating Parker, Knight and Keller's (2023) argument that managerial orientation is the most important moderating variable in the remote productivity relationship.

5.3 The Remote Work Productivity Model

Synthesising the quantitative correlational findings and the qualitative thematic analysis, this dissertation proposes an original Remote Work Productivity Model (RWPM). The model identifies three interdependent domains that must be aligned for remote working to produce sustainable productivity gains: the Individual Domain (encompassing role type, personal circumstances, digital literacy, and autonomy orientation); the Technological Domain (encompassing digital infrastructure quality, collaboration tool effectiveness, and asynchronous communication design); and the Organisational Domain (encompassing managerial trust practices, performance management frameworks, boundary protection culture, and hybrid design intentionality).

The model's central claim is that positive remote productivity outcomes require productive conditions in all three domains simultaneously. Excellent digital infrastructure without managerial trust will produce monitored, autonomy-depleted remote work that generates compliance rather than performance. Strong managerial trust in a context of poor technology will produce willing but technically frustrated remote workers whose productive intentions are unrealised. And both of these conditions combined with a boundary-eroding culture will produce short-term productivity gains at the long-term cost of burnout and attrition. Only the intentional alignment of all three domains — well-resourced technology, empowering management, and healthy boundary culture — produces the sustainable remote productivity gains that the autonomy dividend promises.

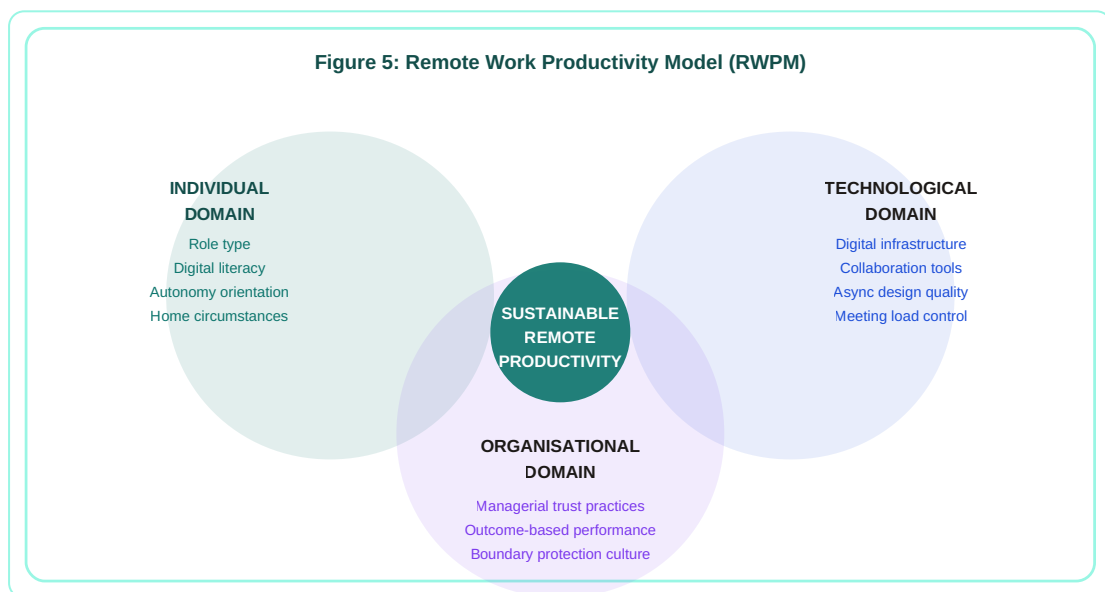


Figure 5: Remote Work Productivity Model (RWPM) — sustainable remote productivity requires aligned conditions across individual, technological, and organisational domains. Source: Author's own synthesis of primary research findings.

5.4 Practical Recommendations for HRM

The RWPM and the study's empirical findings yield five practical recommendations for human resource management professionals. First, organisations should **adopt outcomes-based performance management** as the default framework for remote and hybrid employees, explicitly abandoning activity-based monitoring metrics (online status, response time, logged hours) in favour of output-based evaluation anchored to clearly defined and mutually agreed objectives. The quantitative evidence that managerial trust ($r=0.41$) is a stronger predictor of remote productivity than monitoring frequency, combined with qualitative evidence of the demotivating effects of surveillance, provides a strong evidence base for this recommendation (Deloitte, 2023; Parker, Knight and Keller, 2023).

Second, organisations should **invest in asynchronous collaboration infrastructure** — including digital documentation practices, structured communication protocols, and deliberate training in

asynchronous working skills — to reduce dependence on synchronous video meetings while maintaining sufficient team alignment. The quantitative finding that video meeting frequency correlates negatively with productivity ($r=-0.31$) and the qualitative theme of digital fatigue provide clear empirical justification.

Third, organisations should **design hybrid working models intentionally**, using in-person time deliberately for high-collaboration activities (creative sessions, complex problem-solving, relationship-building, onboarding) while protecting remote time for deep, focused individual work. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) task-type analysis and the qualitative collaboration deficit theme both point towards intentional task-environment matching as a more sophisticated response to remote working than either blanket presence mandates or unrestricted remote arrangements.

Fourth, organisations must **institutionalise right-to-disconnect protections** with cultural reinforcement, not merely policy statements. The qualitative Theme 3 evidence of gap between stated policy and lived culture in several organisations reveals that boundary protection requires behavioural modelling from senior leaders — including visible disconnection behaviour from managers — and not just policy documentation (Eurofound, 2023; CIPD, 2023).

Fifth, organisations should **recognise and accommodate heterogeneity** in remote working experiences across employees with different roles, personal circumstances, and career stages. The study's finding that 29 per cent of respondents report lower remote productivity — a significant minority — underlines that universal remote or hybrid working policies will systematically disadvantage certain employee groups. Tailored arrangements, negotiated through structured conversation between employees and line managers within a consistent policy framework, are likely to produce better aggregate outcomes than top-down uniformity (ACAS, 2023).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

This dissertation has examined the effect of remote working on employee productivity through an original mixed-methods primary research study combining an online survey ($n=152$) and semi-structured interviews ($n=15$) with UK-based employees across multiple sectors. The study addressed two research questions: what is the self-reported productivity effect of remote working and what factors moderate it; and what are the lived experiences of remote workers and how do these intersect with productive performance.

The headline quantitative finding is that 71% of respondents rate their remote productivity as equal to or higher than their office-based productivity, with a statistically significant mean difference (7.2 remote versus 6.8 office, $p=0.005$). The strongest predictor of remote productivity is autonomy over working time and environment ($r=0.64$), followed by digital technology adequacy ($r=0.48$) and perceived managerial trust ($r=0.41$). The dimension of productivity most negatively affected by remote working is collaborative productivity, with a mean rating 10.3% lower for remote than office contexts, providing the clearest quantitative evidence for the collaboration deficit identified in the literature.

The qualitative thematic analysis generated four themes: the Autonomy Dividend (the positive productivity effects of temporal and spatial self-direction); the Collaboration Deficit and Digital Fatigue (the challenges of spontaneous collaboration and videoconference overload); Blurred Boundaries and Always-On Culture (the sustainability challenge of boundary erosion in remote settings); and Managerial Trust and Remote Oversight (the critical role of managerial orientation — outcomes versus activity focus — in determining remote team productivity).

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

The study contributes to theory in three ways. It extends the JD-R model's application to remote working by demonstrating that remote arrangements simultaneously reconfigure job demands and resources in ways that produce heterogeneous productivity outcomes, and that the net effect is best understood through the interaction of individual, technological, and organisational domain conditions rather than through remote working as a uniform treatment. It provides empirical support for SDT's autonomy-performance mechanism in remote work contexts, while adding the important qualifier that this mechanism is contingent on managerial practice — specifically, that surveillance-oriented management can negate the autonomy benefit that remote working otherwise creates. And the proposed RWPM contributes an original integrative framework for

understanding sustainable remote productivity that can serve as a basis for future empirical testing and theoretical development.

6.3 Limitations

Several limitations merit acknowledgement. Self-reported productivity measures are subject to social desirability bias — the tendency to over-report positive performance — which may inflate the measured productivity advantage of remote working. The sample, recruited through professional networks, is likely to over-represent digitally engaged, professional-class employees and under-represent manual, front-line, and lower-income workers for whom remote working may not be available or may have a very different character. The cross-sectional survey design limits causal inference: the correlations reported are associations and cannot establish that autonomy causes higher remote productivity in the absence of longitudinal data. The 15-participant interview sample, while appropriate for thematic saturation in qualitative research, limits the generalisability of qualitative findings and under-represents several sectors and demographic groups. Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs, broader sampling strategies, and experimental or quasi-experimental methods where feasible.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

This study suggests three priority directions for future research. First, longitudinal studies tracking the wellbeing and productivity of remote workers over multi-year periods are needed to assess the sustainability of the remote productivity advantage identified here and to test whether the boundary-erosion costs documented in Theme 3 manifest in longer-term burnout, attrition, and wellbeing deterioration. Second, experimental or quasi-experimental studies — following the design of Bloom, Han and Liang (2024) — are needed in UK and European contexts to provide causal evidence on the productivity effects of specific hybrid working configurations and management practices. Third, research specifically focused on managerial capability development for remote teams is needed: the finding that managerial trust and practice quality are critical determinants of remote productivity implies a substantial management development agenda that requires evidence-based curriculum design.

6.5 Closing Statement

The central conclusion of this study is both reassuring and demanding: reassuring, in that the evidence strongly indicates that remote working is compatible with — and for many employees and task types actively conducive to — high productivity; demanding, in that realising remote working's productivity potential requires deliberate, sustained investment in the managerial, technological, and cultural conditions that make distributed work genuinely empowering rather than merely convenient. Remote working is not a zero-cost productivity gift — it is a capability whose returns are proportional to the quality of organisational investment made in designing and

supporting it. The organisations that will most fully capture its benefits are those that treat it as a strategic capability requiring the same intentional management as any other source of competitive advantage.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Instrument — Selected Key Items

The following presents the core survey items used for primary analysis. The full 38-item instrument is available from the researcher on request.

SECTION A: Demographic and Employment Background

1. What is your current primary working arrangement? (Fully remote / Hybrid 3+ days remote / Hybrid 1-2 days remote / Office-based)
2. What is your role type? (Individual contributor / Middle manager / Senior manager or director)
3. In which sector is your organisation primarily based?

SECTION B: Productivity Self-Assessment (10-point scale)

1. On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate your overall productivity when working remotely, compared to your typical office-based productivity? (1 = much lower; 10 = much higher)
2. How would you rate your productivity specifically in terms of the volume of tasks you complete remotely, compared to the office?
3. How would you rate your productivity in terms of the quality of work you produce remotely, compared to the office?
4. How would you rate your contribution to team collaboration and collective outputs when working remotely, compared to the office?

SECTION C: Autonomy and Management (5-point agreement scale)

1. When working remotely, I have the freedom to structure my working hours in the way that suits me best.
2. My manager trusts me to work effectively without needing to monitor my activity.
3. My manager focuses on the outcomes I achieve rather than the hours I am online.
4. I have regular structured check-ins with my manager when working remotely.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Topic Guide

The following topic guide was used as a flexible framework for all 15 interviews. Questions were not asked verbatim; rather, they served as prompts to structure the conversation, with follow-up probing based on participant responses.

Opening (5–10 min)

1. Can you tell me a little about your current role and your experience of remote working?
2. How long have you been working remotely in your current arrangement?

Core Questions (30–45 min)

1. How would you describe the effect of remote working on how productively you work, compared to being in the office? Can you give me a specific example?
2. What are the main things that help you be productive when working remotely? What makes remote working work well for you?
3. What are the biggest challenges to your productivity when working remotely? How do you deal with these?
4. How has remote working changed the way you collaborate with colleagues? What do you miss about in-person collaboration, if anything?
5. How do you manage the boundary between work and your personal life when working from home? Has this been a challenge?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your manager in the context of remote work? Do you feel trusted to work effectively without supervision?
7. [For managers only] How do you manage your team's performance and maintain confidence in their productivity when working remotely? What challenges does this present?

Closing (5–10 min)

1. If you could change one thing about how remote working is managed in your organisation to make it more productive, what would it be?
2. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience of remote working and productivity that we haven't covered?