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**ANALYSIS ON PRODUCTIVITY OF SRI LANKAN IT
PROFESSIONALS WITH REMOTE WORKING CONDITIONS
IN POST COVID ENVIRONMENT**

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Thesis/Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis/dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any other University or Institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

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The above candidate has carried out research for the PhD/MPhil/Masters thesis/dissertation under my supervision. I confirm that the declaration made above by the student is true and correct.

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Sunimal Rathnayake

Signature of the Supervisor:

Date: 15-Jul-2025

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a sea change in work cultures around the world, with organizations swiftly moving to models of remote work. The given study discusses how working from home has influenced the productivity of Sri Lankan IT professionals in the post-pandemic period, focusing on both the benefits and drawbacks of this new paradigm of working. It had been done by using a mixed-methods approach, combining the in-depth insights from interviews of employees and employers with quantitative data obtained from structured questionnaires to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Findings indicate that while remote work greatly improved individual task-based productivity due to fewer distractions and flexible scheduling, it presented certain challenges related to collaborative productivity, work-life balance, and long-term motivation. Many employees reported being more productive and less stressed from commuting, but these benefits were often offset by the blurred boundaries between work and personal life, overwork, and fatigue. Technological readiness proved another major factor: urban employees were better connected than rural employees, who often had serious infrastructure challenges. Employers also faced challenges when it came to managing strong digital security and making sure all staff had equitable access to tools.

The article states that while Zoom and Slack allowed limited communication to continue, they could not recreate (the spontaneity and cohesion created through) in-person communication. Over time, remote work brought about isolation, team engagement and digital fatigue. However, we identified hybrid work as the sustainable way forward for the Sri Lankan IT sector, allowing a mix of remote working autonomy and collaboration opportunities provided by in-office environments that best suited the cultural and infrastructural makeup of the country while seeking to balance productivity, flexibility and cohesion.

So, it suggested that there is scope for developed hybrid work policies, better digital infrastructure-particularly in rural areas, and measures towards work-life balance like flexible hours and mental fitness. The organization should be adopting newer virtual tools, investing in team-building activities and setting honest metric targets to assist in building relationship and accountability.

The insights provided in this study are valuable, as they reflect the evolving workplace dynamics in the Sri Lankan IT sector and give strategic guidance on how organizations can achieve optimum productivity, employee satisfaction, and organizational efficiency in the post-pandemic world.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the resilient practitioners of the IT sector in Sri Lanka, who were adaptive and tenacious amidst policies of social distancing in the COVID-19 pandemic, and kept the digital economy afloat, whilst redefining the future of work. To all the IT professionals who embraced uncertainty, turned living rooms into board rooms and continuously produced great work under challenging conditions; this is for you.

I also dedicate this study to my family, who tirelessly provided me with support, perseverance and encouragement of which my research rests upon. Their faith in the importance of my academic and professional experience and the value that was added to my research, gave me the motivation to approach my inquiry honestly and ambitiously.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Sunimal Rathnayake, whose constructive feedback, insightful suggestions, and steady encouragement throughout the project allowed me to enhance the impact of this research. Your supervision has expanded my ability to exercise strategic research thinking, while also writing this dissertation.

I would like to sincerely thank the participants of this study - employees and employers alike, in the Sri Lankan IT industry - for taking the time to share candid views and contributed to this study. Without your input, this research would not have achieved its depth and relevance.

I am also thankful to the academic and administrative staff of University of Moratuwa, whose commitment to academic excellence and access to critical resources greatly facilitated my work. Special thanks to the research ethics committee for providing timely clearance and ensuring the study maintained ethical standards throughout.

To my peers and colleagues who served as sounding boards, helped pilot the survey, and offered constructive feedback during times of doubt—thank you for your camaraderie and collaboration.

Finally, to the unseen champions of this journey my close friends, late-night motivators, and every cup of coffee that fueled my analysis your contributions, though quiet, were indispensable.

This research is the result of collective support, academic discipline, and a genuine desire to contribute meaningfully to Sri Lanka's post-pandemic transformation. May it inspire further scholarship and informed policy on the future of work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>DECLARATION</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>ABSTRACT</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Dedication</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of figures</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Appendix – A</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Extensive Tables of Raw Data</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>CHAPTER 1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1 Background to the Problem.....	1
1.2 Definition of the Main Problem and Research Question.....	1
1.2.1 Main Research Question:.....	2
1.2.2 Sub-Research Questions:.....	2
1.2.3 Research Objectives.....	2
1.3 Method of Study.....	2
1.4 Review of Previous Literature.....	3
1.5 Expected Results.....	4
<i>CHAPTER 2</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>LITERATURE REVIEW</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1 Introduction to Remote Working.....	5
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	5
2.3 Defining Productivity in Remote Work.....	6
2.3.1 Key Metrics for Measuring Productivity in Remote Work Environments .	7
2.3.2 Distinctions Between Task-Based and Collaborative Productivity.....	7

2.4 Global Perspectives on Remote Work and Productivity	8
2.5 The Sri Lankan IT Sector: An Overview	9
2.5.1 The Importance of the IT Industry in Sri Lanka's Economy	9
2.5.2 Pre-Pandemic Working Conditions in the Sri Lankan IT Sector	9
2.6 Remote Work in Sri Lanka During COVID-19	9
2.7 Factors Influencing Productivity in Remote Work	10
2.8 Cultural and Social Dynamics in Remote Work	11
2.9 Comparison of Global and Local Findings	11
2.10 Post-COVID Long-Term Implications of Remote Work	12
2.11 Gaps in Existing Literature	13
2.12 Conclusion and Research Focus.....	13
<i>CHAPTER 3</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>METHODOLOGY</i>	<i>15</i>
3.1 Introduction.....	15
3.2 Research Design.....	15
3.3 Conceptual framework	16
3.4 Data Collection Methods	16
3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews.....	16
3.4.2 Interview Questions for Employees	17
3.4.3 Interview Questions for Employers	18
3.4.4 Interview Process	19
3.4.5 Questionnaire	20
3.4.6 Key Sections of the Questionnaire.....	20
3.5 Sampling	21
3.5.1 Sampling Method.....	21
3.6 Data Analysis Methods	23
3.6.1 Qualitative Analysis	23
3.6.2 Quantitative Analysis	23
3.6.3 Rationale for Selected Methods	24
3.6.4 Ethical Considerations	24

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology	25
3.8 Conclusion	25
<i>CHAPTER 4</i>	26
<i>OBSERVATIONS</i>	26
4.1 Qualitative responses from Employers	26
4.2 Qualitative responses from Employees	30
4.3 Quantitative responses from employees.....	32
<i>CHAPTER 5</i>	34
<i>ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS</i>	34
5.1 Introduction.....	34
5.2 Thematic analysis.....	34
5.2.1 Preparation for remote work	34
5.2.2 Productivity	36
5.2.3 Work-life balance.....	37
5.2.4 Technological readiness	39
5.2.5 Communication and collaboration	41
5.2.6 Motivation and engagement.....	43
5.2.7 Challenges and benefits of remote work.....	44
5.2.8 Hybrid work as a future model.....	46
5.3 Quantitative analysis of employee responses.....	48
5.3.1 Comparative analysis	48
Paired T-test for means	49
5.4 Implications.....	51
5.4.1 For Organizations.....	51
5.4.2 For Employees	52
5.4.3 For Policy and Practice	52
<i>CHAPTER 6</i>	54
<i>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	54
6.1 Overview of Findings.....	54
6.2 Addressing Research Questions.....	54

6.3 Key Conclusions	55
6.4 Recommendations	55
6.4.1 For Organizations.....	55
6.4.1.3 Develop Comprehensive Employee Well-being Programs	57
6.4.1.4 Enhance Virtual Collaboration Capabilities	57
6.4.1.5 Develop Cultural Adaptation Strategies for Remote Work	58
Specific Implementation Strategies:	59
6.4.2 For Policymakers	59
6.4.3 For Employees	60
Formulation Rationale:.....	61
Specific Implementation Strategies:	61
6.5 Limitations and Future Research	61
6.6 Final Thoughts	61
<i>References</i>	62
<i>Appendix A: Extensive Tables of Raw Data</i>	66

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Description	Page
Figure 1	ICT Literacy (Sri Lanka Labor force survey, 2018)	1
Figure 2	Conceptual Framework	15
Figure 3	Sample size calculation	20

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
Table 1	Interview questions for employees (Author developed)	16
Table 2	Interview questions for employers	17
Table 3	Qualitative responses from employers	25
Table 4	Qualitative responses from employees	29
Table 5	Quantitative responses from employees for productivity in the office	31
Table 6	Quantitative responses from employees for productivity when working from home	32
Table 7	Quantitative analysis of employee responses	47
Table 8	Paired T-test for means	48

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
IT	Information Technology
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICTA	Information and Communication Technology Agency (of Sri Lanka)
TRCSL	Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
CIPM	Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (Sri Lanka)
SLMA	Sri Lanka Medical Associatio
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
WFH	Work From Home
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SAS	Statistical Analysis System
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MS Excel	Microsoft Excel
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Description	Page
APPENDIX – A	EXTENSIVE TABLES OF RAW DATA	66

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a swift transition to remote work globally, significantly impacting the Information Technology (IT) sector. In Sri Lanka, this shift was particularly pronounced, with IT professionals adapting to new work environments amidst unprecedented challenges. While remote work offered solutions during the crisis, its long-term effects on productivity in the post-pandemic era remain underexplored (Jayanandana & Jayathilaka, 2023). Understanding these impacts is crucial for organizations aiming to optimize performance and employee well-being in the evolving work landscape.

For a brief overview, the figure below shows some key factors regarding the technological landscape in Sri-Lanka, a crucial factor to facilitate working from home.

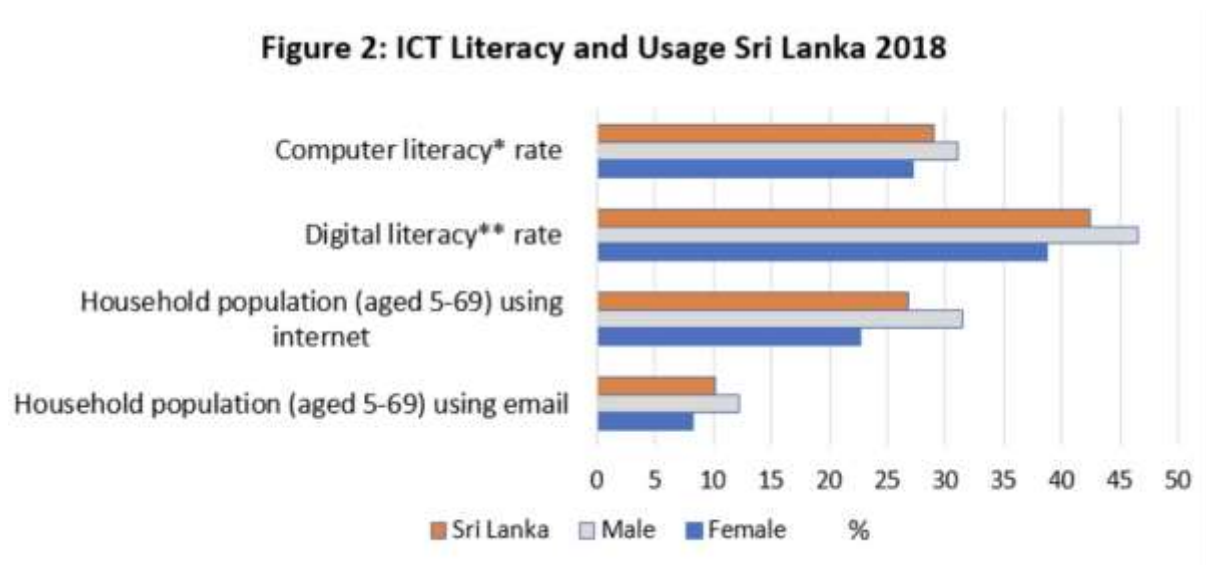


Figure 1 *ICT Literacy*

Source: (Sri Lanka Labor force survey, 2018)

1.2 Definition of the Main Problem and Research Question

The primary concern is evaluating how remote working conditions have influenced the productivity of Sri Lankan IT professionals in the post-COVID-19 environment. This study seeks to assess both the benefits and challenges associated with sustained remote work to inform future organizational strategies.

1.2.1 Main Research Question:

- How have remote working conditions affected the productivity of IT professionals in Sri Lanka following the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.2.2 Sub-Research Questions:

- What factors have influenced productivity under remote working conditions in Sri Lanka's IT sector?
- How have organizational support systems and technological infrastructure impacted remote work outcomes?
- In what ways has remote working affected work-life balance and job satisfaction among Sri Lankan IT professionals?
- How have Sri Lankan cultural and social dynamics shaped remote working practices?
- What strategies can organizations implement to enhance productivity in remote or hybrid work models?

1.2.3 Research Objectives

The key aim of this research is to investigate the effects of remote work conditions on Sri Lankan IT professionals' productivity in a post-COVID-19 context. The research is structured as follows, in accordance with the main and sub-research questions, and has specific, listed objectives:

1. To explore how remote work impacts task and collaborative productivity for Sri Lankan IT professionals.
2. To identify the critical factors affecting productivity in remote work contexts, with regard to personal, technological, and managerial dimensions.
3. To explore how organizational support systems, and organizational digital infrastructure affect successful remote work practices.
4. To review the effects of remote work on work-life balance and job satisfaction, considering the socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka.
5. To make policy recommendations on the hybrid or remote work model practices based on the findings of the research, from both employee and employer techniques.

These humanitarian objectives aims to provide a general sense of productivity in remote work environments, combining empirical findings with practical ideas for Sri Lankan IT managers.

1.3 Method of Study

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection:

1. **Surveys:** Distributing structured questionnaires to IT professionals to gather quantitative data on productivity levels, challenges, and advantages experienced during remote work.

2. **Interviews:** In-depth interviews with managers and employees will be conducted to gain qualitative insights into the effectiveness of and perceptions about remote working practices.

3. **Secondary Data Analysis:** In-depth interviews with managers and employees will be conducted to gain qualitative insights into the effectiveness of and perceptions about remote working practices.

Data analysis will involve the use of statistical methods to do a comparative analysis between the two modes, complemented by thematic analysis of qualitative responses for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena.

1.4 Review of Previous Literature

Productivity of remote work research has brought in mixed results around the world, reflecting varied experiences across industries and regions. For instance, Pabilonia and Redmond (2023) found that productivity growth in some sectors was positively related to the adoption of remote work. Their study highlighted how flexibility in work schedules and reduced commuting times contributed to enhanced efficiency and satisfaction among employees. Contrasting findings, however, have been reported by McKinsey & Company in its 2020 report, underlining that while remote work improved the productivity of individual contributors in task-oriented roles, it decreased collaboration efficiency and caused communication problems in a team-based environment. These global perspectives underscore the dual nature of remote work, with outcomes influenced powerfully by the nature of work conducted and the organizational support provided.

The same type of themes echoes in the Sri Lankan context too, with adjustments for local variability. A study by Jayanandana and Jayathilaka (2023) identified that during the work-from-home period, the productivity of IT professionals was influenced by team collaboration, managerial support, and a suitable work environment. It was also identified that employees with previous experience related to flexible working conditions and technology facilitated an easy transition to working from home. Further, Gamaethige (2021) reiterated that work-life balance and home office arrangements are decisive factors in job performance. The study clearly indicated how, in most cases, culturally induced expectations on familial obligations coincided with professional demands to pose very unique challenges for the Sri Lankan employee while working from home.

Though global and local studies bear relevance, there are marked variations in the context of Sri Lanka that have to be engaged with more deeply. While global findings tend to generalize the impacts, local research identifies specific cultural and infrastructural factors affecting productivity. For example, partial availability of advanced technological infrastructure in parts of Sri Lanka and high reliance on interpersonal collaboration within the IT sector identify unique barriers that might not be as pronounced in more developed economies. While global

studies quite often discuss the issue of remote work in terms of economic benefits and flexibility, Sri Lankan studies are more about the interplay between professional responsibilities and societal expectations.

Although these studies are of immense value, most literature discusses only the short-term effects of working remotely during the pandemic and hence is of limited insight into the long-term implications of the post-pandemic period. The present study therefore intends to fill this gap by investigating the impact of continued remote work on productivity within the IT sector in Sri Lanka and hence country-specific insights into the phenomenon, drawing comparisons with global trends.

1.5 Expected Results

The study hypothesizes finding a complex relation between remote working conditions and the productivity of Sri Lankan IT professionals. Such outcomes are believed to be molded by factors such as technological infrastructure, organizational support, and individual adaptability. Positive outcomes may include an increase in flexibility and autonomy, which, for some professionals, may eventually lead to an increase in job satisfaction and overall productivity. On the other hand, for others, this could trigger low productivity on account of inadequately set-up home offices, blurred boundaries between work life and personal life, and a decrease in face-to-face interactions with coworkers and supervisors.

The writer's personal bias further informs these expectations. He has worked from home previously and found this arrangement to be productive and comfortable. Such a belief that, given the right conditions, working at home can result in efficiency and satisfaction. Yet, the author acknowledges that this may not be the case for everyone, and the results of remote work have been highly contextualized. Hence, the results of this study attempt to give practical recommendations on how organizations can design effective remote or hybrid work strategies to enhance productivity while considering diverse needs and well-being among employees in the IT sector of Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to Remote Working

Remote working, popularly known as telecommuting, has a very interesting history. The concept, dating back to the 1970s, was initially an outburst of the oil crisis when organizations tried to find alternatives to daily commutes as a means of saving energy (Baruch, 2001). However, working from home did not take off until the 1990s, when advances in information and communication technologies made it more viable. In this regard, high-speed internet, email, and collaborative software finally set the stage for what is now called remote work today. (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic marked an important milestone in the history of remote work. In early 2020, governments worldwide implemented lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus, compelling businesses to rapidly transition to remote working models. Organizations that previously resisted telecommuting were forced to adapt, leading to an unprecedented global shift in work culture (Ozimek, 2021). A survey by Gartner (2020) indicated that 88% of organizations encouraged or required employees to work from home during the peak of the pandemic, and this was indeed universal in nature.

The shift was most pronounced in knowledge-intensive industries, better positioned for virtual collaboration using digital tools, like IT and finance. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack have become essential in staying connected and productive. It accelerated the normalisation of remote work, with several organizations considering the hybrid model-both remote and in-office work-after the pandemic is over, according to a study by Dingel & Neiman, 2020.

While remote work granted flexibility and safety, it also presented significant challenges. During the pandemic, several studies reported declines in employee engagement and an increase in burnout, especially in cultures unaccustomed to such a work environment (Bloom et al., 2021). However, proponents argue that remote work can offer new definitions of productivity and work-life balance on a sustainable basis if appropriate infrastructures and policies support it (OECD, 2020).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study relies on multiple theoretical perspectives to conceptualize the relationships between remote work conditions and employee productivity in the IT sector of Sri Lanka in the post-COVID-19 context. Theoretical frameworks support both the research design and interpretation of findings by linking what we are observing to conceptual models.

1. Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) provides context for understanding productivity outcomes in remote work conditions. It proposes that job demands (such as communication difficulties and distractions at home), and job resources (such as autonomy, supportive technology, managerial support) will interact to impact employee well-being and performance. This framework is useful for understanding how remote work conditions enhance or diminish employee output depending on the provision of positive resources.

2. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Davis' (1989) Technology Acceptance Model provides an explanation of how people come to accept and use technology. Considering that remote work relies primarily on ICT tools, the TAM helps to explain how employees' perceived usefulness and ease of use of digital platforms (Zoom, Teams, Slack) impact workplace productivity and levels of engagement. Within the Sri Lankan context, the TAM can help capture the differences in digital literacy and technology readiness observed from rural and urban professionals.

3. Sociocultural Theory of Work Practices

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), adapted for organizational studies, recognizes that work practices are influenced by organizational culture and social context. In Sri Lanka, remote work occurs against a backdrop of family responsibilities, social pressures related to presenteeism, and varying gender roles. This theory provides insight into how culturally conditioned views of, for example, accountability and working flexibly influence productivity outcomes differently from Western contexts.

Altogether, this frameworks facilitates developing research questions, thematic coding of interviews, and, eventually, understanding findings. The JD-R model ascertains the extent to which sample members experience a positive balance of workload and support. The TAM provides insight into using technology, and the degree to which it is perceived to be an impediment or facilitator. The sociocultural perspective creates sensitivity to experiences of work-life balance, motivation, and collaboration norms from a local perspective.

By establishing these perspectives, the study provides a holistic, contextually situated understanding of productivity in the Sri Lankan IT industry in the context of remote work. This theoretical framework is also advantageous for developing practical, evidence-based recommendations to organizational leaders.

2.3 Defining Productivity in Remote Work

It has also redefined the traditional metrics of productivity, thus forcing organizations to adopt measurement frameworks that suit virtual environments. Productivity while working remotely not only involves individual output but also the efficiency of team collaboration, both of which

are influenced by technology, communication practices, and organizational culture (Allen et al., 2015).

2.3.1 Key Metrics for Measuring Productivity in Remote Work Environments

Measuring productivity in remote work is default complex due to the shift from observable work processes to outcome-oriented evaluation. Key metrics include:

1. **Output-Based Metrics:** These focus on deliverables, such as the number of completed tasks, projects, or lines of code written by IT professionals. Studies have found these metrics to be highly effective in technical roles where deliverables are tangible and quantifiable (Brennan et al., 2020).

2. **Time Efficiency:** Remote work eliminates commuting, potentially increasing the time available for focused work. However, time efficiency is often impacted by distractions at home, requiring organizations to track hours spent on productive tasks through tools like time trackers and project management software (Taneja et al., 2021).

3. **Employee Self-Assessment:** Surveys and self-reported data provide insights into how employees perceive their productivity and the barriers they face. Studies suggest that subjective assessments can offer valuable qualitative insights into motivation and well-being (Davenport & Kirby, 2016).

4. **Team-Level Metrics:** These assess team output and collaboration efficiency, tracking metrics like the speed of task completion, adherence to deadlines, and responsiveness in virtual communication channels (Parker et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Distinctions Between Task-Based and Collaborative Productivity

Remote work impacts task-based and collaborative productivity differently, necessitating tailored strategies for measurement and improvement.

1. **Task-Based Productivity:** Refers to an individual's ability to complete specific tasks independently. Studies show that remote work often enhances task-based productivity due to fewer in-office distractions and increased autonomy (Bloom et al., 2015). In general, coding, debugging, and problem-solving are task-based activities that IT professionals perform. However, the absence of immediate supervision has the tendency to make some employees irresponsible, and without self-discipline and time management skills, productivity could suffer (Allen et al., 2015).

2. **Collaborative Productivity:** It is about the effectiveness of teams with interdependent tasks. The barriers of virtual work to teamwork productivity exist in the lack of face-to-face interaction and the absence of shared understandings in virtual spaces (Parker et al., 2020). Information Technology employees frequently rely on brainstorming and solving-dilemma type real-time processes, which were plagued by delays and inefficiencies associated with virtual platforms. Technology solutions involving shared repositories, whiteboard

technology, and synchronous communication tools have somewhat addressed these challenges (Brennan et al., 2020).

While many professions have benefited from remote work through productivity gains based on tasks being completed, we must not forget that collaborative productivity takes more organizational support and investment in communication tools to overcome challenges created by distance and time zones. Taneja et al., 2021.

2.4 Global Perspectives on Remote Work and Productivity

The phenomenon of working from home has emerged as one of the disruptive models of work with potential to deliver significant advantages and challenges to organizations, across sectors. More specifically, benefits include flexibility offered to employees, which affords them the opportunity to balance personal and professional work commitments. This flexibility has been connected to job satisfaction and work-life balance, especially in sectors where outputs are task based (Bloom et al., 2015). In addition, organizations benefit from reduced space costs from less demanding office space needs, and hiring people from different locations further enhances the labor pool available from recruitment (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

However, the challenges of working remotely are being articulated equally loudly. For example, a series of studies have identified declining face to face interactions reduce collaborative behaviour and innovation in roles where team work is required (Parker et al., 2020). From a mental wellness perspective, any feelings of isolation in workers may diminish over time, leading to disengagement that could detrimentally influence their productivity levels as well as their mental well-being (OECD, 2020). Inequity relating to access to devices and good internet access is also a barrier to making working remotely equitable in developing parts of the world (Ozimek, 2021).

Global trends in productivity from remote work provide contradictory results. McKinsey & Company (2020) noted that although workers realized productivity gains with respect to work involving knowledge work i.e., preparing reports, analyzing and drafting memos, operational problems emerged for tasks that had more element(s) of collaboration and where communication came into play more frequently. Similarly, Bloom et al. (2021) noted that productivity gains came from highly structured and individual tasks, not unstructured or creative work. Obviously, some industries, for example IT and finance, had a better capacity to adapt to remote work due to access to sophisticated digital tools, therefore adapt, sustain, and improve productivity (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

Based on these findings one could conclude that working from home (presumably with all the digital tools supporting remote work from home) will lead to substantial productivity improvements, but the research suggests it is dependent on the nature of the work, organizational support and digital infrastructure available to support remote work. The balancing act: Successful remote work strategies have to balance these elements to support productivity and employee well-being, and be successful in various industries/contexts.

2.5 The Sri Lankan IT Sector: An Overview

2.5.1 The Importance of the IT Industry in Sri Lanka's Economy

The IT industry is the backbone of the Sri Lankan economy and one of its major drivers of growth, innovation, and employment. IT is a critical contributor to Sri Lanka's GDP. The sector is estimated to have generated up to about \$1.7 billion in export earnings in 2022, and should be able to reach \$5 billion by 2025. The IT and Business Process Management industry is also among the biggest employers within the country, having given employment to over 120,000 workers, the majority of whom are young professionals with tertiary education. Apart from enhancing the country's role as an outsourcing destination in the global marketplace, the sector's contribution toward innovation and driving digital transformation across other industries makes it all the more important. With Sri Lanka located at a strategic position, having an educated and highly English-speaking workforce has contributed to drawing a lot of FDI to the IT sector, which was vital in the modernization process of its economy.

2.5.2 Pre-Pandemic Working Conditions in the Sri Lankan IT Sector

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sri Lankan IT sector was largely aligned with traditional office environments, with limited opportunities for employees to work from home and structured office hours. Most of the IT companies were located in a technology park or an urban office hub, such as Colombo City Centre or Orion City IT Park, to encourage collaboration through personal interactions. At these firms, work cultures were characterized by excellent salaries, performance-based rewards, and good career growth prospects for software engineers, business analysts, and IT project managers. Work-life balance had often become an issue, with employees having to put in long hours due to tight deadlines on projects. Despite these, the sector was known to provide an enabling environment for professional development with access to certification, training programs, and opportunities to work on international projects. This period set the bedrock for the resilience that was witnessed in the IT industry during the pandemic-forced shift to work from home.

2.6 Remote Work in Sri Lanka During COVID-19

In Sri Lanka, the sudden work-from-home scenario at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a very tough change for most organizations; the case is no different with IT companies. Businesses were adapting to working from home in early 2020 due to the lockdown. Although IT companies, with their digital infrastructure, adapted more quickly, several challenges emerged related to communication, productivity of employees, and cybersecurity. For instance, firms faced difficulties in ensuring stable internet access for employees in remote areas and maintaining secure access to sensitive data. Short-run impacts included decreased productivity for some firms while employees got used to new work environments and balanced personal responsibilities during lockdowns. However, the survey carried out by ICTA in 2020 showed that most IT companies still saw an opportunity for remote work, and almost 70% of the

companies were willing to offer their employees hybrid models of work even after the pandemic.

Government policies and infrastructural readiness during the pandemic were critical in enabling the wide diffusion of remote work in Sri Lanka. The government, too, helped the transition by declaring the IT sector an essential service and thus allowed to continue operations without interruption. Infrastructural barriers were also somewhat offset by initiatives such as tax relief for digital businesses and the expansion of internet bandwidth by telecommunications providers. Meanwhile, the TRCSL worked with Internet Service Providers to offer relatively low-priced data packages for those working from home. However, this showed disparities in digital readiness across different regions, with gaps in rural internet coverage. Despite all odds, Sri Lanka used the pandemic as a reason to upgrade its digital infrastructure, setting the stage for long-term growth of the sector, according to TRCSL (2021).

2.7 Factors Influencing Productivity in Remote Work

Technological Infrastructure: The state of technological infrastructure is the critical differentiator that defines the productivity of work-from-home in Sri Lanka. It is very essential to have high-speed, uninterrupted internet, access to proper tools, and modern software platforms to enable seamless workflow. However, rural areas face challenges with regard to broadband connectivity, according to the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka, at average internet speeds below regional peers. This shows the digital divide: whereas in Colombo and urban areas, people are provided with fiber-optic networks and 4G services, suburban and rural areas are badly lacking in these regards. TRCSL reports that from 2021, access to remote collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom surged, although its adoption has varied by the size of an organization and the financial capability to invest in such technologies. Many small-scale businesses could not afford enterprise-grade solutions and thus had lower productivity in working remotely (ICTA, 2020).

Organizational Support and Individual Adaptability: Productivity is related to managerial practices and the available organizational support systems for working from home. Firms offering structured training, effective communication frameworks, and mental health support had better employee engagement. In a survey conducted by the ICTA, 63% of IT companies in Sri Lanka initiated special training programs in order to equip employees with required skills for working from home (ICTA, 2020). Individual adaptability also played an important role in productivity. While self-discipline and a positive attitude towards working from home demonstrated a higher performance for employees, productivity decreased for employees with mental health challenges. The SLMA reported an increased level of stress among workers due to working from home and called for mental health initiatives by the organizations. (SLMA, 2021). Organizational policies and adaptiveness of employees together decide whether working from home in Sri Lanka will be successful or not.

2.8 Cultural and Social Dynamics in Remote Work

Family Responsibilities and Work-Life Balance in the Sri Lankan Context: In Sri Lanka, cultural expectations of family responsibilities make a great difference in work-life balance when working from home. Extended families are an accepted aspect of society, and many workers, particularly women, have to cope with the double burden of domestic and job-related responsibilities. According to the results of a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization in 2021, 68% of employees in Sri Lanka were unable to separate work from life when working from home. For women in traditional households, things are worse because, in addition to having to meet work demands, there is often the burden of caregiving. This has forced many people into leading a life of increased stress and less productivity; hence, the need for organizations to adopt flexible policies that put into consideration employees' domestic commitments.

Cultural Perceptions of Remote Work and Professional Accountability: The traditional Sri Lankan workplaces, however, have much skepticism toward remote work; physical presence has been equated with productivity and accountability. Such a cultural mindset opposes the wide acceptance of remote work as a sustainable model. A 2022 study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management, Sri Lanka, found that 54% of managers felt that working from home reduced employee accountability, indicating a lack of trust in frameworks for working remotely. On the other hand, younger professionals, especially in the IT sector, perceive working from home as a positive aspect in that it allows flexibility and saves them from wasting time on travel. This calls for organizational efforts of bridging the cultural gap by establishing clear performance metrics, building trust, and creating accountability systems that fit the unique cultural dynamics of Sri Lanka.

2.9 Comparison of Global and Local Findings

Contrasting Sri Lanka's Remote Work Challenges and Opportunities with Global Trends: While remote work has become a global norm during and after the pandemic, unique challenges persist in Sri Lanka compared to more developed nations. Advanced economies like the United States and Germany enjoy a robust digital infrastructure with widespread high-speed internet access, and thus, are able to offer seamless remote work opportunities without productivity loss (OECD, 2021). Sri Lanka, on the other hand, has unequal internet connectivity, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, while most global organizations emphasize flexible work policies for the betterment of work-life balance, Sri Lankan organizations struggle to shake off deep-rooted cultural beliefs that relate physical presence to accountability. However, opportunities in Sri Lanka reflect global trends in the adoption of hybrid models of work, which many companies see as a way to reduce operational costs and improve employee satisfaction (ICTA, 2020). That translates into fast-tracking growth in Sri Lanka's IT-BPO sector, accordingly with the most modern tendencies within remotely performed work, in particular outsourcing, to deliver its potential by leveraging skilled manpower.

Lessons from Global Best Practices That Can Be Adapted to Sri Lanka: Valuable lessons can be drawn from global best practices to enhance the remote work landscape in Sri Lanka. For instance, countries like Finland and the Netherlands emphasize employee well-being through flexible work hours and comprehensive mental health support programs, ensuring higher productivity (Eurofound, 2021). Similarly, Sri Lankan companies could adopt policies like wellness programs and flexible scheduling to address work-life balance challenges. Global organizations instead rely on performance-based accountability systems to monitor outcomes rather than traditionally monitoring activities, thereby engendering trust in their virtual teams. Sri Lankan employers may learn from them and adopt these systems by using KPIs and mechanisms for regular feedback to improve their levels of trust and efficiency. Investment in digital infrastructure and targeted upskilling programs, emulating initiatives in countries like Singapore, can bridge the gap between global and local remote work practices, unlocking long-term opportunities.

2.10 Post-COVID Long-Term Implications of Remote Work

Emerging Hybrid Models of Work: The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of hybrid models around the world, and Sri Lanka has also not remained immune to its reverberations. Hybrid work has started to appear more plausible in the sense that it balances the options for flexibility with those of operational efficiency. In Sri Lanka's IT sector, companies such as Virtusa and WSO2 have embraced hybrid models that allow employees to work from home part of the week while attending the office for collaborative tasks. According to the Information and Communication Technology Agency, more than 60% of IT firms in Sri Lanka have formalized a hybrid work policy post-pandemic (ICTA, 2022). This shift has minimized overheads related to office maintenance, hence increasing employee satisfaction. However, hybrid models thrive on the presence of substantial digital infrastructure and well-laid organizational policies that ensure employees remain involved and productive across both work environments.

Long-Term Changes in Productivity Dynamics for IT Professionals in Sri Lanka: The culture of remote and hybrid working has brought a sea change in the productivity dynamics of Sri Lankan IT professionals. Although flexibility in terms of working from home allowed employees to manage their time better and, therefore, concentrate more on producing better output for individual tasks, working remotely is also associated with several challenges: feelings of isolation have increased, complex problems cannot be solved as efficiently while collaborating, and continuous access to the internet may not be possible. In fact, a survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management, CIPM Sri Lanka, in 2023 revealed that while 72% of IT professionals reported higher productivity for solo work in remote settings, only 45% felt equally productive in collaborative tasks compared to on-site work. This is a dynamic that will likely continue to evolve as organizations also learn how to balance such dynamics with technology-driven solutions-such as virtual collaboration platforms-which better equip employees for success in hybrid work arrangements.

2.11 Gaps in Existing Literature

Limited Studies on Post-Pandemic Impacts Specific to Sri Lanka: Although global research on remote and hybrid work has grown considerably, studies focusing on Sri Lanka's unique post-pandemic context remain sparse. Much of the existing literature highlights global trends in remote work adoption, digital transformation, and employee productivity, but lacks specificity regarding Sri Lanka's infrastructural limitations, cultural dynamics, and socio-economic factors. For instance, while some studies discuss the digital divide in developing nations, few have systematically explored how rural-urban disparities in internet access impact long-term productivity in Sri Lanka's IT sector (ICTA, 2022). This limited scope creates a gap in understanding how remote work policies can be adapted to local challenges and opportunities.

Lack of Research Focusing on Sustainable Strategies for Remote or Hybrid Work: Another critical gap is found in the missing research on sustainable strategies for remote and hybrid work in Sri Lanka, which, as stated by global best practices, involve such frameworks as flexible scheduling, mental health support, and performance-driven accountability. However, very few studies can be found to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of such strategies within the IT sector in Sri Lanka. For instance, little research has considered how cultural perceptions of work accountability or organizational constraints shape the adoption of hybrid models. This not only creates a need but justifies the very essence of creating a long-term and sustainable work solution for Sri Lanka's unique context.

2.12 Conclusion and Research Focus

Summary of Key Findings from Previous Studies: Previous studies have underlined that the concept of working remotely has greatly changed work environments worldwide, ranging from flexibility to reduced operational costs. It also brings a lot of challenges of digital gaps, inequities in productivity, and balance of work and life, particularly in developing countries like Sri Lanka. The hybrid model in the Sri Lankan IT sector does display what is seen in the global market, although limited infrastructure and cultural understanding regarding accountability are the main constraints. Global best practices such as performance-driven accountability systems and robust mental health programs provide exceptional learnings, but absence of evaluation in the Sri Lankan situation exists (OECD, 2021; CIPM, 2023).

How This Study Addresses Gaps and Extends the Existing Literature: This research attempts to address these gaps by providing focused analysis on the post-pandemic impacts of remote work on Sri Lanka's IT industry and therefore the research aims to identify sustainable strategies for Sri Lanka which draw on and localize global best practice. The research will focus on challenges for Sri Lanka including the issue of rural-urban disparities in internet access, cultural notions about professional accountability, and how hybrid models effectively contribute to improved productivity. This research is a contribution to the existing literature by providing actionable recommendations that are sensitive to Sri Lanka's socio-economic and cultural context, and provides insight into the global debate about remote and hybrid work

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology section outlines the methods that have methodically been undertaken for collecting and analyzing data to tackle the research objectives of the study. This research on the productivity of remote working in Sri Lanka's IT Sector after the pandemic had adopted a mixed-methods approach, therefore utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches in tandem. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires will be the methods used to capture the perception of employers and employees to ensure an overall assessment of the research matter.

A mixed-methods approach will therefore ensure depth and breadth of data. Qualitatively the individual experiences and organizational strategies can be assessed through semi-structured interviews, whilst quantitatively, structured questionnaires can indicate trends in employee productivity and adaptation. Thus, triangulation can occur. This enhances both the validity and reliability of the results. The mixed-methods approach will also help analyze holistic dynamics of working remotely in developing economies like Sri Lanka.

3.2 Research Design

The design of the research for this study is descriptive and exploratory in nature to comprehensively understand post-pandemic working-from-home dynamics. The descriptive function helps in cataloging patterns and trends in productivity, while the exploratory function helps in studying the underlying challenges, perceptions, and opportunities, particularly in the IT sector. This allows the study to point out not only what has changed, but also why and how it does so in respect of employees and organizations.

It serves a qualitative research design well, as the purpose of the empirical data collection could be combined within their contextual understanding. For example, semi-structured interviews enabled flexibility in examining these new and evolving themes on the social and cultural consequences of telework, while from the responses to a structured questionnaire, data has been quantified to reach trends and generalization for greater samples of employees. This duality in approach toward studying subjective experiences of remote work and larger productivity patterns of the IT sector in Sri Lanka, where such perspectives have often been missing in literature, forms the backdrop of this chapter.

3.3 Conceptual framework

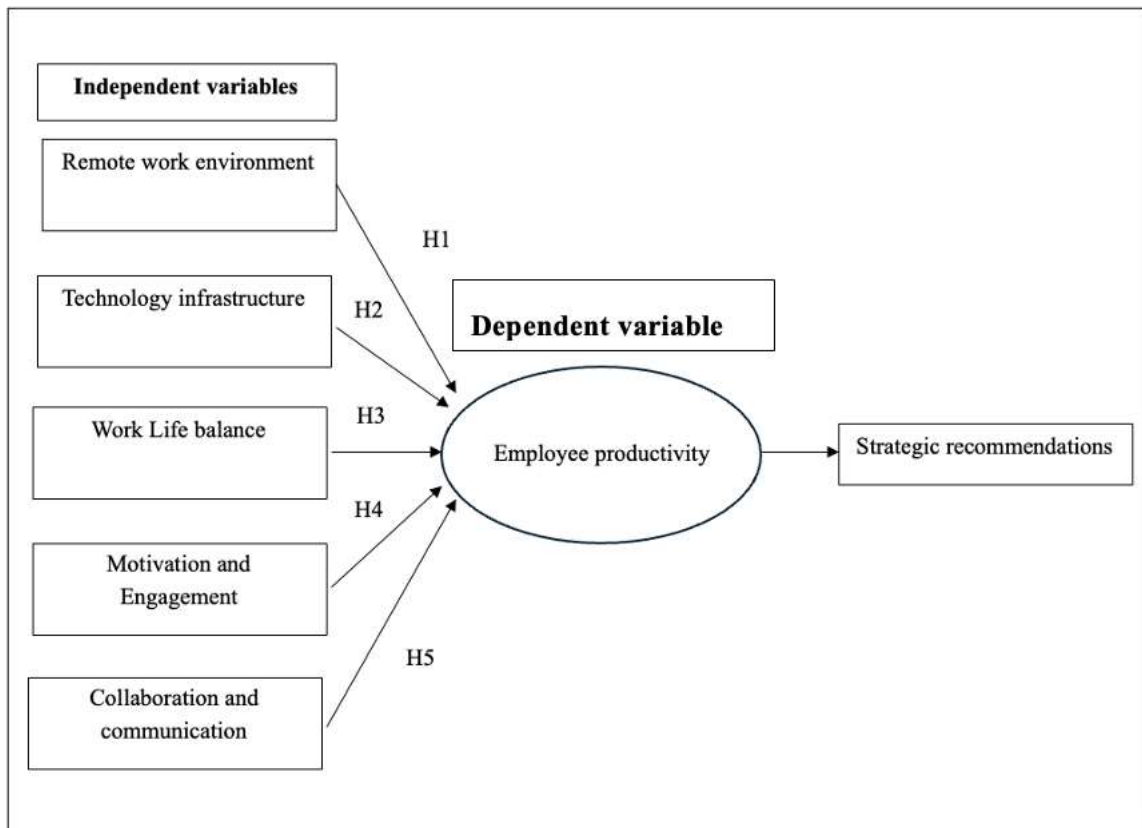


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

3.4 Data Collection Methods

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to acquire qualitative data from employees and employers regarding their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of working from home in the IT sector in Sri Lanka. This approach has been followed since it is flexible; it allows for an in-depth study of the perceptions of participants and, at the same time, consistency in the interviews conducted. The interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom, which easily facilitated access for participants during the post-pandemic period. Nine were interviewed in total: six employees and three employers.

The interview questions have been organized around key themes relevant to the research objectives, which are on productivity, work-life balance, communication and collaboration, technological readiness, and the future of remote work. The sections below break down how different questions for employees and employers are used.

3.4.2 Interview Questions for Employees

Table 1 *Interview questions for employees (Author developed)*

Theme	Interview Questions
Experience with Remote Work	- How long have you been working remotely, and what was your experience with remote work before the COVID-19 pandemic?
Productivity	- How has working remotely affected your productivity? - Do you feel more or less productive compared to working in the office? Why?
Work-Life Balance	- How has remote working impacted your work-life balance? - Have you found it easier or harder to separate work from personal life?
Technology and Tools	- How would you describe your access to the necessary technology and tools for remote working? - Have you faced any challenges related to technology or internet connectivity?
Collaboration and Communication	- How has remote working affected your ability to communicate and collaborate with your colleagues? - Have you noticed any changes in teamwork or project efficiency?
Motivation and Engagement	- Do you feel motivated and engaged while working remotely? - What factors contribute to your level of motivation, and how has it changed since you started working remotely?
Challenges of Remote Work	- What have been the biggest challenges you've faced while working remotely? - How have you addressed these challenges?

Benefits of Remote Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you see as the main benefits of remote working? - How have these benefits influenced your job satisfaction and performance?
Future of Remote Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think remote working should continue to be an option post-pandemic? - What changes, if any, would you suggest to improve the remote working experience?

3.4.3 Interview Questions for Employers

Table 1 *Interview questions for employers*

Theme	Questions
Remote Work Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which type of work-from-home approach was implemented (hybrid or fully remote)?
Organizational Preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How prepared was your organization for the transition to remote work? - What steps did you take to facilitate this shift?
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has remote working affected overall productivity within your organization? - Have you observed any trends or changes in employee output since the shift to remote work?
Technology Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has your organization's technological infrastructure supported or hindered the remote working process? - What challenges have you faced in ensuring employees have the necessary tools?
Motivation and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you assess employee motivation and engagement in a remote work environment?

	- What strategies have you implemented to keep employees engaged and motivated?
Communication and Collaboration	- How has remote working impacted communication and collaboration among your teams? - What measures have you taken to maintain effective teamwork?
Work-Life Balance and Well-Being	- What is your perception of how remote work has affected your employees' work-life balance? - How has this impacted their productivity and well-being?
Challenges and Benefits	- What have been the primary challenges your organization has encountered with remote working? How have you addressed these challenges? - What benefits have you observed from remote working? How have these benefits influenced your organization's operations and employee satisfaction?
Future Strategies	- Do you plan to continue offering remote work options post-pandemic? - What long-term strategies are you considering to optimize remote working in your organization?

3.4.4 Interview Process

- **Mode:** All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to ensure convenience and accessibility for participants.
- **Duration:** Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, providing sufficient time to explore all key themes.
- **Recording and Consent:** With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy during the analysis phase.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and provided with the opportunity to withdraw at any stage.

3.4.5 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from employees to understand their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of remote work. It was distributed online to ensure accessibility and convenience, especially during a period when in-person interactions were limited. Out of the 70 questionnaires distributed, 60 responses were received, resulting in a high response rate that added reliability to the data collected.

3.4.6 Key Sections of the Questionnaire

Key Sections

1. Demographics

- **Purpose:** To categorize responses based on age, gender, and other demographic factors.
- **Questions:**
 - What is your age? (e.g., 18-24, 25-34, etc.)
 - What is your gender? (Male/Female/Other)

2. Productivity in the Office

- **Purpose:** To evaluate employees' perceived productivity and experiences in a traditional office setting.
- **Questions:**

I complete my tasks efficiently.
I experience minimal distractions.
Collaboration with colleagues is effective.
I meet deadlines on time.
The environment allows me to focus better on tasks.

3. Productivity at Home

- **Purpose:** To assess employees' productivity and experiences working from home.
- **Questions:**

I complete my tasks efficiently.
I experience minimal distractions.
Collaboration with colleagues is effective.

I meet deadlines on time.

The environment allows me to focus better on tasks.
--

4. Comparative Productivity Preferences

- **Purpose:** To directly compare employee preferences between office and remote work productivity.
- **Questions:**

I feel more productive when working in the office than from home.
--

I feel more productive working from home than when I am working from office
--

5. Scale and Response Format

- **Likert Scale:** Each question uses a 5-point scale:
 - Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Disagree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Agree (4)
 - Strongly Agree (5)

3.5 Sampling

3.5.1 Sampling Method

The author selected to use random sampling to ensure all participants in the population of interest had an equal opportunity to be part of the sample. This helped reduce the risk of selection bias and ensured the sample was representative of the larger workforce of the company.

3.5.2 Sample Size and Composition

This study focused on IT professionals within the author's organization, which had a total employee population of 70 individuals. As the objective was to analyze internal dynamics rather than generalize findings to the broader national context, the entire accessible population was treated as the sampling frame.

A structured questionnaire was distributed to all 70 employees, and **60 completed responses** were received, yielding a **response rate of approximately 86%**. This represents the majority of the internal population, providing strong coverage for the quantitative phase of this mixed-methods study.

Importantly, the sample size of 60 is not only practically comprehensive but also statistically sound. Using a standard sample size calculator with the following parameters:

- **Confidence Level:** 95%
- **Margin of Error:** 5%
- **Population Size:** 70
- **Population Proportion (p):** 50% (used when actual proportion is unknown)

Result save

Sample size: 60

This means 60 or more measurements/surveys are needed to have a confidence level of 95% that the real value is within $\pm 5\%$ of the measured/surveyed value.

Confidence Level: 95%
Margin of Error: 5 %
Population Proportion: 50 % Use 50% if not sure
Population Size: 70 Leave blank if unlimited population size.
Calculate Clear

Figure 3 *Sample size calculation*

The required minimum sample size was calculated to be **exactly 60 respondents**. This means that there is a **95% probability** that the values measured in this sample fall within **$\pm 5\%$ of the true values for the full population**. In other words, the findings are statistically representative of the full group of IT employees in the company with high confidence.

In addition to the survey, **9 semi-structured interviews** were conducted to provide rich qualitative insights that complement the quantitative data:

- **3 senior managers/employers** were interviewed to offer strategic and organizational perspectives on the remote work transition and productivity.
- **6 employees** from various roles and seniority levels were interviewed to understand their lived experiences of remote working, technology challenges, motivation, and collaboration.

The mixed-methods design, supported by a statistically validated sample and triangulated by qualitative findings, ensures both depth and reliability of results within the context of this organizational case study.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods

3.6.1 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Data from these semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses were coded and categorized into themes aligned with the research objectives.

Theme Identification: Key themes, such as productivity, work-life balance, and communication, were identified based on recurring patterns in the data and also the questions. These themes were then linked to the research objectives to provide deeper insights into employees' and employers' experiences with remote work.

3.6.2 Quantitative Analysis

Statistical Analysis: Questionnaire responses were analyzed using **MS Excel** software to perform descriptive and comparative analyses, specialized software such as SPSS nor SAS were needed to be utilized since excel's data analysis package contained the relevant tests.

Metrics and Tests Used:

- Paired T-tests: To examine if one mode of work is more productive than the other.
- Descriptive Statistics: To calculate means, medians, and standard deviations for Likert-scale responses.

3.6.3 Rationale for Selected Methods

Why a Mixed-Methods Approach?

The combination of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires was chosen to provide both depth and breadth in the data collection process because the author is of the view that this scope is too big for definite methods of inquiry such as questionnaires:

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Allowed for in-depth exploration of personal and organizational experiences, capturing nuances that quantitative methods may overlook.
- **Questionnaires:** Enabled the collection of structured, quantifiable data from a larger sample, ensuring statistical validity.

Advantages of Mixed-Methods Approach

- Facilitated triangulation by integrating qualitative and quantitative findings.
- Provided a holistic understanding of remote work experiences and challenges.

Why Not Alternative Methods?

- Fully quantitative surveys lack depth and contextual insights.
- Unstructured interviews are less systematic and may result in data that is difficult to analyze.
- Mixed methods addressed these limitations by balancing structured data with flexibility and depth.

3.6.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical measures were implemented throughout the study to ensure participant well-being and data integrity:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the purpose, methods, and implications of the research before agreeing to participate.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Participants' identities were anonymized, and data was securely stored to maintain confidentiality.
- **Addressing Biases:** Efforts were made to ensure neutral phrasing of questions and unbiased analysis of responses.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

Identified Limitations

- **Small Sample Size:** While the sample size provided valuable insights, a larger sample could have enhanced the generalizability of the findings, but the time limitations did not make that possible.
- **Reliance on Self-Reported Data:** The study relied on participants' self-reported experiences, which may introduce response bias especially since the author too values WFH and may be biased towards that side.

Mitigation Strategies

- To address sample size limitations, efforts were made to ensure diversity within the sample to capture a range of perspectives.
- Multiple data sources (interviews and questionnaires) were used to triangulate findings and reduce reliance on self-reported data.

3.8 Conclusion

The methodology employed a structured yet flexible approach to capture diverse perspectives on remote work in Sri Lanka's IT sector. The use of semi-structured interviews provided rich qualitative insights, while the questionnaire ensured statistically reliable quantitative data. Together, these methods aligned with the study's objectives, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the challenges, benefits, and implications of remote work. By addressing gaps in the existing literature and ensuring ethical rigor, the chosen methodology contributed significantly to answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

OBSERVATIONS

4.1 Qualitative responses from Employers

Table 3 *Qualitative responses from employers*

Timestamp	Question	Detailed Response
Interviewee 1		
25/10/2024 19:11:55	Which type of WFH degrees were used by you? Was it a hybrid-based approach or fully remote?	The organization adopted a hybrid model. Employees were allowed to work from the office or any other location to balance their personal and professional lives effectively. While not a fully remote setup, it provided enough flexibility to cater to employees' needs.
	What is your position/role in the organization?	CEO
	How prepared was your organization for the transition to remote work? What steps did you take?	The organization was mentally prepared for remote work due to its international customer base. However, it was not structured as a work-from-home company. The shift was managed by adopting a flexible culture where employees could choose their work location based on convenience, though security policies required improvement to support the transition fully.
	How has remote working affected overall productivity within your organization?	Productivity remained stable for sales-focused roles. However, delivery projects faced challenges with collaboration and maintaining efficiency. Remote work highlighted issues with task management that were addressed with hybrid setups.
	How has your organization's technological	Basic requirements like internet connectivity were sufficient for daily tasks. However, the lack of robust security infrastructure posed challenges

	infrastructure supported or hindered the process?	in implementing comprehensive remote work policies.
	How do you assess employee motivation and engagement in a remote work environment?	Employees appreciated the flexibility and autonomy provided but preferred coming to the office at least four days a week to maintain team engagement and morale.
	How has remote working impacted communication and collaboration among your teams?	Communication and collaboration were negatively impacted due to the lack of in-person interactions. Despite the hybrid model, the absence of physical meetings occasionally disrupted teamwork.
	What is your perception of how remote work has affected employees' work-life balance and well-being?	The hybrid approach enhanced work-life balance, providing employees with the autonomy to manage personal and professional priorities effectively.
	What have been the primary challenges your organization has encountered with remote working?	The main challenges were team connection, network issues, and orienting new employees; learning and knowledge sharing, and time management were difficult. A hybrid culture with employees in person at least 2–3 days in the office helped reduce some of these issues.
	What benefits have you observed from remote working?	Flexibility helped instill trust and freedom in the employees, which increased job satisfaction. For the company, while there were no huge operational gains observed, the hybrid model really supported employee engagement.
	Do you plan to continue offering remote work options post-pandemic?	The company plans to continue to have a flexible structure; the organization wants staff in person to build relationships and collaboratively. Remote work will be acceptable for some personal circumstances, but not as permanent state.
Interviewee 2		

25/10/2024 19:14:40	Which type of WFH degrees were used by you? Was it a hybrid-based approach or fully remote?	The organization adopted a hybrid model, utilizing tools like Zoom and Teams to facilitate operations.
	What is your position/role in the organization?	CEO
	How prepared was your organization for the transition to remote work? What steps did you take?	The transition to remote work required immediate adjustments. Though the organization had prior experience with offshore development, it had to quickly adapt to the new setup, relying heavily on online tools for communication and operations.
	How has remote working affected overall productivity within your organization?	Productivity improved for independent and skilled employees. However, managing underperforming staff in a remote setup posed challenges.
	How has your organization's technological infrastructure supported or hindered the process?	Some employees faced technological challenges, particularly those in remote areas. Upgrading the infrastructure took time but was eventually managed effectively.
	How do you assess employee motivation and engagement in a remote work environment?	Employees were highly motivated to work remotely as it saved transportation and accommodation costs.
	How has remote working impacted communication and collaboration among your teams?	A Zoom meeting room concept was introduced, requiring employees to log in during office hours to ensure consistent communication and collaboration.
	What is your perception of how remote work has affected employees' work-life balance and well-being?	Employees experienced improved work-life balance by eliminating commute time. However, their ability to organize day-to-day activities effectively was crucial to maintaining productivity.

	What have been the primary challenges your organization has encountered with remote working?	Connectivity issues posed significant challenges. Employees were advised to find alternative locations during connectivity disruptions to remain engaged in their work.
	What benefits have you observed from remote working?	Remote work resulted in improved project delivery efficiency, fewer leaves taken by employees, and enhanced focus on tasks.
	Do you plan to continue offering remote work options post-pandemic?	The organization plans to continue with a hybrid model to address challenges like onboarding new employees and maintaining operational efficiency. Employees are required to report to the office on short notice when necessary.
Interviewee 3		
02/11/2024 11:22:17	Which type of WFH degrees were used by you? Was it a hybrid-based approach or fully remote?	The organization used a hybrid model, heavily biased toward remote work, requiring physical presence only two days a month.
	What is your position/role in the organization?	CEO
	How prepared was your organization for the transition to remote work? What steps did you take?	The transition was gradual. Employee effort tracking was introduced, requiring daily task logs. Support and DevOps teams were mandated to work onsite more frequently to ensure smooth operations.
	How has remote working affected overall productivity within your organization?	Productivity initially improved but declined over time due to prolonged remote work. The hybrid model restored balance and maintained expected productivity levels.
	How has your organization's technological infrastructure supported or hindered the process?	The infrastructure supported software development. However, some new employees attempted to misuse remote work privileges, requiring monitoring and management adjustments.

	How do you assess employee motivation and engagement in a remote work environment?	Employee output and on-time delivery were monitored through direct calls. Flexibility during office hours and mandatory in-office days helped maintain motivation and engagement.
	How has remote working impacted communication and collaboration among your teams?	Daily team calls were conducted, and tools like Slack and WhatsApp were used to ensure clear communication and timely project delivery.
	What is your perception of how remote work has affected employees' work-life balance and well-being?	Work-life balance improved, but some employees experienced a decline in productivity due to prolonged remote work periods.
	What have been the primary challenges your organization has encountered with remote working?	Prolonged remote work led to productivity decay. Hybrid work models, including periodic in-office presence, helped address these issues and enhanced overall productivity.
	What benefits have you observed from remote working?	Benefits included reduced indirect costs, increased flexibility, lower salary demands for flexible arrangements, and the ability to recruit global talent more effectively.
	Do you plan to continue offering remote work options post-pandemic?	Hybrid work will continue as a long-term strategy to maintain productivity and employee satisfaction while addressing operational challenges.

4.2 Qualitative responses from Employees

Table 4 Qualitative responses from employees

Timestamp	Remote Work Experience	Impact on Productivity	Impact on Work-Life Balance	Access to Technology and Tools	Impact on Communication and Collaboration	Motivation and Engagement	Biggest Challenges	Benefits of Remote Working	Suggestions for Post-Pandemic Remote Work
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25/10/2024 18:37:39	4 years	Increased productivity due to reduced distractions, fewer interruptions, and time savings from no commuting.	Work-life balance has been harder to maintain, with challenges in separating work from personal life.	Limited or no technology issues; no mention of internet problems.	Improved communication skills, but decreased teamwork and collaboration.	Motivation depends on the nature of tasks; engagement varies with task complexity.	Challenges in coordinating teams to work at the same time.	Time saved from commuting is used for family and productive activities.	Hybrid model suggested, balancing office and remote work to optimize productivity and collaboration.
25/10/2024 18:44:00	Nearly 3 years (started in 2022)	Productivity is highest in a hybrid setup with 1-2 office days, balancing focused work and necessary collaboration.	Work-life balance is a lot easier to maintain with flexible remote work arrangements.	Reliable access to technology; no significant challenges faced.	No major challenges in communication; remote work offers more focused time and extra rest from reduced travel.	Highly motivated due to better sleep, time management, and minimized commute-related stress.	No significant challenges reported.	Time and energy savings lead to increased productivity and better focus on personal and professional tasks.	Remote work should continue, and a hybrid model with minimal office days is preferred for balance and productivity.
25/10/2024 21:44:01	4.5 years	Improved productivity due to fewer distractions, reduced meetings, and focused work environment.	Easier work-life balance with flexible hours; tasks are managed effectively within deadlines.	Company provides all required resources, but internet connectivity in underdeveloped regions remains a challenge.	Minimal preference for interactions; some meetings could be replaced with email, reducing unnecessary interruptions.	Motivation is high due to fewer office distractions and increased focus; office drama avoidance is an added benefit.	Internet connectivity is the biggest issue; relying on AKD-led infrastructure improvements.	Flexibility to distribute tasks, take frequent breaks, and avoid inefficient work phases.	Remote work should continue, with a hybrid option to ensure flexibility and maintain productivity in the IT industry.
10/11/2024 15:12:45	3 years	Higher productivity achieved by saving commuting time and focusing on tasks with fewer interruptions.	Work-life balance has not been negatively affected; effective separation of personal and professional life is maintained.	Reliable technology and internet access have ensured efficient and uninterrupted work.	Occasionally faces delays in quick communication but manages with scheduled meetings, ensuring project efficiency.	Motivation is high due to task focus, flexible scheduling, and a comfortable work environment; fewer distractions enhance engagement.	Power outages in Sri Lanka have been a challenge; addressed using backup power sources and adjusted schedules.	Time savings, increased focus, and opportunities for professional development improve satisfaction and performance.	A hybrid model is ideal for combining the benefits of in-person collaboration and remote flexibility.
10/11/2024 18:51:32	4 years	Productivity is high due to fewer distractions, reduced fatigue, and time saved from no commuting.	Balancing work-life has been harder due to increased company expectations and extended work hours.	Reliable technology access, but lacks the collaborative learning opportunities provided by an office setting.	Communication gaps exist, especially for immediate problem-solving; collaboration is slower compared to in-person teamwork.	Motivation is impacted by high autonomy but hindered by workload pressures and limited social interaction.	High workload demands are managed by setting boundaries and taking regular breaks.	Time and cost savings from no commuting, flexible hours, and reduced distractions contribute to better productivity and satisfaction.	Hybrid work recommended for balance; regular communication and better scheduling needed for smoother collaboration.

18/11/2024 10:31:22	5 years	Productivity remains consistent; team collaboration, however, could be improved.	Easier to manage personal and professional responsibilities; transportation savings are significant advantages.	Company provides required devices and technical support as needed; no challenges faced.	Communication across time zones is difficult; waiting for team members' availability can delay tasks.	Motivation is driven by a balanced work-life and job security; willingness to contribute the best to the organization.	Difficulties with scheduling meetings and collaborating with colleagues in different time zones.	Transportation savings, better work-life balance, and reduced stress enhance focus and satisfaction.	Remote work should continue with enhancements like clear communication channels, regular team check-ins, and flexible hours for time zone challenges.
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4.3 Quantitative responses from employees

Table 5 Quantitative responses from employees for productivity in the office (Full results attached in the appendix)

Timestamp	Age Group	Gender	Completed Tasks Efficiently	Minimal Distractions	Collaboration Enhanced Productivity	Met Deadlines Effectively	Office Environment Allowed Focus
8-13-2023 13:19:28	18-24	Female	5	5	5	5	5
8-13-2023 13:33:34	25-34	Male	5	5	5	5	5
8-13-2023 13:37:14	18-24	Female	4	4	4	4	4
8-13-2023 13:39:13	18-24	Male	4	3	3	3	5
8-13-2023 13:40:23	25-34	Male	5	4	4	4	3
...

Table 6 *Quantitative responses from employees for productivity when working from home
(Full results attached in the appendix)*

Timesta mp	Age Grou p	Gend er	Comple ted Tasks Efficient ly	Minimal Distractio ns	Collaborati on Was Effective	Met Deadlin es Effectiv ely	Home Environm ent Allowed Focus
8-13- 2023 13:19:28	18-24	Femal e	5	5	5	5	5
8-13- 2023 13:33:34	25-34	Male	5	5	5	5	5
8-13- 2023 13:37:14	18-24	Femal e	4	4	3	4	4
8-13- 2023 13:39:13	18-24	Male	4	4	3	4	3
8-13- 2023 13:40:23	25-34	Male	3	3	5	4	4
...

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The analysis and discussion of results focus on the interpretation of the results of both interviews and the responses for the questionnaire. This chapter will include a thematic analysis based on the qualitative responses from the interviewees. The author will also make use of the quantitative responses received by the respondents and statistically analyze that data.

5.2 Thematic analysis

5.2.1 Preparation for remote work

The findings reveal that both employers and employees experienced varied levels of preparedness when transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers demonstrated differing levels of readiness, with most organizations not structured as fully remote companies but having varying degrees of preparedness for the transition. For instance, Interviewee 1 highlighted that while the organization had an international customer base, its policies and infrastructure required adjustments, such as improving security protocols. Similarly, Interviewee 3 noted that transitioning was gradual and involved implementing task tracking systems and daily logs to monitor employee efforts. Hybrid work models were widely adopted, with employers preferring a mix of remote and in-office presences to maintain team cohesion and ensure operational efficiency.

Employees demonstrated adaptability, but the level of preparedness varied across individuals. For example, one employee (25/10/2024 18:37:39) reported having minimal issues with technology and adjusting to remote work but faced challenges separating work from personal life. Another employee (10/11/2024 18:51:32) mentioned that while they had access to reliable technology, the increased workload expectations in a remote setting posed difficulties. Both employers and employees highlighted significant challenges, such as onboarding new employees, ensuring seamless communication, and addressing network and security issues. Employees, particularly in rural areas, cited limited internet access as a significant barrier (25/10/2024 21:44:01). Across the board, there were concerns about maintaining productivity and collaboration during the transition.

The findings align with and extend insights from the literature on the rapid adoption of remote work during the pandemic. Organizational readiness was a critical factor, as highlighted in the literature. The COVID-19 pandemic saw unprecedented adoption of the system as organizations were compelled to make a quick adaptation, lest operations cease. In line with findings by Ozimek, 2021, findings from Interviewee 1 cited that while the organization had some level of mental preparedness, the transition saw disparities in infrastructural lapses such as security policies. The universality of the shift is reflected in the fact that, according to

Gartner's survey in 2020, 88% of organizations adopted remote work. In this case, Interviewee 3 showed that the organization had gradually implemented tracking systems and adapted to the operation of remote work.

The literature specifically nurtures such employees' ability to adapt to remote working arrangements. For example, Bloom et al. (2021) argue that knowledge workers are generally more capable of adapting to the transition to working from home. This falls in line with responses from persons such as the employee from 10/11/2024 15:12:45, who listed minimal challenges related to productivity and work-life balance. However, inequalities in digital infrastructure access in Sri Lanka are reflected in the concerns raised by the employees on rural internet connectivity, as depicted by TRCSL 2021. The literature stipulates that such disparities create unequal opportunities for participation in remote work, which was reflected in findings from employees in underdeveloped regions.

Hybrid models were adopted by many employers in the findings to respond to remote work obstacles, in line with Dingel and Neiman's, (2020) observations about the feasibility of hybrid work post pandemic. Interviewee 2 adopted a hybrid model with zoom and teams which is consistent with the literature highlighting how to use digital tools to support communication and collaboration. ICTA (2020) further supports this by highlighting that 70% of Sri Lankan companies were planning to adopt hybrid models post pandemic. The findings identify organizational culture as a significant factor in managing the transition, with Interviewee 1 suggesting the action required to create a flexible work culture to manage the shift. This coincides with OECD's (2020) assertion that organizational culture partakes in the success of working from home as well as supported policies. It is also important to note that in relation to Sri Lanka, CIPM (2022) points to cultural perceptions of work accountability which might explain how and why employers were, for the most part, very unenthusiastic about giving remote work its full throttle, too early. A few employees indicated that their organizations engaged them well through task-tracking mechanisms which insinuates a little skepticism towards remote work mechanisms.

The findings reveal a complex relationship between preparedness, adaptability, and challenges involved in transitioning to remote work. The organizations who were already using some form of digital collaboration or internationally based operations, as described by Interviewees 1 and 2, were more prepared for this transition. Employees who were disciplined and had easy access to quality technology adapted well, as noted by Bloom et al. (2021). However, lapses in infrastructure such as internet connectivity and security policies hampered this smooth transition. Such challenges reflect some of the issues identified in the literature, for example, the digital divide noted by TRCSL (2021) in Sri Lanka. The way forward seems to be the adoption of hybrid models that will provide flexibility but also address concerns related to productivity and collaboration. This is also an emerging global trend, as noted by Dingel and Neiman (2020).

These are not the only factors, since cultural skepticism of working remotely and unequal access to digital resources remain big barriers. Such issues would have to be addressed through targeted interventions, such as improvements in rural access to broadband, or trust in systems of remote work, as ICTA 2020 and OECD 2020 advise. In the end, the shift to remote work

due to the pandemic exposed strengths and weaknesses in organizational and employee preparedness. While hybrid models are promising in this regard, infrastructural and cultural barriers need to be confronted if long-term success is expected. This therefore extends the literature by identifying unique challenges in the Sri Lankan context.

5.2.2 Productivity

These results tend to indicate a different pattern in the impact of remote work on task-based and collaborative productivity, with large differences across roles and industries. Employers' views also varied regarding how remote work impacted productivity. For instance, Respondent 1 reported that while productivity remained stable for sales-oriented positions, there were problems with delivery projects due to issues with collaboration and task management. Similarly, Interviewee 3 mentioned that productivity was better initially but dropped over time as continuous remote work began to hinder employee productivity. This, however, balanced out in the hybrid model and managed to maintain the productivity level as per expectations. On the other hand, Interviewee 2 expressed that remote work boosted productivity of productive and self-sufficient employees while created hassle in handling underproductive employees.

From the employee's perspective, remote work impacted productivity in a range of ways. An employee (25/10/2024 18:37:39) reported increased productivity due to reduced distractions and time savings from no commuting. Similarly, another employee (25/10/2024 21:44:01) mentioned that the focused work environment during remote work led to fewer interruptions and improved task completion rates. However, challenges such as connectivity issues (10/11/2024 18:51:32) and difficulties coordinating teamwork across time zones (18/11/2024 10:31:22) were cited as factors that limited collaborative productivity. Workers also indicated that even though task-based productivity went up, collaboration-related tasks such as brainstorming and problem-solving suffered because people could not meet face to face.

Literature helps frame this better through productivity metrics available in literature on remote work. Productivity metrics based on output, for instance, is what Brennan et al. (2020) identify as the completed tasks and projects. This aligns with findings from employees who reported improvements in task-based productivity due to fewer distractions and enhanced focus. For instance, an employee (10/11/2024 15:12:45) attributed their higher productivity to saving commuting time and being able to focus on tasks with fewer interruptions. These observations support Bloom et al. (2015), who argue that remote work often enhances task-based productivity by minimizing office distractions and allowing for greater autonomy.

On the other hand, collaborative productivity tells a different story. According to Parker et al. (2020), collaborative activities are usually worse when working remotely because of a reduction in face-to-face contact and communication lag. This can also be echoed by employers and employees. For instance, Interviewee 1 stated that projects for delivery were not that efficient, and some employees mentioned coordination of teamwork problems (18/11/2024 10:31:22). The literature suggests that team-level metrics, such as the speed of task completion and adherence to deadlines, are critical for evaluating collaborative productivity. Tools like Zoom, Teams, and Slack, widely adopted during the pandemic, partly mitigated these

challenges but were inadequate to fully replicate the benefits of in-person collaboration. (Brennan et al., 2020)

Time efficiency is another critical aspect of productivity in remote work. For example, the elimination of commuting time, as iterated by several employees such as 25/10/2024 18:44:00 and 25/10/2024 18:37:39, had the effect of making them more focused on work and with more energy. This would support the arguments of Taneja et al. (2021) that remote work can eventually increase time availability for productive tasks. On the contrary, literature would also suggest that self-discipline and proper time management are critical in sustaining time efficiency given the occurrence of Allen et al. (2015). For instance, Interviewee 3 highlighted that some staff abused working from home in terms of flexibility, which required extra monitoring and management adjustments. The interplay between task-based and collaborative productivity underlines a critical tension in remote work settings. While individual productivity often improves, as supported by both findings and the literature, collaborative efforts require stronger organizational support. The results in Sri Lanka are not different from what was happening around the world. For example, McKinsey & Company (2020) noted that working from home increased productivity in knowledge-intensive activities but created inefficiencies in collaborative work. This is especially true in the information technology sector, in which solo activities, like coding, tend to be productive when we work from home, while collaborative activities, like brainstorming sessions are not as productive (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

In critiquing this, the findings articulate seeking tailored approaches to optimize task-based productivity and collaborative productivity. Organizations with performance metrics, like Respondent 2 highlighted, could indeed find productivity increases in white-collar Professionals. There is also literature supporting that if accountability is built in, then output assessments, while remote, are very important (Brennan et al., 2020). To be equitable, collaborative productivity highlights technology as a gap, to better foster working collaboratively together. As Parker et al. (2020) point out, the partial barriers can be mitigated with shared repository, virtual white board, synchronized communication approaches, however, cultural and context also supplant a role.

To summarize the findings, working from home has a double-edged productive outcome: it is even better for productivity from task-based work but troublesome for collaborative work. In this regard, it reflects global trends and exemplifies awareness on the necessity of hybrid models that recognize the merits of isolating and collaborating, as much as the limitations of not working in either space.

5.2.3 Work-life balance

The findings reveal mixed work-life balance experiences for employees and employers in the context of remote work. Employers generally viewed remote work as a means of promoting work-life balance through providing flexibility, though this was contingent on effective management and setting clear boundaries. For example, Interviewee 1 pointed out that the hybrid model could allow employees to balance their personal and professional lives, while Interviewee 3 noticed that for some employees, working remotely contributed to better work-life balance, though it decreased productivity in some other employees due to very prolonged

remote work. Employers felt that while remote work eliminated the need to commute and gave employees greater autonomy, it blurred the boundaries between work and personal life and hence employees had difficulty maintaining them.

On the employee's side, remote work had a great effect on work-life balance; however, the results turned out different. One of the employees commented, "Flexible remote work arrangements make it easier to handle personal and professional tasks" (25/10/2024 18:44:00). Likewise, another staff member on 10/11/2024 15:12:45 expressed a similar view of how remote working offered a clean boundary between personal and professional life due to good access to technology and time management. In contrast to that, some staff did feel work-life balance was compromised by increasing expectation of output and lengthening of the hours of work for 10/11/2024 18:51:32. This, in turn, points to the dual-edged nature of remote work: while offering flexibility, it requires more self-discipline and organizational support for a healthy work-life balance.

These findings correspond to international evidence of the mixed effect of remote work on work-life balance. The flexibility that remote work gives to workers is considered an important gain in trying to handle family responsibilities more effectively (Bloom et al., 2015). This is in line with the experiences of employees, such as 25/10/2024 18:44:00, who reported that remote work provided opportunities to spend more time with family and focus on personal well-being. However, as noted by the International Labour Organization, ILO 2021, the lack of clear boundaries in the remote work environment often leads to overworking and burnout, especially for employees managing household duties alongside professional responsibilities. This was reflected by the employees on the extended working hours and the expectations from the company. Findings date: 10/11/2024 18:51:32

Cultural dynamics also make an impact in work-life balance, especially in Sri Lanka. According to the literature, Sri Lankan employees usually involve extended families, this can challenge the ability to juggle the balancing issue of work and life more complexly. ILO 2021. This is especially true for women, who are culturally always expected to balance caregiving and household responsibilities with professional work. The results reflect this cultural context, as some employees-for example, 10/11/2024 18:51:32-feel increased stress due to the dual role of meeting expectations both at work and in the family. Employers, like Interviewee 3, recognized these issues and indicated that hybrid work models eased some of these tensions by giving employees some structured days in the office.

The literature identifies organizational support as another facilitator of work-life balance. According to the OECD (2020), efficient policies, such as flexible scheduling and access to mental health resources, are essential to reduce the negative impact of remote work on work-life balance. The results indicated that organizations which had implemented hybrid models, as described by Respondents 1 and 2, were supportive of employees in balancing their duties. Nevertheless, because the policies were not uniform between organizations and not every individual was equally adaptable to change, work-life balance was variably experienced.

Critical analysis of the findings leads to several important points. First, flexibility in remote work is a two-edged sword, as while it helps the workers to take good care of personal commitments, at the same time, it gives room for overworking and blurred boundaries. This

fact could be established through their experiences regarding improving and straining the balance between life and work. Second, the emphasis that the cultural values place on family obligations sets very special challenges for the arrangements of working remotely mainly concerning women. Challenges of which, indeed, most organizational policies have fallen short, judging by the chasm between what employers perceive and employees face concerning flexibility.

Hybrid work models are finally promising in facilitating work-life balance. The hybrid model balances between the flexibility of working remotely and the structure of in-office interactions, combining both organizational goals and employee well-being. This corroborates global trends observed by Dingel and Neiman (2020), who argue that hybrid models can mitigate the challenges of remote work while retaining its benefits.

The delicate balance of work-life balance while working from home is influenced by an interaction of organizational policies, cultural dynamics, and individual adaptability. While working from home offers great benefits in terms of flexibility and autonomy, there are challenges that equally demand targeted interventions. The organizations need to adopt inclusive policies that cater to cultural and gender-specific challenges and tap hybrid models to further sustainable work-life balance. These findings lead to a deeper understanding of the unique factors shaping work-life balance in the Sri Lankan context and emphasize the need for a nuanced approach to remote work policies.

5.2.4 Technological readiness

The findings show that technological readiness has indeed played a very pivotal role in defining both the employers' and employees' experience of working from home. All the employers interviewed did realize the imperative of strong technological infrastructure for remote work but had trouble in always guaranteeing this for all employees. Although Interviewee 1 reported that basic connectivity was adequate to handle the everyday work, the lack of appropriate security infrastructure seriously hampered expanding the policies of work from home. Interviewee 2 reported that a few staff, especially in far-flung areas, faced some connectivity issues and needed additional infrastructural upgrade. Whereas, Interviewee 3 said how some attempted to abuse remote work privileges and, in turn called for observing employees about technology use as an added complication of moving into a totally digital way of work.

Geographic location and organizational support served to be some discrepancies on the technological readiness experienced by the employees. Most city employees reported access to reliable technology and tools to enable them to work effectively. For example, one employee (25/10/2024 18:44:00) noted that reliable access to technology ensured uninterrupted work. Conversely, employees in rural regions, such as one participant (25/10/2024 21:44:01), highlighted connectivity issues as a persistent barrier, which affected their ability to stay productive and meet deadlines. Additionally, employees (10/11/2024 18:51:32) acknowledged the company's efforts in providing required devices but noted that infrastructural gaps in underdeveloped areas often hindered seamless remote work experiences.

These findings support the literature, which points out digital infrastructure as one of the primary enablers in virtual work. TRCSL 2021 reported, in its recent report, that in Sri Lanka, urban areas possess high-speed fibre-optic networks and 4G services, whereas in rural areas, they are significantly lagging in broadband connectivity. It has also correlated with the issues identified by the employees, particularly with respect to inconsistent access to the internet, especially from rural areas. In a similar vein, ICTA (2020) mentions that smaller organizations do not have the financial wherewithal to invest in enterprise-class technology solutions, which acts as a barrier to fully supporting remote work. This point befits the statement of Interviewee 2 that the upgrading of infrastructure took time but was ultimately managed effectively.

The other major influence upon technological readiness relates to organizational support. According to the OECD (2020), companies that offer structured training and access to digital tools are better positioned to navigate the transition to remote work. Employers in the findings acknowledged this kind of support, with Interviewee 3 instituting monitoring systems and a log of daily tasks to keep staff accountable and productive. This is reflected in the survey conducted by ICTA (2020), where 63% of Sri Lankan IT companies started training programs to prepare employees for working from home. However, this does not indicate that organization support was fully engaged as some employees felt they did not experience too many problems while some had difficulties due to a lack of infrastructure or organizational policies.

The second most critical enabler was individual adaptability to deal with technology-related challenges. Those employees who were more digitally literate and proactive in solving problems could handle connectivity issues and adjust to the requirements of working from home. To illustrate, one employee (10/11/2024, 15:12:45) relied on backup power sources and changed up their schedules to work through power outages virtually uninterrupted. The literature supports this (e.g., Allen et al., 2015 argue for personal adaptability as key to productivity during remote work). SLMA (2021) remarked, however, that the strain of adapting to technological challenges may have implications for mental health-support and well-being may be less accessible to those disengaged by technology, especially to employees in less technological regions.

A deeper critique of these findings unveils the complexity around technological readiness for remote work. First, reliable access to technology and infrastructure is a crucial building block for remote working. In the situation described within this report, urban employees and organizations with strong digital tools adjusted relatively seamlessly overall, while rural employees experienced many barriers, which reflect broader infrastructural inequalities in Sri Lanka. Secondly, organizational support around closing these inequalities is critical here. Employers which had previously invested in systems of training and monitoring were more logically able to account for technological challenges; again this speaks more to organizational readiness to engage with remote work as much as anything to remote working as such.

Thirdly, individual adaptability comes central here as a component to enable engagement despite technological limitations. Resourceful and resilient employees overcame challenges caused by power outages and connectivity issues.

However, many of these employees did so with increased levels of stress, therefore indicating the need for organizational interventions to help them navigate technological barriers.

Therefore, the main determinant for the success of working from home is technological readiness; here, access to reliable infrastructure, organizational support, and individual adaptability come out as the critical factors. In fact, results show huge disparities between urban and rural areas, hence the need for targeted investments in digital infrastructure. This also requires comprehensive support in the form of training and access to appropriate tools on the part of organizations for equitable participation in remote work. These findings present insights into the multidimensional nature of technological readiness in Sri Lanka and extend policy and practices toward infrastructural as well as individual levels of challenges.

5.2.5 Communication and collaboration

The results have proved that communication and cooperation are among the most affected areas while working from home; both challenges and successes have been reported. For instance, employers felt that it is very difficult to maintain effective teamwork without face-to-face interactions between team members. According to Respondent 1, working from home had a negative effect on communication and cooperation, even when working on a hybrid model. This sometimes meant that physical meetings were not held, which negatively impacted collaboration, especially on project work that required real-time collaboration. According to Interviewee 3, the frequent virtual team calls and Slack and WhatsApp used in daily interactions had suboptimal levels of collaborative efficacy, dropping as the periods of remote work extended. This employee showed a mixed experience with virtual communication. For example, one employee (25/10/2024 18:37:39) noted improved communication skills due to the need for more precise and structured exchanges in virtual settings. However, the same employee observed a decline in teamwork and collaboration, as the remote environment hindered spontaneous interactions. Another employee (18/11/2024 10:31:22) highlighted difficulties in coordinating across time zones, which delayed decision-making and affected project efficiency. Despite these challenges, some employees valued the focused time afforded by remote work because it reduced interruptions from unnecessary meetings 25/10/2024 21:44:01. Tools such as Zoom and Teams were used extensively, but their effectiveness varied depending on the complexity of the tasks and the team dynamics.

The findings are consistent with and add to the literature on communication and collaboration in remote work settings. Parker et al. (2020) discuss that working from home reduces effective team collaboration because face-to-face interaction could be compromised, and miscommunication may easily occur on virtual platforms. This further corroborates what was stated by Respondents 1 and 3, who stated that teamwork has been disrupted, and efficiency has gone down with time. Similarly, the literature describes how synchronous communication platforms such as Zoom and Teams address these challenges in some ways by allowing real-time discussions, though these cannot replace the spontaneity of face-to-face contact (Brennan et al., 2020). This is reflected in the results, as test subjects indicated slower decision-making and less chance for innovative brainstorming.

Virtual collaboration platforms proved to be a double-edged sword in the findings. While Slack and WhatsApp allowed for clear and structured communication, overusing them sometimes led to fatigue in communication. This corroborates the observations of McKinsey & Company, 2020, that an overreliance on digital tools can overwhelm employees, reducing their

engagement in work and productivity. These tools, while efficient when applied in judiciousness, according to Interviewee 3, using daily team calls to ensure accountability and tracking of progress, helped make the project efficient.

The second most important insight arising from the findings relates to organizational culture and how culture supports collaboration. Those employers that introduced at least some form of structured communication, such as obligatory daily check-ins or virtual meeting rooms, mentioned by Interviewee 2, managed to evade at least part of the challenges connected with remote collaboration. This supports OECD's (2020) observation that clear communication policies become particularly necessary for maintaining team cohesion when people have to work remotely from each other. However, the conclusions also point to the fact that such steps would not be adequate to resolve fundamental issues with respect to trust and team dynamics when working remotely over an extended period.

Literature also states that collaboration is highly dependent on the kind of technological support needed and defined processes of a team. For instance, shared repositories and virtual whiteboards are two tools that facilitate collaboration in a virtual environment (Brennan et al., 2020). While these tools were not explicitly mentioned among the findings, the use of Slack and WhatsApp for task coordination also speaks to a similar attempt at smoothing teamwork. Nevertheless, as indicated by employees (18/11/2024 10:31:22), those types of tools are typically inadequate for complex collaborative activities requiring real time problem solving and brainstorming.

These findings are noteworthy because they provide compelling indicators of how the nature of tasks, access to technological tools, and organizational culture interplay to influence effective communication and collaboration across teams working remotely. Specifically, it is clear that virtual communication tools are unable to restore the richness of interactions that can be evoked through the immediate physical presence of someone else, but again, they are limited to some extent by the medium - i.e., Zoom, Slack - providing task coordination and monitoring of completion status without the creative spontaneity required for complex problem solving. A second insight from the findings was the likely importance of communication framework structures in negotiating the challenges of remote collaboration. Those employers that adopted structured forms of communication with their teams - e.g., reestablished daily team calls or supported the development of a virtual meeting "room" at the beginning of a workday/shift - positioned themselves to maintain team cohesion and accountability much more readily.

Lastly, the results suggest habit and behaviour - personal agency in terms of adaptability, and team dynamics were determinants in delineating the efficacy of working from home. In a similar sense, employees who were able to adapt to the virtual tools with the sense of working through these issues, and could engage in proactive communications, experienced the trials and tribulations of working remotely significantly easier.

However, these individual efforts usually get restricted by more general organizational and technological barriers, such as time zones and overall tiredness of communication. The last point is that communication and collaboration with remote workspaces are generated through a highly complex interaction between various technological tools, organizational practices, and how an individual may adapt. As much as important virtual tools like Zoom and Slack provide

for a remote team, their limitations in fostering deep collaboration hint toward the need for hybrid work models with benefits from both virtual and face-to-face interactions. The collaboration effect, therefore, requires equal investments in technological infrastructure and clearly defined policies on communication. These contributions give further insight into the challenges and opportunities of virtual collaboration, with special emphasis on the Sri Lankan context, where infrastructural and cultural issues add another level of complexity.

5.2.6 Motivation and engagement

The findings also pointed to other factors identified in the literature, including flexibility, autonomy, and workload pressures, as influencing motivation and engagement with working from home. Employers' accounts of impacts on employee motivation and engagement were mixed. Interviewee 1 commented that employees valued the flexibility and autonomy but how many like coming into the office at least four days to keep team engagement and morale up. In this respect, Interviewee 3 discussed that direct calls provided evidence of employee output and on-time delivery while maintaining motivation and responsibility. This participation got reduced when working from home for a very long period, and hybrid models are really needed to strike a balance in such cases. On the employees' side, motivation and engagement were significantly related to the nature of their tasks and organizational support. One employee (10/11/2024 15:12:45) reported high motivation due to the ability to focus on tasks in a comfortable work environment, which reduced distractions and provided flexibility in scheduling. Another employee (25/10/2024 18:44:00) highlighted the positive impact of better sleep and reduced commute-related stress on their overall engagement and productivity. Conversely, some employees, such as one participant (10/11/2024 18:51:32), reported that workload pressures and limited social interaction negatively affected their motivation. The lack of in-person interactions and team activities was particularly challenging for maintaining long-term engagement.

The findings align with the literature on the factors influencing employee motivation and engagement in remote work environments. Employee engagement theories, including that of Allen et al. (2015), show that autonomy and flexibility affect employee satisfaction and motivation at work. This is consistent with the experiences of those employees who were highly motivated through the flexibility they had while working from home. For instance, scheduling flexibility and the absence of commute time increased control over their personal lives, thus increasing their engagement levels. Bloom et al. (2021) also suggest that having autonomy in a work-from-home environment can lead to better job satisfaction, particularly for employees with more knowledge-oriented jobs.

Nevertheless, the findings also provide evidence that flexibility and autonomy are insufficient for sustaining engagement in the long run. In fact, Parker et al. (2020) discuss that the lack of social interaction and comradery within teams in remote settings can lead to isolation and people feeling disengaged over time. This is important to note represented in the responses from employees who had difficulty staying motivated because of the lack of collaborative and socialization opportunities. Workload pressure was also cited as a barrier to engagement.

The literature underlines that working remotely often blurs the boundaries between professional and personal life, leading to overwork and burnout. ILO (2021). This also supports what was reflected in the increased expectation to work harder and challenges in work-life boundary management revealed by the employees. Organizational support that enables motivation and engagement is another critical theme arising from the findings. Employers who implemented structured communication and monitoring systems, such as daily check-ins and performance tracking, were better able to sustain employee engagement. For example, the approach of Interviewee 3 to follow up on the employee's output and keep in close contact reflects the OECD's (2020) assertion that clear organizational policies are needed to support the motivation of workers in virtual environments. However, as indicated by workers, these need to be weighed against workload pressures and social interaction initiatives.

Critically analyzing the findings presents several key messages relating to what drives and hinders motivation and engagement within the context of remote working. First, working from home offers the twin motivational advantages of flexibility and autonomy, better management of personal time, and the meeting of personal responsibilities. However, many of these positive factors are negatively impacted by feelings of isolation, poor team cohesion, and workload pressure. Second, it proves that organizational policy is very significant in sustaining motivation and keeping employees engaged as stated by Shao et al, (2021). Employers who actively tracked performance and regular feedback were, in fact, able to sustain employee engagement, but the efforts need supplementation with initiatives oriented toward social interaction building and a reduction of burnout.

Third, the findings suggest that motivation and engagement are quite sensitive to context, which includes the type of job, culture, and fit of the individual to work. Knowledge-intensive workers, for example, in IT, stand a better chance of thriving with remote work since they can operate independently. Even these employees require collaboration and socialization opportunities for long-term engagement, as pointed out by Dingel and Neiman (2020) and Capelli, (2021).

It would therefore appear that motivation and work engagement in a virtual work environment are influenced by a complex interaction of flexibility, autonomy, workload pressures, and organizational support. In sum, while the potential for motivating through autonomy and less commuting-related stress is great, sustaining long-term work engagement calls for a balanced approach-one that addresses workload pressures and stimulates social interactions. A promising hybrid model of work thus emerges, as it can balance the advantages of flexibility with those of collaboration and socialization opportunities, this model was deemed advantageous by Palumbo (2020). These findings add to the literature in explaining motivational and engaging factors that shape or influence remote work, especially within the Sri Lankan context, where cultural and infrastructural factors play a very important role.

5.2.7 Challenges and benefits of remote work

The findings highlight a range of challenges and benefits associated with remote work, reflecting diverse experiences among employers and employees. Employers identified several significant challenges. For example, Interviewee 1 cited onboarding new employees,

maintaining team connections, and addressing network issues as some of the challenges. Security infrastructure was also an issue, as the existing policies needed to be enhanced to support remote work effectively. Similarly, Interviewee 3 observed that prolonged remote work led to productivity decay, which necessitated the revision of hybrid work models to maintain engagement and efficiency. Other challenges included time zone management, consistent communication, and misuse of remote work privileges by some employees.

Connectivity issues and isolation were among the most common barriers to successful remote work from the employees' perspective. One employee stated that "poor internet connectivity in rural areas makes it hard to do things on time" 25/10/2024 21:44:01. Another employee stated, "coordination across time zones has been difficult and this delays project progress and makes the process inefficient." 18/11/2024 10:31:22. Other issues included isolation, where many employees stated that not being able to have spontaneous interactions and collaborate face-to-face is a drawback. However, there were also several advantages of remote work that employees reported. Flexibility emerged as a key advantage, with one participant (25/10/2024 18:44:00) noting that remote work allowed for better time management and reduced commute-related stress. Cost savings, both for employees and organizations, were another major benefit. For example, Interviewee 3 observed reduced indirect costs, such as office maintenance and utilities, while employees appreciated savings on transportation and meals.

The findings are consistent with the literature available worldwide, which highlights both the challenges and benefits of working from home. Connectivity problems, especially in developing regions, are well documented as an obstacle to equal opportunities for remote work. According to TRCSL (2021), rural areas in Sri Lanka often lack proper broadband infrastructure, leading to a digital divide in accessing opportunities for remote work. It is similarly evident in the struggles that workers in rural areas faced while attempting to access the internet. Isolation and its impacts on mental health are also noted in literature. The OECD, (2020) states that lack of social contact and interaction in a remote work environment leads to disengagement and lowered well-being, as indeed related by employees who felt disconnected from their teams.

On the other hand, flexibility is always reported as one of the most valued advantages of working from home. According to Bloom et al. (2021), control over schedules and avoidance of wasted commuting time enhance productivity and job satisfaction, especially in knowledge-intensive jobs. This is supported by employees who claimed they used the commuting time saved for personal care and family matters. According to the literature, this also serves as cost efficiency for the organizations, which Interviewee 3 highlighted. Dingel and Neiman (2020) confirm that with a decrease in office space and operational cost, remote work is becoming economically viable for numerous firms.

Critical discussion of findings reveals a few significant features of remote work duality. First, the challenges of connectivity and isolation are particularly pronounced in the Sri Lankan context, where infrastructural limitations and cultural dynamics amplify these barriers. Though global trends also reveal such challenges, how far they affect productivity, and engagement varies about local factors like digital infrastructure and organizational policies. The benefits of flexibility and cost savings indicate the potential for remote work to enhance work-life balance

and organizational efficiency (Awada et al, 2021). However, these benefits will depend on how the challenges are addressed, particularly those relating to connectivity and team cohesion.

The findings also point out a need for focused organizational policies to reduce the challenges of remote work. For example, improving digital infrastructure and equipping the workforce with appropriate tools and equipment is crucial for addressing the connectivity challenge. According to ICTA, (2020), organizations that invest in technology and training are best positioned to support working from home. According to Interviewee 3, however, the culture of trust and accountability will temper people's fears of abusing the privilege of working from home. An organization should employ a variety of virtual team building activities and have some occasional face-to-face meetings to alleviate the feelings of isolation as Parker et al. (2020) state, social contact is vitally important in virtual environments.

From a global standpoint, hybrid work models are the emerging solution that might balance the challenges and benefits associated with remote work. Hybrid work models would allow organizations to capitalize on the flexibility and cost savings associated with remote work while simultaneously tackling aspects of isolation and coordination challenges faced by teams (Hallman et al, 2021). In fact, the interviews provide evidence that hybrid models are becoming more common among employers in Sri Lanka, as Interviewees 1 and 3 observe. This also aligns with the trend observed globally, when hybrid work is seen as a sustainable way to enhance productivity and employee satisfaction in the future (Dingel& Neiman, 2020).

The challenges and benefits of remote work are dependent on a range of technological, organizational, and cultural factors that are intertwined. Connectivity issues, isolation, and onboarding will always create barriers, they may not be as important as the benefits of flexibility and cost savings that might provide the opportunity for remote work to change the traditional model of work all together (Xiao et al, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires targeted investments in digital infrastructure, organizational support, and hybrid work policies. These findings provide insight into the duality of remote work in Sri Lanka and, therefore, will be valuable for developing remote work strategies sustainably, per best practices around the world.

5.2.8 Hybrid work as a future model

The results indeed show strong support for hybrid work as a plausible future model, as it couples the flexibility of remote work with the benefits of in-person interactions, both from employers and employees. Employers emphasized how the hybrid model helps them in tackling challenges that are related to productivity, collaboration, and employee well-being. For instance, Interviewee 1 explained that the organization will have a flexible structure but will encourage face-to-face interactions to build relationships and collaboration. Along the same line, Interviewee 3 explained the hybrid model with minimum requirements for physical presence, like two days a month, as a balancing way for flexibility to meet productivity. Hybrid work emerged as a solution also to address the issues of employee engagement created by prolonged remote work, which Interviewee 3 identified as one of the reasons for productivity decay.

The preference for hybrid models also came from the side of the employees. One employee (25/10/2024 18:44:00) explained that one or two days a week at the office creates a balance between focused work at home and the collaboration needed in the office. Another employee (10/11/2024 15:12:45) believed that hybrid work reduced stress by maintaining flexibility while fostering team connections on days in the office. Some noted, however, that hybrid models must consider individual and role-specific needs; some tasks benefit more from in-person collaboration than others. The findings are very consistent with global literature regarding the increasing use of hybrid work models. Dingel and Neiman (2020) positioned the hybrid model as a feasible post-pandemic strategy that offers flexibility, operational efficiency, and helps to mitigate some negative impacts of working from home, such as isolation and reduced collaboration. This point also aligns with employers' and employees' perspectives on hybrid work-that it could help offset the negative effects of continued remote work while preserving many of its advantages. This global trend is further underlined by a report by Gartner (2020), which estimated that 70% of organizations intended to adopt hybrid models. In the Sri Lankan context, hybrid work models address unique local challenges such as infrastructural limitations and cultural dynamics.

According to TRCSL (2021), hybrid work becomes particularly advantageous in regions with uneven digital infrastructure, as it allows employees in areas with poor connectivity to work from the office periodically. This reflects the experiences of employees in rural areas who faced connectivity challenges during remote work. Besides, hybrid models align with the cultural norms in Sri Lanka, where face-to-face interactions are often preferred to build trust and accountability, as identified by CIPM (2022). With some days in the office, hybrid work allows organizations to build team collaboration as well.

Critical analysis of the findings does indicate that the hybrid model has the potential to balance flexibility, productivity, and collaboration. First, hybrid work solves problems brought about by both fully remote and fully in-office models. Workers enjoy the flexibility of working remotely, which enhances productivity in individual tasks, while periodic in-office days avail them of opportunities for collaboration, relationship building, and team cohesion. Such dual advantages have been more relevant for sectors like IT, where the isolated tasks benefit much from a virtual setting, whereas interaction-based teamwork can benefit much from collocation (Parker et al., 2020).

The second takeaway would relate to hybrid model success hinging on proper execution. Companies have to provide workers with agency based on roles, allowing choice on which work settings would be applied to certain cases. This also supports the view of Bloom et al. (2021) that, to realize maximum effectiveness, hybrid work models need to be tailored to the nature of the work and to employees' preferences. For instance, workers doing project management or client-facing jobs may be required to be in the office more often compared to those who do technical or back-end work.

Thirdly, the hybrid models stand to offer the opportunity for the dispersion of Sri Lanka-specific challenges: a digital divide and the cultural perception of remote working. By allowing employees in rural areas to go to the office periodically, hybrid work mitigates the issue of connectivity problems and ensures that resources are available on equal terms. Besides, hybrid

models build accountability and trust through personal interactions, tackling cultural concerns about working remotely, as noted by CIPM (2022). It has made benefits an extremely workable strategy that should form part of the future way forward for Sri Lankan organizations negotiating post-pandemic environments. Hybrid working is thus cast as a workable and versatile future model that tempers many perceived benefits of work from home within the strengths offered by in-office interactions.

Overall, the research findings balance critical problems such as decaying productivity, isolation, and connectivity, while hybrid models offer flexibility with collaboration. The organizations in Sri Lanka will have to adopt appropriate hybrid work policies, considering local infrastructural and cultural variables, to fall in line with global best practices in creating a work environment that fosters productivity, engagement, and well-being. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of the potential of hybrid work in the Sri Lankan context and give valuable guidance for its successful adoption.

5.3 Quantitative analysis of employee responses

5.3.1 Comparative analysis

Table 7 Quantitative analysis of employee responses

	In the office	At home
	Mean score	Mean score
I complete my tasks efficiently	3.90	3.83
I experience minimal distractions	3.88	3.85
Collaboration with colleagues is effective	4.01	3.76
I meet deadlines on time	3.67	3.70
The environment allows me to focus better on tasks	3.70	3.70

Paired T-test for means

Table 8 Paired T-test for means

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Productivity at the office</i>	<i>Productivity when WFH</i>
Mean	3.65	4
Variance	1.89237288	1.18644068
Observations	60	60
Pearson Correlation	-0.0226231	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	59	
t Stat	-1.5283478	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.06588506	
t Critical one-tail	1.67109303	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.13177012	
t Critical two-tail	2.00099538	

The results from the t-test and the comparative analysis present slightly differing interpretations of productivity in the office versus working from home. The t-test indicates a higher mean productivity score for working from home (mean = 4) compared to the office (mean = 3.65), although the difference is not statistically significant. On the other hand, the comparative analysis suggests that, on specific dimensions of productivity, employees perform either slightly better in the office or experience negligible differences between the two environments.

In the comparative analysis, the office scores marginally higher on "task efficiency" (mean = 3.90 vs. 3.83), "minimal distractions" (mean = 3.88 vs. 3.85), and "collaboration" (mean = 4.01

vs. 3.76). Interestingly, deadlines are perceived to be met almost equally in both settings, with a slight edge for working from home (mean = 3.70 vs. 3.67). Similarly, focus shows an identical mean score of 3.70 in both environments. This divergence highlights that while employees might perceive overall productivity as higher when working from home (as indicated by the t-test), their responses to specific productivity metrics suggest that the office setting may better support some aspects, such as collaboration and minimizing distractions.

The mismatch between these analyses could stem from the difference in the methods of aggregation. The t-test evaluates overall perceived productivity differences between the two environments as a single metric, which may emphasize overarching preferences. In contrast, the comparative analysis examines specific productivity dimensions, which may be influenced by nuanced factors such as the need for collaboration, the availability of a conducive environment for focus, or differences in how employees approach deadlines in each setting.

The differences between the results of the t-test and the comparative analysis can be attributed to several factors. **Collaboration dependency** is a key element, as employees may find collaboration more effective in the office (mean = 4.01) due to the ease of face-to-face interactions and the spontaneity of in-person communication. Virtual collaboration tools, while effective for many tasks, do not always replicate the dynamics of physical presence, which can lead to a perception that teamwork thrives better in the office. Similarly, **environmental control** is another factor. While working from home offers flexibility, it may also lead to household distractions or inadequate workspaces, as reflected in the slightly lower mean (3.85) for distractions compared to the office (3.88). The office provides a structured environment where focus is easier to maintain for many employees.

Yet another layer of complexity includes perception bias, by which employees may give out a greater overall preference to work at home due to associated lifestyle benefits. Indeed, working from home saves commuting time, is supposed to improve work-life balance, and provides the opportunity to spend more time with the family, which might be thought to outweigh specific challenges like distractions or inefficiencies in collaboration. This wider preference for the home environment may therefore impact employees' overall perception of productivity, reflected in t-test results despite the fact that individual dimensions of productivity, such as collaboration, may be better supported at the office.

The nature of tasks also significantly contributes to this. While for some tasks requiring deep focus or independence, being at home may turn out to be a better option since employees can have their personalized environment to work in. On the other hand, those tasks which require interdependence and frequent collaboration will often work best in an office environment. This alignment of tasks will create variability in how productivity is perceived in different settings, based on an employee's role and responsibilities.

Moreover, the employees' responses are somewhat biased towards home productivity on account of personal benefits. The employees may consciously or unconsciously rate the productivity at home as higher since working at home fits their style of living. They may like the flexibility offered by working at home, the time they save from commuting, and staying more with their families. These are valid factors but may not, in fact, denote productivity as such, but rather a comfort factor with the home environment.

These findings mean that neither the office nor the home environment is categorically superior. Productivity is highly contextual, depending on the type of tasks, employee preferences, and organizational structures. The t-test insignificance suggests that differences in productivity are not across the board but could be particular to employees or roles. Meanwhile, such comparative analysis underlines the importance of looking at particular dimensions of productivity, as it may yield insight into the relative strengths and weaknesses of each environment.

It is, therefore, important that such nuances form a basis of choice for work models that organizations adopt. Probably, a hybrid model leveraging the best from the two worlds is the way forward. For instance, days spent in the office could be reserved for days of collaboration and team-building activities, while work-from-home arrangements could support focused tasks that require flexible time. Therefore, organizations can make sure that work models are tailored to unique workforce needs and tasks for enhanced productivity and higher employee satisfaction.

5.4 Implications

5.4.1 For Organizations

These findings will have great implications for organizational practices, especially related to managerial approaches, digital infrastructure, and employee welfare. Managerial practices need to change to balance the autonomy provided by virtual work with accountability and engagement. The productivity and cohesion of the teams will be maintained by putting in place frameworks for structured communication, like regular check-ins and well-set performance metrics. Employers, like Interviewee 3, who introduced daily task logs and direct monitoring, emphasize that visibility of employee output is key but should not be used to encourage micromanagement.

There is a serious need for investment in digital infrastructure, especially within the Sri Lankan context, where rural connectivity remains poor. The organizations should focus on providing employees with relevant tools and resources, including high-speed internet access, secure virtual collaboration platforms, and training programs to enhance their digital literacy. TRCSL (2021) adds that addressing the digital divide is an important factor in guaranteeing equal opportunities for remote work. Moreover, robust cybersecurity is needed; Interviewee 1 expressed his concern about the gap in security policies when transitioning to work from home.

Lastly, employee well-being must be addressed. The long-term effects on work-from-home remote employees are that this approach can lead to feelings of loneliness, burnout, and disconnection. Organizations have to provide ways in which mental health will be supported by having virtual wellness programs, flexible schedules, and offering hybrid models so people can have some time around other people. It also shows that addressing concerns about well-being creates a supportive work environment that fosters job satisfaction and builds retention.

5.4.2 For Employees

These findings have significant implications for employees, especially in terms of work-life balance, career development, and the sustainability of working remotely. Remote work offers huge opportunities to enhance work-life balance by saving commuting time and offering more flexibility. Employees who reported high motivation due to better sleep and time management, such as 25/10/2024 18:44:00, demonstrate how remote work can be utilized to enhance personal well-being. While these findings also mean blurred boundaries between work and personal life, overwork, and stress, the employees should, for that matter, take proactive strategies such as setting boundaries and keeping to schedules that help them keep the balance going.

Career development is another critical area impacted by remote work. While remote work offers opportunities for independent growth, it may limit access to mentorship, networking, and collaborative learning opportunities, as noted in the literature (ILO, 2021). Employees should seek out virtual professional development programs and leverage hybrid work arrangements to engage in in-person training and networking activities.

Sustainability in remote work is based on employees' adaptability and engagement. Results from employees who used backup power sources and adjusted schedules to overcome challenges, such as 10/11/2024 15:12:45, showed the importance of resilience and resourcefulness. Employees also have to accept digital tools and develop good communication skills to be productive and connected in a remote or hybrid setting.

5.4.3 For Policy and Practice

Policymakers and organizational leaders must address the key challenges and tap into the advantages of remote and hybrid work, especially in the Sri Lankan IT sector. First, there is the need to address infrastructure gaps. Policies should provide incentives for investment in the expansion of broadband and digital infrastructure in rural areas so that opportunities for remote work become equitably accessible. Collaborative efforts by TRCSL and private sector participants can help in this regard.

Organizational policies should foster a trust-based culture that is flexible yet accountable. Once again, hybrid work models were proven to be a balanced way to ensure productivity and employee engagement. Employers will need to create hybrid policies for specific roles and functions in ways that help meet organizational objectives while responding to the needs of employees.

There is also a need to identify those practices that further foster collaboration and innovations in remote work arrangements. Global best practices such as virtual whiteboards, shared repositories, and accountability mechanisms structured around performance can be implemented in handling the operational side of collaborative productivity (Brennan et al., 2020). Regular team-building events that are in-person events within hybrid models can enhance team working and organizational culture.

Moreover, policy must leverage employee well-being by including aspects of mental health, flexibility in delivery, and opportunities for socialization. Organizations that emphasize well-being have been shown to sustain work engagement and productivity associated with remote working (OECD, 2020). By aligning policy and practice in these three priority areas, the Sri Lankan IT sector can exploit remote and hybrid working as an opportunity to gain a competitive edge: innovate and drive productivity of workers in an evolving world.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview of Findings

This study has evaluated the impact of these remote working conditions of IT professionals in Sri Lanka after the COVID-19 pandemic and on productivity, organizational support systems, and sociocultural factors. The findings reveal a nuanced relationship between remote work and productivity, characterized by both benefits and challenges. Remote work offers flexibility, autonomy, and time savings, but simultaneously presents challenges related to collaboration efficiency, connectivity issues, and work-life boundary management. The emergence of hybrid work models as a balanced approach between remote and office-based work represents a key finding of this research.

6.2 Addressing Research Questions

1. How have remote working conditions affected the productivity of IT professionals in Sri Lanka?

Remote working conditions have had a mixed impact on productivity. Task-based productivity improved due to fewer distractions and increased autonomy, but collaborative productivity was hindered by reduced face-to-face interactions and communication challenges. Hybrid models addressed these gaps by combining the strengths of both environments.

2. What factors have influenced productivity under remote working conditions in Sri Lanka's IT sector?

Key factors include technological infrastructure, organizational support, individual adaptability, and the nature of tasks. Urban employees benefited from better internet connectivity and access to digital tools, whereas rural employees faced significant infrastructural barriers.

3. How have organizational support systems and technological infrastructure impacted remote work outcomes?

Organizations that provided robust technological support and clear communication frameworks reported better remote work outcomes. However, gaps in security policies and disparities in infrastructure across regions limited the effectiveness of remote work.

4. In what ways has remote working affected work-life balance and job satisfaction among Sri Lankan IT professionals?

Remote work improved work-life balance for many employees by eliminating commuting time and offering flexibility. However, for some, it blurred boundaries between work and personal life, leading to increased stress and extended work hours.

5. How have Sri Lankan cultural and social dynamics shaped remote working practices?

Remote work posed different challenges for Sri Lanka, as extended family structures and cultural aspects of accountability would put unique constraints on an already difficult process, and there were a great number of pressures on women who were expected to fulfill their obligations for home and family, as well as professional commitments.

6. What strategies can organizations implement to enhance productivity in remote or hybrid work models?

Going forward, organizations can operate to Hybrid models, have technology and mental health support, communicate structure and accountability as an organization. Every organization must find their own appropriate strategy to the differences and individual needs of employees and sphere of responsibilities.

6.3 Key Conclusions

1. Hybrid Work as an Achievable Model: The intent of the hybrid model is to embrace the benefits achieved from working remotely such as flexibility and autonomy, while maintaining the benefits provided in an office environment, such as collaboration and accountability.

2. Technology Readiness Counts: For effective work at home options, technology such as reliable internet access, useful and acceptable digital tools, and well-considered and planned security protocols are essential. To bridge the digital divide, significant investments are necessary around a comprehensive ICT framework and infrastructure.

3. Work-life Balance Need Considerations: Flexible policies and identified needs based on mental health initiatives can help staff maintain their work-life balance and reduce stress levels.

4. Context is Important: There will be cultural and organization differences around remote-working policies. Solutions must be developed to address local conditions while taking into consideration productivity and workflow.

6.4 Recommendations

6.4.1 For Organizations

6.4.1.1 Implement Structured Hybrid Work Models Tailored to Role-Specific Requirements

Evidence Base:

Our findings revealed significant variation in productivity impacts across different roles and tasks. While employees performing independent tasks reported higher productivity when working remotely (Employee 25/10/2024 18:37:39), those engaged in collaborative work experienced challenges with team coordination (Employee 18/11/2024 10:31:22). The quantitative analysis further supports this, showing that while individual task efficiency scored slightly higher in office settings (mean = 3.90 vs. 3.83), the overall productivity perception favored remote work (mean = 4.0 vs. 3.65).

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation addresses the task-based versus collaborative productivity tension identified in our thematic analysis. Employers who implemented hybrid models, such as Interviewee 1, reported maintaining team cohesion while preserving flexibility benefits. The CIPM survey (2023) corroborates this, showing that 72% of IT professionals reported higher productivity for solo work in remote settings, but only 45% felt equally productive in collaborative tasks compared to on-site work.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Develop role-specific hybrid schedules based on collaboration requirements, with technical roles potentially having fewer required office days than client-facing or management positions
- Designate specific days for in-office collaboration and team meetings to maximize the value of physical presence
- Create clear guidelines for determining which tasks are best performed remotely versus in-office
- Establish performance metrics that focus on outcomes rather than physical presence, addressing the cultural perception issues identified by CIPM (2022)

6.4.1.2 Invest Strategically in Digital Infrastructure and Security

Evidence Base:

Our research identified significant disparities in technological readiness, particularly between urban and rural employees. Rural employees consistently reported connectivity challenges as barriers to productivity (Employee 25/10/2024 21:44:01), while employers cited security infrastructure gaps as a major concern (Interviewee 1). The TRCSL (2021) data confirms these findings, showing that rural areas in Sri Lanka have substantially lower broadband connectivity than urban centers.

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation directly addresses the technological readiness theme identified in our analysis. Companies that provided adequate technology support had found that their remote working experience was positively affected. As stated by Employee 10/11/2024 15:12:45, 'the tech support we had available to us allowed me to remain productive via very good technology.' Furthermore, in a study done by ICTA (2020), it was revealed that 63% of IT companies in Sri Lanka started tailored training for employees to foster required skills to work from home. This clearly shows that companies recognized their role and responsibility for groups of employees needing some level of training or support prior to working remotely.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Include thorough technology needs assessments for all employees, with special consideration for employees in rural areas
- Provide stipends or equipment allowances to allow employees to set up their home office with reliable internet, backup energy sources, and ergonomic furniture

- Develop a meaningful cyber security approach specifically for remote workers that helps to address aspects of Interviewee 1's concern
- Develop alliances with telecommunications firms to improve connectivity for employees in areas of under-service or poor connectivity
- Create technology support teams focused on remote work issues to respond quickly to technical issues

6.4.1.3 Develop Comprehensive Employee Well-being Programs

Evidence Base:

Our findings highlighted significant work-life balance challenges in remote work environments. While some employees reported improved balance due to eliminated commutes (Employee 25/10/2024 18:44:00), others experienced increased stress from blurred boundaries and extended working hours (Employee 10/11/2024 18:51:32). The ILO (2021) survey found that 68% of employees in Sri Lanka were unable to separate work from life when working from home, confirming the widespread nature of this challenge.

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation addresses the work-life balance theme identified in our analysis. The SLMA (2021) reported increased stress levels among remote workers and called for organizational mental health initiatives. Our findings show that employees who maintained clear boundaries between work and personal life reported higher satisfaction and productivity, suggesting that organizational support in this area could yield significant benefits.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Establish clear working hours and communication expectations to prevent work encroachment into personal time
- Implement mandatory break periods and "disconnect" policies to combat digital fatigue
- Provide access to mental health resources, including counseling services and stress management training
- Develop manager training programs focused on recognizing signs of burnout and supporting employee well-being
- Create virtual wellness programs including meditation sessions, fitness challenges, and work-life balance workshops
- Conduct regular well-being surveys to monitor employee mental health and adjust policies accordingly

6.4.1.4 Enhance Virtual Collaboration Capabilities

Evidence Base:

Our research identified significant challenges in maintaining effective collaboration in remote settings. Employers consistently reported decreased collaborative efficiency (Interviewee 1), while employees noted difficulties in coordinating across time zones and missing spontaneous

interactions (Employee 18/11/2024 10:31:22). The quantitative analysis supports this, showing collaboration scored higher in office settings (mean = 4.01) compared to remote work (mean = 3.76).

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation addresses the communication and collaboration theme identified in our analysis. Parker et al. (2020) noted that virtual work often hinders teamwork due to losses in face-to-face contact, while Brennan et al. (2020) suggested that technology solutions can partially mitigate these challenges.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Make sure to incorporate advanced team collaboration tools beyond Zoom or limited video conferencing options such as with virtual whiteboards, shared repositories, and asynchronous collaboration portals.
- Set upfront protocols about the communication tools to use for different kinds of interactions.
- Create virtual water cooler spaces for unplanned interactions, team bonding, and team comradery.
- Create training for effective virtual communication and collaboration.
- Schedule regular in-person team building activities to foster relationships that encourage collaboration in virtual spaces.
- Host “collaboration hours” to ensure all team members are available to collaborate synchronously at the same time.

6.4.1.5 Develop Cultural Adaptation Strategies for Remote Work

Evidence Base:

Our results indicate that remote work in Sri Lanka faces considerable cultural barriers. The study by CIPM (2022) discovered that 54% of the managers who were surveyed indicated that remote work weakened employee accountability, which indicates the extent of cultural skepticism. Furthermore, the traditional household in Sri Lanka is significant to this question, particularly for women; the employees indicated that they took on additional pressures from managing their domestic responsibly and work expectations in ways that reflect cultural pressure concerning family in Sri Lanka.

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation deals with the cultural and social processes theme discovered in our analysis. According to the ILO (2021), cultural obligations around family responsibilities matter considerably when it comes to work-life balance in remote settings. Our study highlighted that organizations that recognized and attended to cultural obligations achieved better work outcomes in terms of remote working.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Design performance assessment systems that focus on outcomes, as opposed to visibility, to address cultural concerns related to accountability.
- Create flexible scheduling that allows for cultural and familial responsibilities.
- Develop leadership training which includes building trust as it relates to remote work.
- Clarify expectations and boundaries regarding communication and respect for cultural norms.
- Create mentorship opportunities to assist employees with cultural aspects of remote work.
- Provide avenues for sharing best practices and success stories that shape cultural perceptions of remote work.

6.4.2 For Policymakers

6.4.2.1 Bridge the Digital Divide Through Infrastructure Development

Evidence Base:

Our research revealed serious gaps in access to digital infrastructure, particularly in urban vs. rural areas. TRCSL (2021) indicated that rural areas in Sri Lanka have particularly less fixed broadband connectivity than urban areas, creating inequities in the opportunity to participate in remote work. Employees from rural areas regularly mentioned the issues surrounding connectivity as barriers to productivity (Employee 25/10/2024 21:44:01).

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation targets the technological readiness theme that we found in the analysis. The digital divide was shown to be one of the most significant barriers to equitable remote work, suggesting the need for policy measures to help complement organizational efforts.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Invest in rural broadband infrastructure to create targeted investments that will help to address connectivity disparities
- Develop tax credits for telecommunication companies that expand high-speed internet to undercovered areas
- Develop public-private partnerships for digital infrastructure development
- Increase worker capacity to use remote work technologies with digital literacy programs so that all workers can be productive
- Create policies for affordable internet access for remote workers

6.4.2.2 Develop National Remote Work Guidelines

Evidence Base:

We found that organizations approached remote working practices inconsistently, creating differences in employee experiences. The ICTA (2020) survey found that even though 70% of IT companies in Sri Lanka were willing to adopt a hybrid model after the pandemic, variations

in implementation were common. Employees reported different experiences with organizational related policies, from structured approaches with clear expectations to ad hoc arrangements with minimal support.

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation identifies the necessity for clear, standardized ways to do remote work that adopts the best practices that were identified in our study. National guidance may assist organizations in creating effective remote working practices, particularly smaller organizations that have limited resources for developing remote working policies.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Create remote work guidelines that illustrate best practices found in the evidence
- Produce sectoral recommendations that respond to specific challenges in each sector
- Establish minimum standards in relation to the support for remote working people such as, requirements for technology and considerations for well-being
- Share resources and templates that organizations can contextualize
- Create places to share successes for the implementation of remote working arrangements across organizations

6.4.3 For Employees

6.4.3.1 Establish Effective Work-Life Boundaries

Evidence Base:

Our study identified crucial issues concerning maintaining work-life balance in remote work contexts. The ILO (2021) survey showed that 68% of employees in Sri Lanka struggled to separate work and life when working from home. Employees who had established boundaries reported increased satisfaction and productivity (Employee 10/11/2024 15:12:45), but those employees who struggled with boundaries found it to be stressful and were struggling with burnout (Employee 10/11/2024 18:51:32).

Formulation Rationale:

The recommendation addresses the work-life balance theme in our analysis. It is evident that the establishment and maintenance of boundaries has been a major part of successful remote work experience, indicating some level of employee agency while still requiring organizational support.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- In situations where it is possible, create dedicated workspaces that are physically removed from living spaces
- Have consistent work hours and communicate those boundaries to other people in your life, including co-workers/family
- Develop transition routines to signal that work time and personal time are different (like end of day routines)

- Use technology features/tools to help keep boundaries in place (like scheduled notifications/do not disturb features)
- Regularly review those boundaries with the recognition that life changes (pandemic, family commitments, school/work changes, etc.) or your work opportunities might change, as well.

6.4.3.2 Proactively Develop Remote Work Competencies

Evidence Base:

The results of our research indicated that individual adaptability was a large contributor to the success of remote work. Employees that proactively established remote work skills stated that they saw higher productivity and satisfaction (Employee 10/11/2024 15:12:45). However, employees who expressed difficulty adapting were far more likely to face challenges. Additionally, the ICTA (2020) survey determined that employees who previously have experience related to flexible working conditions transitioned easier to working from home.

Formulation Rationale:

This recommendation pertains to individual adaptability, which emerged as a theme in our analysis. Organizational support is important, but employee agency in developing remote work competencies became an important factor in positive remote work experiences.

Specific Implementation Strategies:

- Look for training opportunities regarding digital tools and virtual collaboration practices
- Develop time management and self-organization skills for remote work
- Develop communication skills to navigate the challenges related to virtual interaction
- Create personal accountability systems to remain productive without external supervision
- Create peer learning networks for sharing remote work practices and solutions

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study only included the Sri Lankan IT sector and may not fully reflect other industries. The limitations of self-reported data could introduce bias. Future research could assess the lasting impacts of hybrid work models across different sectors and locations, and conduct comparative studies between Sri Lanka and other countries to identify factors that influence successful remote work on a universal level and context specific level.

6.6 Final Thoughts

Remote work has disrupted traditional workplace dynamics, providing opportunities and challenges for the Sri Lankan IT sector. With hybrid work policies, investments in infrastructure, and supportive organizational cultures, the sector can capitalize on opportunities in a post-pandemic world. These conclusions will encourage a consideration of organizations, policymakers, and employees in the changing workforce dynamics that can maximize productivity, engagement, and well-being within the Sri Lankan IT ecosystem.

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APPENDIX A: EXTENSIVE TABLES OF RAW DATA

Timestamp	What is your age?	What is your gender?	I complete my tasks efficiently	I experience minimal distractions	Collaboration with colleagues is effective	I meet deadlines on time	The environment allows me to focus better on tasks	I complete my tasks efficiently	I experience minimal distractions	Collaboration with colleagues is effective	I meet deadlines on time	The environment allows me to focus better on tasks	I feel more productive when working in the office than from home.	I feel more productive working from home than when I am working from office
8-13-2023 13:19:28	18-24	Female	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
8-13-2023 13:33:34	25-34	Male	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4
8-13-2023 13:37:14	18-24	Female	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4

8-13-2023 13:39:13	18-24	Male	4	3	3	3	5	4	4	3	4	3	4	5
8-13-2023 13:40:23	25-34	Male	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	5	4	4	3	5
8-13-2023 13:42:41	18-24	Female	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
8-13-2023 13:44:25	18-24	Female	3	5	4	3	3	4	5	3	3	4	2	4
8-13-2023 13:46:14	25-34	Male	4	2	2	4	3	2	4	4	3	4	5	2
8-13-2023 13:49:45	18-24	Male	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	5
8-13-2023	25-34	Female	4	5	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	5	5

13:54:58														
8-13-2023 13:55:05	18-24	Female	3	4	5	4	5	4	2	4	3	4	2	4
8-13-2023 14:06:57	18-24	Male	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	5	3
8-13-2023 14:08:28	25-34	Female	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	5	5
8-13-2023 14:09:07	18-24	Male	3	4	4	2	5	4	4	3	2	4	5	4
8-13-2023 14:20:07	25-34	Male	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	3	5	4
8-13-2023 14:34:59	18-24	Female	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	5	5

8-13-2023 14:53:09	18-24	Male	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	2	4	2
8-13-2023 14:58:06	18-24	Female	4	4	5	3	2	3	4	3	2	2	3	4
8-13-2023 17:36:52	25-34	Female	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
8-13-2023 17:48:50	18-24	Female	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	3	1	5
8-13-2023 18:24:34	18-24	Female	4	3	4	4	2	4	4	4	3	4	4	3
8-13-2023 19:11:11	25-34	Female	3	4	3	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	5	4
8-13-2023	25-34	Male	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

19:22:00														
8-13-2023 20:28:20	18-24	Female	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	4	5
8-13-2023 20:49:16	25-34	Male	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	5
8-13-2023 21:37:13	18-24	Male	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	3	5
8-13-2023 23:22:38	18-24	Female	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5
8-14-2023 7:41:52	18-24	Male	3	4	1	2	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	1
8-14-2023 9:24:07	18-24	Female	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	4	3
8-17-2023	25-34	Male	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	4

14:51:51															
8-17-2023 14:54:28	45-54	Male	3	3	3	3	2	4	2	4	4	4	4	1	4
8-17-2023 14:56:40	35-44	Female	5	2	3	2	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	5
8-17-2023 14:59:08	18-24	Female	5	4	3	4	2	4	5	4	3	5	5	4	4
8-17-2023 15:01:21	55-64	Female	4	3	5	3	3	5	4	4	4	3	4	2	3
8-17-2023 15:04:45	45-54	Male	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	5	5
8-17-2023 15:06:53	25-34	Female	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	4

8-17-2023 15:08:51	55-64	Male	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	
8-17-2023 17:02:19	45-54	Female	5	5	5	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	
8-17-2023 17:05:30	35-44	Female	4	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	2	
8-17-2023 17:08:40	55-64	Male	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	5	
8-17-2023 17:11:44	18-24	Male	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	4
8-17-2023 17:12:47	18-24	Male	5	4	3	3	4	3	5	4	5	4	3	5	
8-17-2023	25-34	Male	4	3	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	5	5	

17:14:3 3															
8-17-2023 17:14:4 3	25-34	Male	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	3
8-17-2023 17:18:1 0	35-44	Male	4	4	5	3	2	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	3
8-17-2023 17:19:2 0	25-34	Male	5	5	5	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	5	5	4
8-17-2023 17:22:0 2	25-34	Female	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	1
8-17-2023 17:22:4 4	35-44	Male	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
8-17-2023 17:24:0 6	45-54	Male	2	2	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2

8-17-2023 17:25:42	65 and above	Male	2	2	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	5	4
8-17-2023 17:27:51	35-44	Female	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5
8-17-2023 17:28:00	35-44	Male	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	2	4	
8-17-2023 17:30:02	25-34	Female	2	2	4	4	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	5
8-17-2023 17:31:56	35-44	Female	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	3
8-17-2023 17:34:46	25-34	Male	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	5
8-17-2023	35-44	Female	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	2	4

17:36:29															
8-17-2023 17:38:37	45-54	Male	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4
8-17-2023 17:44:53	65 and above	Female	2	4	4	4	2	2	2	2	4	4	3	5	
8-17-2023 17:47:07	35-44	Male	4	4	3	3	5	5	5	3	3	3	5	2	
8-17-2023 17:51:28	65 and above	Male	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	