REMOTE WORK, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, AND SOCIAL BONDS IN ABUJA ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT: Remote work has evolved from a temporary solution to a permanent workplace model in many parts of the world. Initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has now become a key aspect of the modern workforce, transforming not only how people perform their jobs but also how they interact with colleagues, experience company culture, and establish professional relationships. This study reviewed the relevant literature, using symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework. The pursuit to examine how remote work has influenced organizational culture among employees in some selected organizations and the way it impact the development and maintenance of social bonds among colleagues brings about the conduct of this research. In the course of this research, a qualitative research technique was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how employees perceive changes in workplace dynamics, team cohesion, and cultural values within remote or hybrid work settings. Therefore, this research found that the transition to remote work weakened the ability to internalize institutional norms, interpret workplace values, and develop a sense of organizational identity. It further shows that remote work not only reduces the frequency of informal social interaction but also erodes the depth of relationships and emotional connection among coworkers. The study recommends that organizations encourage the development of hybrid work models that blend remote flexibility with regular in-person interactions. They should implement mentorship and onboarding programs tailored specifically for remote staff, with an emphasis on new and junior employees.

Keywords: Remote Work, Organizational Culture, Social Bonds, Symbolic Interactionism, Abuja

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, remote work has shifted from being a temporary fix to a permanent workplace model in many parts of the world. Started by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has now become a key aspect of the modern workforce, changing not only how people do their jobs but also how they interact with colleagues, experience company culture, and build professional relationships. While the advantages of flexibility, autonomy, and increased productivity are well known, there is growing concern among scholars and industry leaders that remote work may be slowly eroding social fabric of the workplace. Indeed, the ability of organizations to maintain strong cultures and personal bonds is being challenged as teams become more spread out and depend more on digital communication tools. Yet, the extent and character of this change differ across countries, depending on factors such as economic development, digital infrastructure, organizational norms, and cultural expectations.

In the United States, remote work has become deeply ingrained in corporate operations. By 2023, nearly 29% of full-time employees were working entirely from home, while 51% worked in hybrid arrangements, leading to a total of 80% of remote-capable workers participating in some form of offsite work (Gallup, 2023). Although this trend has improved work-life balance and employee satisfaction for many, it has also brought challenges. Specifically, the loss of spontaneous office interactions has weakened social cohesion. A report by Microsoft (2021) revealed that 60% of U.S. managers found it hard to maintain a cohesive organizational culture, while younger employees, especially those from Generation Z, reported feeling more isolated, with 66% saying remote work hindered their ability to build meaningful workplace relationships (McKinsey & Company, 2023). As a result, the decline in informal mentoring, trust-building, and team spirit now poses a threat to the long-term health of U.S. organizational environments.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the normalization of remote and hybrid work has fundamentally changed workplace dynamics. As of 2023, about 40% of working adults either work entirely from home or follow hybrid schedules, with London and other major cities showing the highest adoption rates (UK Office for National Statistics, 2023). While this shift has allowed employers to access a larger talent pool and lower operational costs, it has also decreased the relational aspects of work. According to a study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2023), over 53% of HR professionals noticed a significant reduction in informal interactions, knowledge sharing, and mentoring activities. Additionally, many British employees worry that the corporate culture has become fragmented, with fewer shared values and rituals to bring teams together. As organizations strive to rebuild social connections through digital tools, the risks of employee disengagement and cultural drift continue to rise.

In Canada, remote work has become not only a necessity during the pandemic but also a preferred long-term option for many professionals. By the end of 2022, 32% of Canadian workers were working remotely, a significant increase from just 4% before the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2023). While this shift has generally been welcomed for improving work-life balance, it has also introduced notable challenges. A study by the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC, 2022) reported that nearly 47% of Canadian employees felt less connected to their teams. Additionally, middle managers faced greater difficulties in building teamwork, aligning employees with organizational goals, and maintaining company values. Although some companies have attempted to compensate for the lack of in-person interactions with virtual team-building activities and digital check-ins, these efforts often fall short of the depth provided by face-to-face interactions. As a result, a gap has formed between workers and the social structures that usually support morale, loyalty, and a shared sense of purpose.

In Tunisia, remote work gained prominence during the strict lockdowns of 2020, especially in the education and information technology sectors. Although only about 18% of the workforce was working remotely at its peak (AfDB, 2022), the experience exposed significant weaknesses in organizational cohesion. As digital workspaces replaced traditional office settings, many employees reported feelings of exclusion and alienation. A study by Ben Ayed and Gharbi (2022) found that 61% of remote employees in Tunisia experienced decreased engagement and felt disconnected from their teams and corporate missions. Infrastructural limitations, including unstable internet connections and limited experience with remote supervision, worsened this issue. Additionally,

organizational leaders often lacked the skills or resources to adapt their leadership styles to remote conditions, resulting in communication breakdowns and diminished trust between employees and management. Consequently, remote work in Tunisia has, in many cases, undermined the very social structures that support organizational performance.

In Algeria, remote work has experienced slower adoption, but it has still presented fundamental challenges to workplace culture. During the peak of the pandemic, approximately 10% of the Algerian workforce worked remotely, primarily in sectors such as public administration, finance, and telecommunications (Ministère du Travail, 2022). Although the low adoption rate might indicate a minor impact, the effects were still significant. Research by Bendahmane and Belkacem (2022) found that 68% of remote workers reported worsening social connections, decreased collaboration, and limited involvement in organizational decision-making. Traditional norms about workplace presence and hierarchy also conflicted with the decentralizing nature of remote work, creating tension between employees and managers. Furthermore, many organizations lacked effective strategies to maintain engagement and preserve a strong corporate identity in digital environments, resulting in a fragmented workforce and lower morale.

In Kenya, the shift to remote work was particularly noticeable in Nairobi's banking, telecommunications, and technology sectors. Approximately 24% of the urban workforce adopted remote work models during the pandemic (KIPPRA, 2023). While some companies continue to use hybrid setups, others have reverted to full-time office work due to concerns about losing organizational cohesion. A study by Oduor and Muthoni (2022) revealed that 58% of Kenyan remote workers faced reduced access to their supervisors and limited collaboration with colleagues. This led to confusion in task coordination, weakened team accountability, and reduced trust. Additionally, the digital divide between urban and rural areas hinderd inclusive participation, and the lack on in-person contact prevented the development of strong workplace relationships, particularly for new or junior employees who rely heavily on informal mentorship and peer learning.

In Nigeria, remote work has been most common in industries such as fintech, telecommunications, education, and creative services. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) show that 22% of urban white-collar employees transitioned to remote work after the pandemic. However, the experience has faced significant challenges. Frequent power outages, unstable internet, and poor digital infrastructure have obstructed consistent virtual interaction. A study by Onah and Adebayo (2022) found that 64% of Nigerian employees working remotely felt detached from their organizations, while 57% reported a drop in interpersonal trust and difficulty accessing real-time feedback. Additionally, managers struggled to maintain organizational values, motivate teams, and reinforce performance standards. As a result, the shift to remote work has revealed serious gaps in organizational integration, threatening long-term cohesion and workforce alignment.

Statement of the Problem

Remote work has become a transformative trend in Nigeria's post-pandemic workforce, offering increased flexibility, cost savings, and access to a broader talent pool. However, beneath these benefits lie significant disruptions to organizational culture and workplace relationships, especially

in urban professional centers like Abuja. As Nigeria's administrative and political hub, Abuja hosts many government agencies, international NGOs, private companies, and diplomatic missions, many of which adopted remote or hybrid work models during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While these models persist in sectors such as technology, education, and consulting, their unintended effects on organizational cohesion and interpersonal relationships are becoming more apparent.

In Abuja, where the work culture traditionally values face-to-face collaboration, hierarchy, and physical presence, remote work has led to a noticeable decline in workplace communication, mentorship, and informal learning opportunities. Many organizations have reported decreases in team bonding, trust, and employee morale, especially among younger staff and new hires who lack established relationships with colleagues or superiors. According to Onah and Adebayo (2022), over 64% of remote workers in urban Nigerian centers, including Abuja, feel isolated and detached from organizational goals and culture. Similarly, a report by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) indicates that while approximately 22% of urban white-collar employees work remotely, more than half of them report feeling less connected to their teams and face challenges with accountability and collaboration.

Furthermore, Nigeria's infrastructural issues like unreliable electricity, limited internet access in parts of Abuja, and high data costs worsen the problem by making virtual engagement inconsistent and frustrating. Consequently, managers struggle more with supervising remote teams, reinforcing company values, and maintaining a unified workplace culture. These difficulties are exacerbated by the lack of clear organizational strategies or training on managing professional relationships in virtual settings.

Research Objectives

To examine how remote work has influenced organizational culture among employees in selected organizations and its impact on the development and maintenance of social bonds among colleagues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research reviewed some literature on the concept of remote work and how it influences organizational culture, and also the impact it has on the development and maintenance of social bonds among employees. Remote work has become not only a necessity during the 2019 pandemic but also a preferred long-term option for many professionals.

Remote Work

Remote work has forced organizations to reconsider traditional notions of presence. Physical visibility is no longer sufficient or necessary for cultural integration. Instead, digital presence marked by active participation in virtual meetings, responsiveness, and task engagement has become a new yardstick for involvement (Bilderback & Kilpatrick, 2024). The shift challenges

conventional norms for communicating organizational values, rituals and symbols in the absence of shared physical space (Bilderback & Kilpatrick, 2024).

Remote work and Organizational culture

Sharma (2023) in his work, Impact of Remote Work on Organizational Culture, notes that remote work can weaken organizational identity and reduce spontaneous cultural reinforcement, such as hallway conversations or casual office rituals, which historically served to reinforce shared values.

Mozammel, Irum, and Abdulla (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study in Bahrain and found that remote work accounted for 16.5% of variation in cultural change within organizations, influencing employee performance, team dynamics, and the sense of belonging. Their findings suggest that remote work can substantially reshape organizational norms and identities.

A more recent article by Petitta and Ghezzi (2025) examines how a reduced sense of belonging can exacerbate the negative effects of work stressors. The authors argue that belongingness mediates the relationship between remote work and outcomes like performance and distress, serving as a protective factor (Rome-based study) (Petitta & Ghezzi, 2025).

Remote work and Social Bonds

Beyond formal work, socially oriented practices help maintain ties. Zhang (2025), indicated that participation in company community sports (CCS) fostered both intra-group and organization-level integration in remote or hybrid environments. This suggests that structured social activities can bolster social cohesion even when physical co-presence is limited.

The literature emphasizes that organizational culture and social bonds are interdependent under remote work. Without informal, spontaneous social interactions, culture must be intentionally maintained through digital rituals and mechanisms (Sharma, 2023; Yaqub, 2025). Social bonds trust, shared identity, and support act as the glue that sustains culture. For example, Mozammel et al. (2025), show that team dynamics and relationships, alongside remote work, significantly impact cultural change and performance.

Theoretical framework

Symbolic Interactionism is a sociological theory that highlights the importance of symbols and everyday social interactions in shaping meaning and reality. The theory was first developed by George Herbert Mead, an American philosopher and sociologist affiliated with the University of Chicago. However, it was his student, Herbert Blumer, who officially coined the term "symbolic interactionism" in the 1930s. The roots of the theory can be traced back to the broader American pragmatist tradition, which sees individuals as active participants in forming their social realities through communication and interpretation. At the core of symbolic interactionism are three fundamental assumptions: first, that people act toward things based on the meanings these things hold for them; second, that these meanings come from social interaction; and third, that meanings

are altered through an interpretive process used by individuals when engaging with what they encounter (Blumer, 1969). Unlike structuralist theories that focus on macro-level forces, such as institutions or class, symbolic interactionism operates on a micro-sociological level, highlighting how everyday human interactions create larger social patterns, including culture, norms, and identity. The theory emphasizes the significance of face-to-face interactions in forming shared meanings, norms, and the social self. Through both verbal and non-verbal communication, individuals learn group expectations, develop attachments, and internalize organizational or group identities.

Applying symbolic interactionism to the study of remote work and its impact on organizational culture and social bonds in Nigeria, particularly in cities such as Abuja and Lagos, reveals how the absence of physical presence alters the symbolic ways workplace relationships are formed. In traditional office settings, employees engage in informal interactions, such as corridor chats, team lunches, and spontaneous problem-solving, all of which serve as symbolic acts that convey inclusion, trust, and shared values. These rituals and casual interactions are not just social niceties; they are crucial to how employees create meaning, interpret workplace expectations, and develop a sense of identity with the organization. However, with the widespread shift to remote work, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these social exchanges have been replaced by virtual meetings, emails, and chat apps that are more task-focused and functional. As symbolic interactionism points out, this shift reduces opportunities for symbolic expression and understanding. Employees, particularly new hires or junior staff, may struggle to understand the organization's culture, establish personal connections, or access informal mentoring opportunities. The lack of shared physical spaces also limits non-verbal cues such as body language, tone, and workplace rituals, which are vital for fostering mutual understanding and a sense of belonging.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, which is suitable for exploring employees' subjective meanings and lived experiences regarding how remote work influences organizational culture and social connections. A qualitative approach provides an in-depth understanding of how employees interpret changes in workplace dynamics, team cohesion, and cultural values within remote or hybrid work settings. The study is grounded in the Symbolic Interactionist theoretical framework, emphasizing the importance of everyday social interactions and shared symbols in shaping meaning and identity within organizational contexts.

The target population comprises employees engaged in remote or hybrid work across selected formal organizations in Abuja, Nigeria, where remote work has been adopted with varying degrees of consistency. Abuja was selected due to its high concentration of public sector agencies, international NGOs, and private companies that transitioned to remote operations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus is on professionals whose roles generally involve interpersonal interaction, team collaboration, and cultural engagement in the workplace.

The study focused on four organizations in Abuja that have adopted remote or hybrid work models: the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in Garki, which promotes remote work among its IT and administrative staff; TechHer Nigeria in Wuse II, a civil society

organization advancing digital inclusion for women through remote collaboration tools; the Open Government Partnership Nigeria (OGP Nigeria) within the Federal Ministry of Justice in the Central Business District, which implemented flexible hybrid work structures during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to apply them; and CivicHive by BudgIT Foundation in Utako, a civic tech NGO that operates hybrid work arrangements across its research, communications, and technology teams.

These organizations were chosen because they represent a mix of public sector, civil society, and tech-related workplaces, offering diverse organizational cultures and remote work experiences. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, targeting employees who have worked remotely for at least six consecutive months. This ensured that participants had enough exposure to virtual work environments and could provide meaningful insights into their cultural and relational effects.

The sample size included 20 participants, evenly distributed across the four selected organizations (i.e., five employees per organization). In addition to staff members, one manager or senior officer from each organization was also interviewed, bringing the total number of interviews to 24. This group comprises individuals from diverse backgrounds, including various ranks, genders, and departmental roles, thereby capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were the primary tool for data collection. The interview guide featured open-ended questions about changes in communication styles, workplace rituals, team cohesion, trust, informal mentorship, and employees' sense of belonging following the shift to remote work. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, depending on the participant's availability and preference. Each session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent for accuracy and transcription.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, based on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The interviews were transcribed, coded, and organized into key themes related to symbolic interactionist concepts, such as meaning-making, shared norms, and the formation or dissolution of organizational identity. NVivo 12 software supported the analysis by organizing codes and identifying patterns across responses. The study also followed strict ethical standards. Before fieldwork, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology at the relevant university. Participants received a detailed informed consent form that explained the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. To protect participant anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned during transcription and reporting, and all data were securely stored on encrypted drives accessible only to the researcher.

RESULTS

This section presents the study's findings, based on its two research objectives. The data was collected from 24 respondents, including staff and managerial personnel from four organizations in Abuja: NITDA (Garki), TechHer Nigeria (Wuse II), OGP Nigeria (Central Business District), and CivicHive by BudgIT (Utako). The analysis is thematically organized according to the research objectives, with respondents' narratives cited to reflect their experiences.

Objective One: To examine how remote work has influenced organizational culture among employees in selected organizations

The data reveal that remote work has had a marked effect on the understanding, transmission, and experience of organizational culture. Respondents expressed that shared norms, institutional values, and informal learning have become harder to maintain in virtual settings.

One respondent from NITDA remarked:

"Before remote work, you could sense the seriousness of our workplace just by walking into the office people's posture, their dress, the tone of conversations. Now, there is no atmosphere. Everyone logs in and logs out."

A manager at OGP Nigeria echoed similar sentiments, saying:

"Culture is more than the mission statement; it is in the way people greet, joke, and even argue. Remote work stripped away all of that. Everything is just performance and deadlines now."

A relatively new employee at CivicHive observed:

"When I joined remotely, I had no idea what the values were. There was no orientation that could replicate what you learn by just watching others in the physical workspace."

Another respondent from TechHer Nigeria shared:

"Our work culture used to be very relaxed and people-centered, but when we moved online, that connection started fading. We only saw the formal side of each other."

A senior officer at NITDA explained:

"It's difficult to pass on culture remotely. You can't mentor people the same way or show them the ropes. They don't learn from watching anymore."

Some respondents highlighted attempts to maintain culture virtually, but noted that these efforts often felt artificial or short-lived. As one respondent from TechHer noted:

"We tried to do virtual hangouts and check-ins, but they always felt forced. People showed up out of duty, not connection."

Table 1: KII Responses on: The Influence of Remote Work on Organizational Culture

Respondent Code	Organization	Summary of Response / Key Quote	Emerging Theme
R1	NITDA (Garki)	"You could sense the seriousness of our workplace just by walking into the office… now there's no atmosphere."	Loss of symbolic cultural cues
R2	TechHer Nigeria (Wuse II)	"We only saw the formal side of each other after we moved online."	Erosion of informal culture
R3	CivicHive (Utako)	"There was no orientation that could replicate what you learn by just watching others in the physical workspace."	Disrupted social learning
R4	OGP Nigeria (CBD)	"Culture is more than the mission statement… remote work stripped all that away."	Fragmentation of values
R5	TechHer Nigeria (Wuse II)	"Virtual hangouts felt forced. People showed up out of duty, not connection."	Surface-level engagement
R6	NITDA (Garki)	"You can't mentor people the same way… they don't learn from watching anymore."	Breakdown of mentorship

Objective Two: To assess the impact of remote work on the development and maintenance of social bonds among colleagues

The findings under this objective indicate a noticeable weakening of interpersonal bonds among employees due to the absence of informal social interactions. Many respondents reported a loss of camaraderie, reduced emotional support, and increased isolation.

An employee from CivicHive explained:

"When we were in the office, I used to talk with my teammates while making tea or during lunch. Now, I only hear from them if there's work to be done. It's lonely."

At TechHer Nigeria, a communications staff member noted:

"It's hard to build friendships remotely. You can't just laugh at someone's joke in passing or join a conversation. Everything has to be scheduled now."

A program manager at OGP Nigeria commented:

"Collaboration has become more mechanical. People don't trust each other like before because there's no human connection. Just tasks and messages."

One junior employee at NITDA shared:

"I feel invisible in the team. When I worked physically, people would check in with me. Now, nobody even knows if you're struggling unless you say it yourself."

Another staff member from OGP Nigeria added:

"I've worked with some colleagues for two years and still haven't met them in person. It's hard to bond with someone when you've never shared a physical space."

A senior officer at TechHer Nigeria reflected on how leadership changed:

"Remote work made it harder for us as managers to know when someone is emotionally down. In the office, you can read body language. Online, everyone just smiles and logs off."

Table 2: KII Responses on: The Impact of Remote Work on Social Bonds Among Employees

Respondent Code	Organization	Summary of Response / Key Quote	Emerging Theme
R7	CivicHive (Utako)	"I only hear from my teammates if there's work to be done. It's lonely."	Social isolation
R8	TechHer Nigeria (Wuse II)	"You can't just laugh at someone's joke or join a conversation. Everything has to be scheduled."	Lack of spontaneous interaction
R9	OGP Nigeria (CBD)	"Collaboration has become mechanical… just tasks and messages."	Decline in interpersonal trust
R10	NITDA (Garki)	"In the office, people would check in with me. Now, nobody knows if you're struggling."	Disconnection from emotional support
R11	OGP Nigeria (CBD)	"I've worked with some colleagues for two years and still haven't met them."	Weak team bonding
R12	TechHer Nigeria (Wuse II)	"Online, everyone just smiles and logs off… as a manager, I miss seeing people's real emotions."	Disrupted emotional intelligence cues

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to examine the impact of remote work on organizational culture and social bonds among employees in selected organizations in Abuja, Nigeria. Guided by the Symbolic Interactionist theory, the study examined how the absence of daily face-to-face interaction, essential

for meaning-making and cultural transmission, has impacted the lived experiences of remote workers. The findings are discussed below concerning the research objective.

Impact of Remote Work on Organizational Culture

The findings revealed that remote work has significantly disrupted employees' experience and understanding of organizational culture. Across all four organizations studied NITDA, TechHer Nigeria, OGP Nigeria, and CivicHive respondents consistently reported that the transition to remote work weakened their ability to internalize institutional norms, interpret workplace values, and develop a sense of organizational identity. These findings align directly with the central tenets of Symbolic Interactionism, which emphasizes that people construct meaning and shared understanding through everyday interactions, rituals, and symbols (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). In traditional office settings, organizational culture is often transmitted through subtle, informal cues, such as how superiors interact with subordinates, shared jokes in communal areas, and visible norms in dress, time management, or interpersonal conduct. However, in remote work settings, these opportunities for informal learning and symbolic reinforcement are largely absent. As one respondent from NITDA put it, "There is no atmosphere anymore." This reflects how the removal of physical context impedes the social process through which employees interpret and absorb workplace expectations. Another respondent at CivicHive noted that orientation programs were insufficient for helping new employees understand the workplace culture, as there were no shared physical experiences or interactions to observe and emulate. These findings illustrate that organizational culture is not only taught through policies or onboarding sessions but is also learned primarily through symbolic observation and repeated social interaction. This process is severely weakened in remote work contexts. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this weakening of culture represents a breakdown in the shared process of meaning-making. When employees no longer interact in environments where values are socially performed and reinforced, they begin to experience the organization as fragmented or impersonal. The result is a workplace culture that feels shallow, formalized, and disjointed from daily employee life.

Impact of Remote Work on the Development and Maintenance of Social Bonds

These focused on how remote work affects the development and maintenance of social bonds among colleagues. The findings showed that remote work not only reduces the frequency of informal social interaction but also erodes the depth of relationships and emotional connection among coworkers. Respondents frequently reported feelings of isolation, weakened collaboration, and difficulty building trust, particularly when working with colleagues they had never met in person. These outcomes also align with Symbolic Interactionism, which posits that symbols, gestures, and routine interactions are central to forming and maintaining human relationships (Blumer, 1969). In the absence of physical co-presence, employees lose access to nonverbal communication cues, such as tone, facial expressions, and body language, that are critical for interpreting emotional states and building rapport. A staff member from TechHer Nigeria described remote interaction as "mechanical," while another from CivicHive noted that they "only hear from teammates when there is work to be done." These statements reflect how virtual communication platforms tend to prioritize task completion over relational connection, leaving little room for casual, emotionally affirming exchanges that generally occur in office settings. According to

symbolic interactionism, such informal exchanges are not trivial; they are the very foundation of symbolic solidarity and group belonging. In their absence, relationships become formal, fragmented, and ultimately less meaningful. Interestingly, a few respondents noted that remote work facilitated one-on-one professional communication, such as reaching out to managers privately through messaging platforms. While this may reflect some adaptive symbolic interaction, it does not fully compensate for the loss of collective experiences and shared rituals, such as tea breaks, birthday celebrations, or spontaneous hallway chats, that strengthen workplace social bonds. These findings suggest that while virtual platforms enable functional communication, they are structurally limited in fostering the symbolic depth required for sustained interpersonal bonding and trust.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of remote work on organizational culture and social bonds among employees in selected organizations in Abuja, Nigeria. Using a qualitative approach grounded in Symbolic Interactionism, it examined how the shift from physical to virtual workspaces has influenced how employees internalize workplace values and maintain interpersonal connections. The findings revealed that remote work has significantly altered employees' experience of organizational culture. Without the shared physical spaces and spontaneous social interactions that characterize traditional workplaces, employees struggle to interpret informal norms, engage with symbolic cues, and feel a sense of cultural identity within their organizations. New staff, in particular, expressed difficulty understanding expectations and feeling integrated into organizational life. In terms of social bonding, the study found that remote work weakens informal relationships, interpersonal trust, and emotional support among colleagues. Respondents frequently described feelings of isolation, disconnection, and the transactional nature of online communication. The Symbolic Interactionist framework helps explain how the absence of face-to-face interaction undermines the symbolic processes, such as shared rituals, informal mentorship, and nonverbal communication, through which relationships and shared meanings are formed in the workplace.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, several recommendations are proposed to assist organizations, particularly those in Abuja and similar urban contexts, in adopting remote work strategies that balance the preservation of organizational culture and social bonds. First, organizations are encouraged to develop hybrid work models that blend remote flexibility with regular in-person interaction. There is a need to institutionalize virtual culture-building rituals. Remote workspaces should not function solely as productivity centers; instead, they should include structured opportunities for cultural connection. Organizations should implement mentorship and onboarding programs tailored explicitly for remote staff, with emphasis on new and junior employees. These programs should pair new hires with experienced staff, facilitate consistent virtual engagement, and provide cultural orientation through interactive sessions that go beyond administrative tasks. Training for managers on symbolic leadership in virtual environments is critical. Managers should be equipped to recognize emotional cues, maintain empathetic communication, and foster informal connections within their teams even when working remotely. Moreover, it is essential for HR departments to

monitor employee well-being and social integration regularly. Through anonymous surveys, focus group discussions, and periodic one-on-one check-ins, organizations can gather feedback on employees' emotional states and cultural connectedness, thereby addressing potential issues early. Finally, organizations are advised to create a culture documentation strategy. This involves codifying values, traditions, stories, and informal norms in accessible formats such as videos, newsletters, and storytelling sessions that can be shared with both on-site and remote workers.

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