Remote Working and Employee Satisfaction in the Information Technology Sector: A Conceptual Reappraisal Grounded in Wellbeing and Work Experience

Oluwanifesimi Ibikunle, MSc

Department of Project Management, Faculty of Business and Law, University of Northampton, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Studies & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Temiloluwa Ajibade, PhD

Health Business School, Health Science University, London, United Kingdom; and PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Kennedy Oberhiri Obohwemu, PhD

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Christianah Adekunbi Falade, PhD

Department of Business Management, Scholars School System, Leeds Trinity University Partnership, Bradford Campus, United Kingdom

Charles Leyman Kachitsa, PhD

Faculty of Business Management and Enterprise, Leeds Trinity University, GBS Partnership, Manchester, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Oladipo Vincent Akinmade, MPH

Digital Health and Rights Project (Center for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, CIM), University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Oluwafemi Emmanuel Ooju, MHPM

World Health Organisation, Abuja, Nigeria; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Eddy Eidenehi Esezobor, PhD

Department of Management Studies, Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (UCAM), Murcia, Spain; and PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Daniel Obande Haruna, MSc

Department of Psychology, St. Mary's University, London, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Festus Ituah, PhD

School of Health and Sports Science, Regent College, London, United Kingdom; and Department of Interdisciplinary Research & Statistics, PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Temiloluwa Ajibade, Health Business School, Health Science University, London, United Kingdom; and PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

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Abstract

Remote working has shifted from a marginal practice to a central feature of contemporary employment, particularly within the information technology sector, where digital infrastructure and project-based work make distributed arrangements common. Although many studies report positive links between remote work and employee satisfaction, the existing evidence often remains fragmented or focused on narrow indicators. A broader perspective is needed to understand how employees actually experience remote work and why satisfaction varies across individuals and organisations.

This paper offers a theoretically grounded reappraisal of how remote working shapes satisfaction through wellbeing, work-life balance and perceptions of organisational support. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and Self Determination Theory, the paper brings together recent empirical findings and organisational scholarship to show that satisfaction in remote settings does not arise from flexibility alone. It develops through the quality of autonomy, employees experience, the strength of their relationships with the organisation and the way remote work practices are structured and supported. These processes influence how employees interpret their work environment, manage boundaries and sustain motivation.

The paper contributes to current debates by clarifying the mechanisms that strengthen or weaken satisfaction in the IT sector. It also presents a conceptual framework that moves beyond simple comparisons between remote and office-based work, offering a more grounded understanding of the conditions that support positive remote work experiences. Implications are outlined for organisations seeking to promote wellbeing, engagement and sustainable performance in digitally mediated environments.

Keywords

Remote working, employee satisfaction, wellbeing, information technology sector, social exchange theory, self-determination theory

Introduction

Remote working has become a defining feature of contemporary employment, particularly within the information technology (IT) sector, where digital infrastructure, distributed workflows, and modular tasks enable work to be conducted independently of physical location. Although remote working existed prior to 2020, its rapid expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic marked a structural transformation rather than a temporary adjustment. Organisations across the globe transitioned swiftly to remote arrangements, many of which have since been institutionalised as part of long-term workforce strategies (Kniffin et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Research increasingly suggests that this shift has had lasting implications for job design, employee wellbeing, and organisational culture, positioning remote working as a durable reconfiguration of work rather than a short-term crisis response (Spurk and Straub, 2020; Carillo et al., 2021). Despite widespread adoption, important questions remain regarding how remote working shapes employee satisfaction and the conditions under which its potential benefits are fully realised.

Employee satisfaction has emerged as one of the most frequently examined outcomes within the remote working literature. Early organisational narratives and empirical studies largely portrayed remote working as inherently advantageous, emphasising enhanced autonomy, schedule flexibility, reduced commuting time, and improved work-life balance (Allen et al., 2015). From this perspective, remote working was expected to increase satisfaction by affording employees greater control over how and when work is performed. However, evidence accumulated over the past decade challenges the assumption that these benefits are universal or automatic. Instead, employee satisfaction under remote working conditions appears highly contingent on contextual, organisational, and individual factors.

Empirical research conducted both before and after 2020 indicates that remote working generates a combination of resources and demands. Under supportive organisational conditions, remote working has been associated with higher satisfaction, stronger wellbeing, and reduced stress. Under less supportive conditions, it has been linked to emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and declining attachment to the organisation (Charalampous et al., 2019; Molino et al., 2020). Recent studies continue to report mixed and sometimes contradictory findings. While some employees experience improved wellbeing and job satisfaction, others report social isolation, blurred boundaries between work and non-work domains, role ambiguity, and extended working hours (Felstead and Reuschke, 2020; Eurofound, 2020; Eurofound, 2022). A longitudinal study tracking remote workers over four years found notable improvements in happiness, work-life balance, and retention, yet it also highlighted the importance of supportive organisational structures to prevent overwork and disconnection (Ahmadi and Shadpour, 2025). These findings underscore that remote working should not be treated as a uniform job condition with predictable outcomes. Its effects depend on how work is designed, how collaboration is organised, and how employees experience ongoing organisational support.

The IT sector provides a particularly salient context for examining these dynamics. IT professionals commonly operate

in cognitively intensive, project-based environments characterised by rapid technological change, tight deadlines, and high-performance expectations (Raghuram et al., 2019). Remote working may alleviate certain pressures in this context, including commuting strain and rigid scheduling. At the same time, it can intensify others. Coordination becomes more complex, informal communication is reduced, and effort may be less visible to managers and peers. Concerns around career signalling, progression, and collaborative problem solving are often heightened when work is mediated primarily through digital platforms (Saleem and Khan, 2024). In knowledge intensive sectors such as IT, constant connectivity and digital presenteeism can further undermine psychological wellbeing, even where formal flexibility exists (Derks et al., 2021). These tensions suggest that employee satisfaction in remote IT work cannot be adequately explained through surface level comparisons between remote and office-based arrangements.

This paper argues that a deeper theoretical approach is required to explain why remote working enhances satisfaction for some IT employees while diminishing it for others. It advances a conceptual reappraisal that positions employee satisfaction as an emergent outcome shaped by wellbeing experiences, the quality of autonomy, and the nature of reciprocal relationships between employees and organisations. Rather than treating flexibility or location as direct predictors of satisfaction, the analysis emphasises how employees interpret and experience remote working arrangements within broader organisational systems.

Recent research grounded in motivational and wellbeing theories supports this perspective, suggesting that remote working improves employee satisfaction primarily when it enables autonomy, competence, and social connectedness rather than merely changing where work takes place (Van Steenbergen et al., 2018; Vayre and Pignault, 2022). To develop this argument, the paper draws on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Self Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) as complementary explanatory frameworks. Social Exchange Theory highlights how perceptions of organisational support, trust, and fairness shape employee attitudes and affective responses. In remote working contexts, reduced physical presence may heighten employees' sensitivity to signals of support or neglect. Self Determination Theory, in contrast, focuses on the fulfilment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Remote working may support or undermine these needs depending on task design, leadership practices, and digital communication norms.

Through the integration of these perspectives, this paper contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it moves beyond binary assessments of remote versus office-based work. Second, it foregrounds employee wellbeing and work experience as central mechanisms linking remote working to satisfaction. Third, it offers a sector-specific conceptual framework that reflects the realities of contemporary IT work.

This approach provides a more robust foundation for future empirical research and more grounded guidance for organisations seeking to sustain satisfaction and wellbeing in remote and hybrid work environments.

Remote Working and the Changing Nature of Work

Remote working is commonly understood as an arrangement in which employees carry out their tasks away from traditional organisational premises, supported by digital tools that allow communication, coordination and knowledge sharing. This understanding has been well established for some time, particularly in sectors that rely heavily on digital infrastructures. The IT sector is one such example, where virtual collaboration and geographically dispersed teams have long been part of everyday practice. The scale and normalisation of remote working have grown substantially in recent years, reflecting broader organisational shifts and employee expectations.

The expansion of remote working has prompted organisations to rethink long-held assumptions about supervision, performance monitoring and what it means to belong to a workplace community. Physical presence once acted as a visible indicator of commitment and productivity. Remote work challenges this assumption and places greater emphasis on trust, output based evaluation and the capacity for self-management. Recent research shows that supervisors navigating telework environments must balance job demands, available resources and employee satisfaction to maintain effective oversight (Peiró et al., 2024). These changes shape how employees interpret their work environment and how they evaluate their own satisfaction.

Studies continue to show that remote working can strengthen employees' sense of control over their time, pace and workflow. This sense of control is closely linked to job satisfaction and can support greater engagement and wellbeing. A decade of bibliometric evidence highlights that remote work often enhances perceptions of autonomy and safety, which in turn contribute to satisfaction (Belaid et al., 2025). At the same time, remote work can introduce new pressures. Employees may feel the need to remain constantly available, particularly when digital communication tools create expectations of rapid responses. This can lead to work spilling into personal time and contribute to emotional exhaustion. Recent studies on electronic performance monitoring show that heightened surveillance can undermine trust and reduce job satisfaction, especially when employees feel watched or constrained (Brinson et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the importance of examining not only whether employees work remotely, but how remote work is structured, supported and experienced.

The IT sector provides a particularly relevant context for these debates. IT professionals often work in fast paced, cognitively demanding environments where deadlines, innovation pressures and complex coordination tasks are routine. Remote

working can ease some of these pressures by offering flexibility and reducing commuting time. However, it can also complicate collaboration, reduce visibility and create uncertainty about performance expectations. Evidence from recent organisational studies shows that remote work can influence task innovativeness, performance and employees' willingness to continue working remotely, depending on how well organisational systems support distributed work (Dzandu et al., 2023). These insights highlight the need for organisations to design remote work arrangements that balance autonomy with support, and flexibility with clarity.

Employee Satisfaction as a Multidimensional Construct

Employee satisfaction is widely recognised as a multidimensional construct that captures how individuals feel about their work roles, conditions and organisational relationships. It reflects emotional, cognitive and evaluative responses to the work environment rather than a single, uniform sentiment. Contemporary research continues to show that satisfaction is shaped by a combination of job characteristics, interpersonal experiences and organisational practices (Joanna & Jerzy, 2020). In remote working contexts, satisfaction cannot be reduced to convenience or a preference for working from home. It involves broader assessments of wellbeing, recognition, autonomy and fairness, all of which interact in subtle ways when work is distributed across locations.

Wellbeing sits at the centre of these evaluations. Psychological wellbeing is influenced by workload manageability, opportunities for recovery, social connection and the perceived meaningfulness of work. Recent evidence shows that remote working can support wellbeing when it reduces commuting stress, allows employees to shape their work rhythms and provides space for focused tasks. A 2025 review of empirical studies highlights that remote work can enhance wellbeing when employees have adequate resources, supportive management and clear expectations (Wishart, 2025). At the same time, the review notes that wellbeing outcomes remain inconsistent, with some employees experiencing isolation, cognitive overload and reduced access to informal support. Editorial work in organisational psychology similarly emphasises that remote work can improve health and satisfaction, but only when organisations actively address social connection and workload pressures (van Dick et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the idea that wellbeing is not an automatic by-product of remote work but a product of how remote work is designed and supported.

Work-life balance forms another critical dimension of satisfaction. Remote working offers flexibility that can help employees align work with personal responsibilities, but it can also weaken temporal boundaries between work and non-work domains. Studies consistently show that blurred boundaries can lead to longer working hours, increased digital availability and difficulties disengaging from work. Remote workers often report better work–life balance overall, but this balance declines when expectations of constant availability are not managed (Adisa et al., 2021; Shirmohammadi, Aub & Beigi, 2022). This suggests that satisfaction depends on whether employees experience flexibility as empowering or as a source of continuous obligation.

Recognition and fairness also shape satisfaction in remote contexts. Employees evaluate whether their contributions are visible, whether performance assessments feel equitable and whether development opportunities remain accessible (Okuboye, 2021; Byrd, 2022; Tarigan, Gustomo & Bangun, 2023). Bibliometric evidence from 2025 shows that perceptions of fairness and safety strongly influence satisfaction among remote workers, particularly when digital monitoring or surveillance is present (Belaid et al., 2025). These relational and structural dimensions remind us that satisfaction is not simply about individual preference but about the quality of the organisational environment that surrounds remote work.

These insights show that employee satisfaction in remote working contexts is shaped by multiple, interdependent factors. Wellbeing, work-life balance, recognition, autonomy and fairness all contribute to how employees interpret their experiences. Understanding satisfaction, therefore, requires attention to the broader organisational systems that enable or constrain positive remote working experiences.

Social Exchange Theory and Remote Work Satisfaction

Social Exchange Theory offers a useful way to understand how employees interpret their experiences of remote working. It proposes that employment relationships are shaped through reciprocal exchanges of resources, support and commitment. Employees assess how fairly they are treated and whether the organisation invests in their success, and these perceptions influence their satisfaction, motivation and willingness to contribute (Blau, 2017). In remote settings, where informal cues and spontaneous interactions are reduced, these judgements often become even more salient.

Organisational support takes on heightened significance when employees work remotely. Access to appropriate tools, clear communication and responsive management all signal whether remote workers are valued or overlooked. Recent research shows that remote work environments characterised by strong social and job resources tend to produce higher satisfaction and engagement, particularly when employees feel trusted and supported (Cappetta et al., 2025). Studies examining wellbeing in remote contexts also highlight that organisational practices play a central role in shaping employees' experiences, with supportive structures helping to buffer the challenges of distributed work (Wishart, 2025). When organisations invest in remote work infrastructure and demonstrate confidence in

employees' autonomy, workers are more likely to reciprocate with positive attitudes, stronger commitment and higher satisfaction reciprocal positive attitudes.

The opposite dynamic can also occur. Remote work arrangements that rely heavily on digital surveillance, rigid monitoring or ambiguous expectations can create a sense of imbalance in the exchange relationship. Employees may feel that trust is lacking or that their contributions are less visible, which can undermine satisfaction even when flexibility is available. Recent studies on remote work environments show that reduced visibility and unclear performance expectations can weaken employees' sense of belonging and fairness, leading to lower engagement and diminished satisfaction (Capone et al., 2024). Research exploring the broader implications of remote work on organisational culture also notes that shifts in communication patterns and leadership practices can influence whether employees feel included or marginalised (Bilderback & Kilpatrick, 2024). These findings reinforce the idea that remote work is not experienced uniformly; the quality of the exchange relationship shapes how employees interpret the same structural arrangements exchange relationship quality.

Social Exchange Theory therefore helps explain why similar remote work arrangements can produce divergent outcomes. Employees who perceive high levels of support, fairness and trust tend to experience remote work as empowering and satisfying. Those who encounter surveillance, limited career support or reduced visibility may interpret remote work as a sign of organisational withdrawal rather than investment. Understanding these relational dynamics is essential for designing remote work practices that foster satisfaction, engagement and long-term commitment.

Self Determination Theory and the Quality of Autonomy

Self Determination Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding how employees experience remote work because it focuses on the psychological conditions that sustain motivation and wellbeing Self Determination Theory foundations. The theory highlights three core needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. When these needs are supported, employees are more likely to feel motivated, engaged and satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Remote working is often assumed to enhance autonomy simply by giving employees more control over where they work. However, recent research shows that the *quality* of autonomy matters far more than the amount.

High quality autonomy involves having meaningful choice, clarity about expectations and access to the resources needed to perform effectively. Studies exploring motivation in remote work environments show that autonomy supports wellbeing only when it is paired with clear communication, constructive feedback and opportunities for skill development (Couto et al.,

2025). When these conditions are present, employees are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and stronger satisfaction with their work. This aligns with broader conceptual reviews of Self Determination Theory, which emphasise that autonomy must be supported rather than imposed for motivation to flourish (McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

Autonomy can also be experienced negatively. When employees feel that autonomy is a sign of managerial withdrawal, unclear expectations or a lack of support, it can undermine motivation. Remote workers may interpret this form of autonomy as abandonment rather than empowerment. Evidence from workplace motivation research shows that environments that fail to support competence and relatedness can weaken the benefits of autonomy and reduce overall wellbeing.

Relatedness is particularly vulnerable in remote settings. Reduced informal interaction, fewer spontaneous conversations and limited social cues can weaken employees' sense of connection to colleagues and the organisation. Recent work on remote motivation highlights that relatedness remains a critical need, even when employees value flexibility and independence (Olafsen, Marescaux & Kujanpää, 2025). Without intentional efforts to maintain social bonds, remote workers may feel isolated, which can diminish satisfaction even when autonomy is high remote.

Applying Self Determination Theory to remote work therefore highlights that satisfaction depends on more than the removal of physical oversight. Organisations need to cultivate connection, learning and meaningful choice. Remote work becomes most satisfying when employees feel trusted, supported and connected, and when their autonomy is accompanied by the structure and resources needed to thrive.

## Towards an Integrated Conceptual Framework

Bringing Social Exchange Theory and Self Determination Theory together offers a richer and more complete way of understanding how employees experience satisfaction in remote working environments. Social Exchange Theory helps explain how employees interpret organisational intent, fairness and support. These relational judgements shape whether employees feel valued, trusted and treated equitably. At the same time, Self Determination Theory focuses on the fulfilment of core psychological needs, particularly autonomy, competence and relatedness, which underpin motivation and wellbeing. When these two perspectives are combined, they reveal how remote working influences satisfaction through both relational and experiential pathways (Figure 1).

Recent research reinforces the importance of these dual processes. Studies examining remote work environments show that organisational support, clarity and fairness strongly influence wellbeing and work-related outcomes (Capone et al.,

2024). Reviews of remote working and wellbeing also highlight that employees' experiences depend on the resources available to them, the quality of communication and the extent to which organisations actively address the challenges of distributed work (Wishart, 2025). These findings align with Social Exchange Theory's emphasis on reciprocal expectations and with Self Determination Theory's focus on psychological need fulfilment.

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper positions wellbeing as a central mediating outcome (Figure 1).

Wellbeing is shaped by organisational support, the quality of autonomy and the effectiveness of boundary management. Organisational support signals fairness and investment, which strengthens the exchange relationship. Autonomy quality influences whether employees feel empowered or abandoned. Boundary management affects the extent to which employees can protect recovery time and maintain a healthy separation between work and personal life. Evidence from recent organisational studies shows that these factors interact to shape satisfaction, engagement and performance in remote settings (Capone et al., 2024; Dale, 2024).
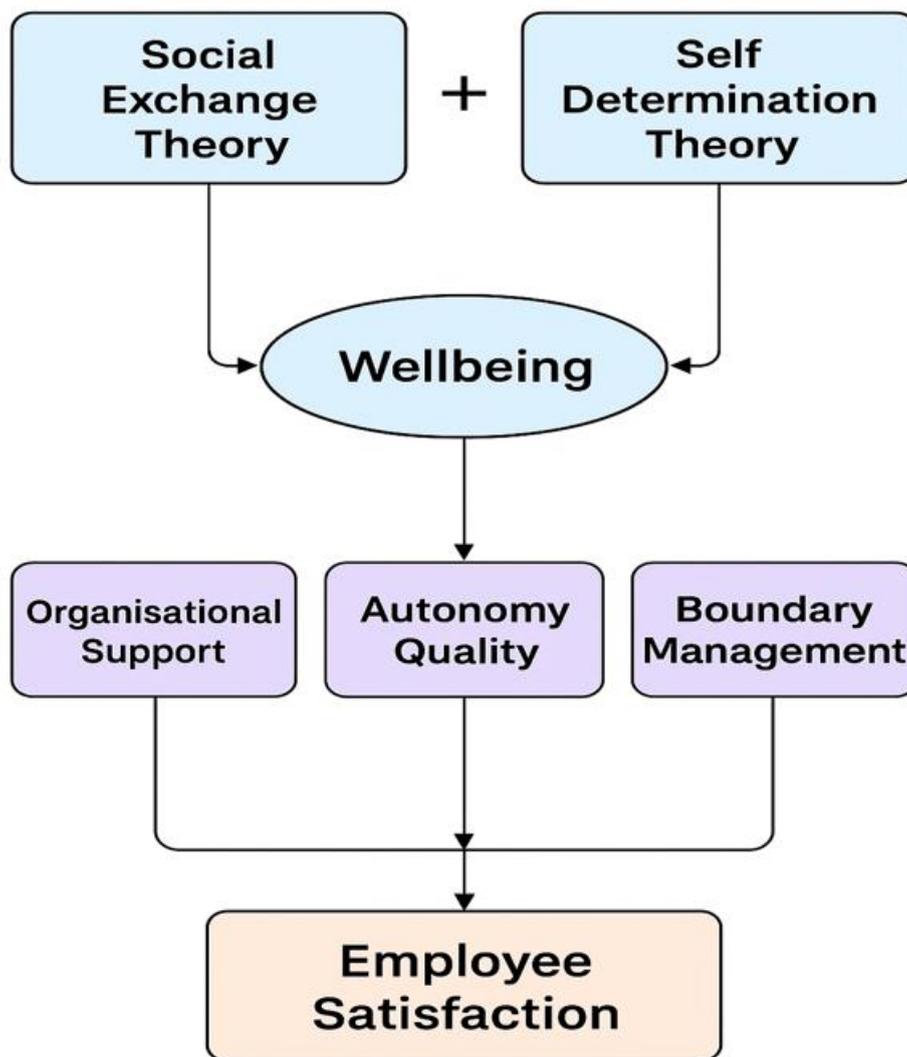
Figure 1: Relational and Psychological Pathways to Remote Work Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction emerges when remote work arrangements align reciprocal expectations with psychological needs. When employees feel supported, trusted and connected, and when their autonomy is accompanied by clarity and opportunities for growth, remote work becomes a context that enhances wellbeing and satisfaction. Conversely, when support is inconsistent, boundaries are blurred or autonomy lacks structure, satisfaction is likely to decline even if flexibility is present. This integrated perspective therefore provides a more nuanced understanding of why remote work produces positive outcomes for some employees and more challenging experiences for others.

Implications for Research and Practice

This paper carries important implications for both researchers and practitioners seeking to understand and improve remote working experiences. Scholars need to move past simple comparisons between remote and office-based work, as these comparisons often flatten the complexity of real working lives. A more productive approach involves examining the specific design features that shape remote work experiences. Elements

such as autonomy quality, communication practices, workload expectations and boundary management deserve closer attention across different occupational groups. Research that follows employees over time would also help to capture how remote work arrangements evolve and how satisfaction shifts as teams, technologies and organisational cultures change. Studies that draw on multiple theoretical perspectives, including relational and psychological frameworks, can deepen understanding of how organisational support and psychological need fulfilment interact to influence wellbeing and satisfaction.

Practical implications are equally significant, especially for leaders and practitioners in the IT sector. Remote working strategies need thoughtful design rather than reliance on flexibility alone. Employees benefit when organisations invest in communication systems that promote clarity, trust and a sense of connection. Managers also need support and training to lead distributed teams effectively. Skills such as giving timely feedback, maintaining visibility without over-monitoring and supporting career development become even more important when teams are not co-located. Wellbeing support should be built into everyday practice, with attention to workload, recovery time and opportunities for social interaction (Dale, 2024; Bilderback & Kilpatrick, 2024).

IT professionals often work under considerable cognitive and time pressure. Remote work can ease some of this pressure, yet it can also introduce challenges related to coordination, visibility and access to informal learning. Organisations that treat remote work as a strategic design challenge are more likely to create conditions that support satisfaction. Employees respond positively when they feel trusted, supported and able to manage their boundaries. Satisfaction grows when autonomy is paired with clear expectations and when contributions are recognised in meaningful ways.

A broader message for both researchers and practitioners is that remote working is not a single experience. Its impact depends on how it is structured, how it is supported and how employees interpret the signals they receive from their organisation. A more thoughtful approach to design and evaluation will help ensure that remote work supports wellbeing, motivation and long-term satisfaction.

Conclusion

Remote working has reshaped how work is organised and lived within the information technology sector. The discussion in this paper shows that employee satisfaction in remote settings does not arise automatically, nor does it follow a single pattern. Satisfaction develops through the combined influence of wellbeing, the quality of relationships between employees and their organisations, and the type of autonomy employees experience. These elements interact in ways that shape how individuals interpret and respond to remote work arrangements.

The analysis presented here draws on Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory to offer a clearer understanding of these dynamics. Social Exchange Theory highlights the importance of trust, fairness and organisational support, while Self Determination Theory draws attention to the psychological conditions that sustain motivation and wellbeing. When these perspectives are brought together, they help explain why remote working strengthens satisfaction in some situations yet creates challenges in others.

Remote work is now firmly embedded in organisational life, particularly in the IT sector. A clearer theoretical foundation is therefore essential for guiding both research and practice. Organisations that understand the relational and psychological processes shaping remote work experiences will be better placed to design arrangements that support wellbeing, foster commitment and sustain satisfaction over time.

Author Contribution

O.I. and T.A undertook the conception and design of the study. The development of the theoretical framework was carried out by O.I. and K.O.O., who also contributed to the primary drafting of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the drafting, revising, and approval of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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