

Remote Working and Career Development in the Information Technology Sector: A Conceptual Reassessment of Skill Formation, Visibility, and Progression

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ABSTRACT

Remote working has reshaped how careers unfold in knowledge-intensive sectors, particularly within information technology. While much of the literature emphasises employee satisfaction and wellbeing, far less attention has been paid to how remote working influences career development, skill acquisition, and perceived progression. This paper develops a conceptual reassessment of career outcomes under remote working conditions, arguing that remote work simultaneously expands access to developmental opportunities while constraining visibility, signalling, and informal learning. Drawing on Human Capital Theory and Social Exchange Theory, the paper conceptualises career development as a socially embedded and structurally mediated process rather than a purely individual outcome. It

proposes that remote working alters three critical mechanisms of career progression: skill formation, career visibility, and access to developmental relationships. The paper contributes to the literature by offering a theoretically grounded framework that explains why remote working enhances career development for some employees while inhibiting it for others, particularly within the IT sector. Implications are discussed for organisational design, leadership practice, and future research.

KEYWORDS

Remote working, career development, skill acquisition, IT sector, human capital, career progression

1. INTRODUCTION

Remote working has become firmly embedded in contemporary employment structures, particularly in the information technology (IT) sector, where digital infrastructure enables work to be conducted across distributed environments. The rapid expansion of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a shift that was already underway, transforming remote working from a peripheral arrangement into a central organisational strategy (Matli, 2020; Sjöberg & Hall, 2021). While early research largely concentrated on employee wellbeing, work–life balance and job satisfaction, far less attention has been directed toward understanding how remote working shapes longer-term career trajectories and the structural conditions that support or hinder progression.

Career development remains a central concern for employees, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors such as IT where continuous skill acquisition, professional visibility and access to complex tasks are essential for maintaining employability and relevance (Haruna et al., 2026; Ibikunle et al., 2026; Wickramasekara et al., 2026). Traditional career development models assume a workplace characterised by physical proximity, informal interaction and observable performance. These assumptions underpin many established mechanisms of progression, including mentoring, sponsorship, stretch assignments and informal learning. Remote working disrupts these foundations, raising important questions about how careers are built, recognised and advanced in digitally mediated environments.

Initial narratives surrounding remote work often emphasised its potential to democratise opportunity. Flexible working arrangements were seen as enabling broader participation, reducing geographical constraints and allowing employees to engage in continuous learning through digital platforms (Roberto et al., 2023; Radovan, 2024). Remote work was also framed as a means of levelling organisational hierarchies by reducing the influence of physical presence and enabling employees to demonstrate competence through outputs rather than visibility. However, emerging evidence suggests that remote working introduces new forms of inequality and constraint. Reduced visibility, limited access to informal mentoring and fewer opportunities for

spontaneous learning may hinder career progression, particularly for employees early in their careers or those without established organisational networks (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2022).

The IT sector provides a particularly revealing context for examining these tensions. IT professionals operate within fast-moving, project-based environments where career progression is closely tied to skill acquisition, project visibility and access to complex problem-solving opportunities (Fagerholm et al., 2018; Baldonado, 2026). Remote working may support career development by offering increased flexibility, autonomy and access to digital learning resources. It can also enable employees to work across geographically dispersed teams, potentially broadening exposure to diverse projects and technologies. At the same time, remote working may restrict access to high-impact assignments, reduce opportunities for informal knowledge exchange and limit the visibility required for recognition and advancement.

Understanding how remote working reshapes career development in the IT sector is therefore essential for organisations seeking to build equitable and sustainable talent pipelines. The emerging evidence suggests that remote work is neither inherently enabling nor inherently limiting; rather, its impact depends on how organisations structure opportunities, distribute visibility and support employees in navigating digitally mediated career pathways.

This paper argues that understanding career development under remote working requires a shift away from individualistic explanations towards a more relational and structural perspective. Career progression is not solely determined by individual effort or capability. It is shaped by access to opportunities, visibility within organisational networks, and participation in developmental relationships. Remote working reconfigures each of these elements.

To capture these dynamics, this paper develops a conceptual framework grounded in Human Capital Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Human Capital Theory explains how employees accumulate skills and competencies that enhance their productivity and career prospects (Becker, 1964). Social Exchange Theory highlights how career opportunities are embedded within

relationships characterised by trust, reciprocity, and organisational support (Blau, 1964). Integrating these perspectives allows for a more nuanced understanding of how remote working reshapes career development processes.

2. RETHINKING CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN REMOTE CONTEXTS

Career development has traditionally been understood as a cumulative process through which individuals acquire skills, gain experience, and progress within organisational structures. Conventional models often assume stable career pathways, visible performance, and regular interaction within shared physical environments (Tomlinson et al., 2018; Alexander, 2023). These assumptions are increasingly difficult to sustain in work settings shaped by remote and hybrid arrangements. Distributed work has altered not only how careers unfold, but also how employees gain recognition, access opportunities, and build professional relationships.

In remote contexts, career development is better understood as a socially embedded and structurally mediated process rather than a purely individual trajectory. Opportunities for informal learning, observation, and relationship building are less readily available when work is no longer co-located. Informal interactions remain critical for transmitting tacit knowledge, developing professional judgement, and cultivating organisational awareness (Asher and Popper, 2021; van Houten, 2023). Reduced access to these interactions may limit exposure to the learning experiences that underpin long-term progression.

Recent research highlights the uneven implications of remote working for career development. Remote arrangements can expand access to formal training and self-directed learning while simultaneously restricting exposure to high-value assignments and strategic decision-making processes (Choudhury et al., 2021). Employees working remotely may also experience reduced visibility within organisational networks, affecting how their contributions are recognised and evaluated. This issue is especially significant in knowledge-intensive sectors such as information technology, where progression often depends on participation in complex projects and collaborative work environments (Raghuram et al., 2019; Collet et al., 2025).

Visibility has therefore become increasingly important in remote work settings. Recognition is shaped not only through performance, but also through relational access and digital interaction. Emerging evidence suggests that remote working can create disparities in recognition and advancement, particularly for employees with weaker organisational networks or fewer opportunities for synchronous collaboration (Chekwa, 2018; Haque, 2023;

Hinds et al., 2026). Although remote working can support flexibility and technical skill development, it may also weaken experiential learning and collaborative problem-solving opportunities that contribute to career growth (Kalas and Raisinghani, 2019; Neelen and Kirschner, 2020; Camp et al., 2022). These dynamics illustrate the need for more critical and theoretically grounded approaches to understanding career development in remote work environments.

3. HUMAN CAPITAL FORMATION UNDER REMOTE WORKING

Human Capital Theory proposes that individuals invest in knowledge, skills, and competencies to improve productivity, employability, and long-term career prospects (Becker, 1964). In remote working environments, the formation of human capital is increasingly mediated through digital infrastructures, self-directed learning practices, and access to virtual collaboration systems. This shift has important implications for how employees acquire, apply, and develop valuable capabilities within contemporary organisations.

Remote working can support human capital development in several important ways. Greater flexibility often enables employees to engage more actively with online training platforms, professional certifications, and digital learning communities. In knowledge-intensive sectors such as information technology, where rapid technological change requires continuous upskilling, remote work may accelerate the development of digital competencies and adaptive expertise (Khan & Minghai, 2026). Employees working remotely are frequently required to develop stronger self-management, virtual communication, and technological problem-solving skills, all of which are increasingly valued within modern labour markets (Choudhury et al., 2021).

At the same time, the developmental benefits of remote working are unevenly distributed. Human capital formation extends beyond formal training and technical skill acquisition. Informal learning, experiential exposure, and collaborative problem-solving remain central to professional growth, particularly in project-based environments (Beier et al., 2025). Remote working may reduce access to these developmental experiences by limiting spontaneous interaction, observational learning, and participation in complex organisational processes. Tacit knowledge transfer, which often occurs through informal workplace engagement, can become fragmented in digitally mediated environments (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

These constraints are particularly significant for early-career professionals and employees seeking advancement into leadership or strategic roles. Access to high-value projects, mentoring relationships, and visible

organisational participation often shapes long-term career progression as much as technical competence itself. Human capital formation in remote contexts therefore depends not only on individual initiative, but also on how organisations structure developmental opportunities, facilitate collaborative learning, and ensure equitable access to meaningful work experiences.

4. VISIBILITY AND CAREER SIGNALLING IN REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Career progression depends not only on the acquisition of skills and competencies, but also on the extent to which those capabilities are recognised within organisational systems. Visibility plays a central role in this process. In traditional workplace settings, visibility is often reinforced through physical presence, informal interaction, and proximity to managerial decision-making. Remote working disrupts these conventional mechanisms of recognition, reshaping how employees signal value, competence, and promotability.

In digitally mediated environments, career signalling increasingly relies on virtual communication, measurable outputs, and online participation. While remote work can create more flexible and outcome-oriented performance structures, it may simultaneously reduce opportunities for employees to demonstrate tacit contributions such as leadership presence, collaborative engagement, and discretionary effort (Yang et al., 2022). This is particularly significant in knowledge-intensive sectors such as information technology, where project visibility and strategic involvement strongly influence advancement opportunities.

Emerging evidence suggests that remote employees often experience concerns regarding reduced organisational visibility and weaker career recognition. Virtual work arrangements can limit access to informal networks and spontaneous interactions through which high-value opportunities are frequently distributed (Wang et al., 2020; Choudhury et al., 2021). Employees who are less visible in organisational communication channels may therefore encounter barriers to promotion, mentoring, and leadership development, regardless of technical performance.

The issue extends beyond individual perception. Organisational evaluation systems themselves may remain implicitly shaped by assumptions associated with physical presence and observable activity. Studies increasingly suggest that proximity bias continues to influence managerial judgement even in hybrid and remote organisations, often privileging employees who maintain greater physical or relational visibility within organisational networks (Bloom et al., 2024). Such dynamics risk reproducing inequalities in access to recognition and progression.

Effective career signalling in remote contexts therefore requires intentional organisational design. Transparent performance metrics, equitable access to strategic projects, and structured opportunities for interaction become increasingly important in mitigating visibility gaps. Career progression within remote environments depends not only on what employees contribute, but also on how organisations recognise and interpret those contributions within digitally mediated systems of work.

5. SOCIAL EXCHANGE AND DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Career development is shaped not only by individual capability and performance, but also by access to relational networks that provide support, guidance, and opportunity. Social Exchange Theory offers an important lens for understanding these dynamics, arguing that workplace relationships are built through reciprocal exchanges of trust, recognition, and organisational support (Blau, 1964). In professional environments, developmental opportunities often emerge through these relational processes rather than through formal systems alone.

Mentorship, sponsorship, and informal guidance play a particularly important role in career progression. Employees who maintain strong developmental relationships are more likely to gain access to strategic projects, leadership exposure, and organisational information that supports advancement (Ragins & Verbos, 2017; Kram, 2022). Remote working alters the conditions under which these relationships develop and are sustained. Reduced physical interaction limits opportunities for spontaneous conversation, informal observation, and relationship building, all of which traditionally contribute to professional socialisation and trust formation.

Research increasingly suggests that remote employees may experience weaker relational integration within organisational networks, particularly when communication becomes heavily task-focused and transactional (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Informal mentoring relationships that might naturally emerge in co-located settings are often more difficult to establish in remote environments. Early-career professionals may be especially disadvantaged because they rely more heavily on observational learning, informal feedback, and network visibility to navigate organisational cultures and progression pathways (Suh & Kim, 2025).

At the same time, remote working does not inevitably weaken developmental relationships. Organisational practices play a decisive role in shaping exchange quality. Structured mentoring schemes, inclusive leadership practices, and regular developmental dialogue can strengthen trust and relational support even within distributed work environments (Carillo et al., 2021).

Digital collaboration platforms may also expand access to cross-functional networks and international professional communities that were previously less accessible.

These dynamics suggest that career development in remote contexts is deeply relational. Access to opportunity depends not only on formal competence, but also on the quality of exchange relationships employees are able to establish and maintain within evolving organisational structures.

6. TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF REMOTE CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Remote working has altered the mechanisms through which careers are developed, recognised, and advanced within contemporary organisations. Existing discussions often examine skill acquisition, visibility, or organisational support in isolation. Such approaches risk overlooking the interdependent nature of career development in digitally mediated work environments. This paper argues that career progression under remote working conditions emerges through the interaction of three closely connected processes: human capital formation, career visibility, and developmental relationships.

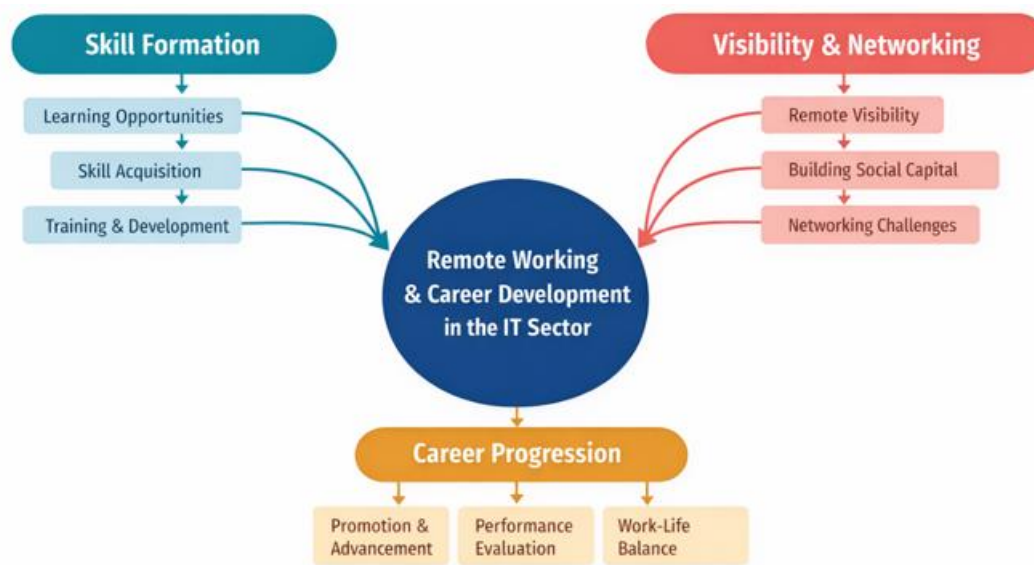


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Remote Career Development

Human capital formation remains central to career advancement, particularly within the IT sector where technological change requires continuous learning and adaptive capability (Khan & Minghai, 2026). Remote working can facilitate access to digital training, self-directed learning, and flexible skill development. However, technical competence alone is insufficient for sustained progression. Employees must also secure visibility within organisational systems so that their contributions are recognised, valued, and associated with future potential. In remote environments, visibility becomes more difficult to establish because opportunities for informal interaction and spontaneous recognition are reduced (Yang et al., 2022).

Developmental relationships further shape how skills and visibility translate into career outcomes. Mentorship, sponsorship, and organisational support influence access to strategic assignments, career guidance, and professional networks (Ragins & Verbos, 2017). Remote working can weaken these relational exchanges where communication becomes highly transactional or where informal engagement is limited. Conversely,

organisations that intentionally cultivate developmental support structures may reduce many of the career risks associated with distributed work (Carillo et al., 2021).

The framework proposed here conceptualises remote career development as a relational and structurally mediated process rather than a purely individual achievement. Human capital, visibility, and developmental relationships operate as mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Skill development without visibility may limit recognition. Visibility without substantive capability may produce unsustainable progression. Developmental relationships influence access to both opportunity and recognition.

This integrated perspective contributes to the remote work literature by moving beyond binary assumptions that remote working either enhances or constrains career outcomes. Career development is shaped less by remote working itself than by how organisations structure access to learning, recognition, and relational support within evolving digital work environments.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The growing normalisation of remote and hybrid working arrangements has important implications for how career development is conceptualised, researched, and managed within contemporary organisations. Existing research has made significant progress in examining productivity, wellbeing, and employee satisfaction under remote working conditions. Comparatively less attention has been directed towards the long-term career implications of distributed work, particularly within knowledge-intensive sectors such as information technology. This paper highlights the need for a more relational and structurally informed understanding of career progression in remote environments.

For researchers, the framework developed in this paper suggests several important directions for future inquiry. First, career development under remote working conditions should be examined as a multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of skill formation, visibility, and developmental relationships rather than as a purely individual outcome. Future studies would benefit from exploring how these mechanisms operate across different career stages, organisational structures, and demographic groups. Early-career employees, for example, may experience remote working differently from established professionals because informal learning and network access often play a greater role during formative career stages (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Greater attention is also needed to how remote working intersects with inequalities related to gender, ethnicity, disability, and organisational status.

Second, more longitudinal research is required. Much of the current literature remains cross-sectional and focused on short-term experiences following the pandemic transition to remote work. Longer-term studies could provide deeper insight into how remote working shapes promotion trajectories, leadership development, and career sustainability over time (De Vos et al., 2020). Research should also move beyond binary comparisons between remote and office-based work towards examining the quality of organisational support, communication practices, and developmental access.

For practitioners, the findings underscore that remote working strategies cannot focus solely on operational flexibility or productivity outcomes. Career development requires intentional organisational design. Transparent promotion pathways, equitable allocation of high-value assignments, structured mentoring opportunities, and inclusive leadership practices are increasingly important in remote contexts. Organisations that fail to address visibility disparities and developmental access risk reinforcing hidden inequalities within digitally mediated workplaces.

The IT sector illustrates these challenges particularly clearly because career progression is closely linked to collaborative learning, technological adaptation, and project visibility. Sustaining career development in remote settings therefore depends on how effectively organisations create environments in which employees can learn, connect, and gain recognition despite physical distance.

8. CONCLUSION

Remote working has fundamentally reshaped the conditions under which career development occurs within the information technology sector. Traditional assumptions surrounding visibility, learning, and professional progression are increasingly challenged in digitally mediated work environments where physical proximity is no longer central to organisational participation. This paper has argued that career development in remote contexts cannot be adequately understood through individual capability or technical competence alone. Rather, progression emerges through the interaction of human capital formation, career visibility, and developmental relationships.

The analysis demonstrates that remote working creates both opportunities and constraints for professional growth. Flexible work arrangements may enhance access to digital learning, self-directed development, and broader professional networks. At the same time, reduced informal interaction, fragmented experiential learning, and diminished organisational visibility may constrain access to recognition and advancement. These tensions are particularly pronounced within the IT sector, where collaborative problem-solving, project exposure, and continuous upskilling remain central to career progression.

Grounding the discussion in Human Capital Theory and Social Exchange Theory has provided a more comprehensive explanation of these dynamics. Human capital development remains important, yet career advancement also depends on how employees are supported, recognised, and embedded within organisational networks. Developmental relationships and visibility mechanisms continue to shape access to opportunity, even in technologically advanced remote work settings.

This paper contributes to the remote work literature by moving beyond simplified assumptions that remote working either enhances or undermines career development. The effects of remote work are contingent upon how organisations structure learning opportunities, maintain relational support, and create equitable systems of recognition within distributed environments. Career development under remote working conditions is therefore best understood as a relational and

organisationally mediated process rather than a purely individual achievement.

As remote and hybrid work arrangements continue to evolve, organisations face increasing pressure to ensure that professional development remains inclusive, visible, and sustainable. Greater theoretical and empirical attention to these issues will be essential for understanding the long-term implications of remote working for careers, organisational inequality, and workforce development.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors played a substantive role in shaping this study and developing the manuscript. O.A. conceptualised the work and designed the overall study framework. Data analysis, data interpretation, and validation of findings were carried out collaboratively, with each author contributing to the discussions that informed the final results. The development of the theoretical framework was carried out by O.I., T.A., and K.O.O., who also contributed to the primary drafting of the manuscript. Co-authors strengthened the analysis, offered detailed revisions and enhanced the clarity and coherence of the final document. Every author reviewed the complete manuscript, approved the final version and accepted responsibility for the integrity of the work.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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