

## Perceptions of Innovation in Remote vs. Onsite Work Environments: A Qualitative Study

Laman Gasimzade\*

<sup>1</sup>University of Miskolc, Hantos Elemér Doctoral School of Business, Management and Regional Sciences, H-3515, Miskolc, Egyetemvaros, Hungary

\*([lamangasimzada97@gmail.com](mailto:lamangasimzada97@gmail.com))

(Received: 20 May 2025, Accepted: 18 June 2025)

**ATIF/REFERENCE:** Gasimzade, L. (2025). Measuring Innovation Capability on Individual Level: Challenges and Solutions. *International Journal of Advanced Natural Sciences and Engineering Researches*, 9(6), 218-225.

**Abstract** – This study explores how hybrid work environments affect employees' perspectives and experiences of innovation. As existing research has largely focused on productivity and communication side, this qualitative research examines how different working environments establish innovation visibility, collaboration, and recognition. For getting the deep idea about the topic, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with hybrid workers from different international companies. Qualitative coding identified five key points; the significance of spontaneous interaction for idea generation, the autonomy and focus enabled by remote work, the risk of innovation being overlooked, and the unique recognition across work environments. This study suggests that hybrid work offers huge potential for innovation, but only when the organization can keep it up with the newly merged outcomes. The study concludes with recommendations for fostering innovation across all work modes through leadership, virtual collaboration, and equal recognition system.

**Keywords** – Hybrid Work; Innovation; Remote Collaboration; Employee Perception; Workplace Recognition.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic caused on the most affecting disruptions in the history of modern work, forcing organizations across the globe to adopt new work models. What started as a crisis-driven implications have evolved into the long-term plan for companies as giving their employees chance work-from-home or do remote work. By the end of 2020, companies had adopted new digital tools and flexible working coordination not as a choice, but as a necessity in order to cope with global challenges. In the years since, companies offered their employees to work both remotely and onsite, thus altering the structure of work life (Wang et al., 2021; Gratton, 2021). This change has generated essential debate around how such models affect organizational performance, employee well-being, and collaboration. However, one sphere of the work that remains not explored enough is **innovation**, a crucial capability for organizational growth, adaptation and long-term sustainability (Anderson, Potochnik, & Zhou, 2014). Innovation is not only about generating applicable ideas, but also developing environments where creativity, collaboration and problem-solving can thrive (Amabile, 1996). The state where employees work, whether in an office or at home, can have different effects on how innovation is being generated.

Research suggests that working in an office can create innovation through different approaches, such as informal interactions, sudden conversations, and physical co-location, where all can trigger idea exchange (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). Meanwhile, remote work also offers advantages, such as autonomy, reduced

distractions from office chatters, and the potential for deep focusing, which also supports innovation in different ways (Bloom et al., 2015). However, remote work may also hinder rapid collaborations or create feelings of disconnection, specifically in companies, that lack structure for communication and creativity (Leonardi, 2021).

Large numbers of existing literature on remote and hybrid work have focused on outcomes such as productivity, job satisfaction and communication effectiveness (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2021). In spite of these measures being important, they do not fully capture the main points of innovation, generating ideas, collaboration, and supporting in creative work. Besides, the dominant portion of the studies which were conducted have relied on quantitative data, offering lacking depth into individual values and mood-driven influence on innovative behavior. (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006).

This study seeks to address that gap by exploring how employees across a variety of organizations and roles perceive innovation in all three working environments, remote, onsite, hybrid. Using semi-structured interviews with twenty professionals from diverse backgrounds, this research investigates the connection between work settings and innovation experiences. By hearing the voices of the employees, this study will provide richer understanding of how work environments affect innovation, but also the circumstances that allow innovation to emerge and flourish.

In short, the research question of this study is how do workers themselves perceive innovation in the context of the diverse work environments?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovation, often defined as the implementation of new or improved ideas, products, is widely regarded as essential to organizational sustainability and competitiveness (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). Traditionally, innovation has prospered in onsite work environments, where informal conversations, co-locating, and coincidental interactions led to exchange of ideas (Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Amabile 1996). However, with the global shift toward to the remote and hybrid work following the pandemic, the way employees generate, share, and develop ideas has changed significantly (Gratton, 2021; Wang et al, 2021).

Before the pandemic, face-to-face work environments were accepted as more favorable to innovation, because of their structural affordability for collaboration. These included rapid interactions, and the ability to see others' work, which is said to improve knowledge exchange (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). Team working in close quarters often benefit from shared context, coordinated flow, and higher social cohesion, which are linked to greater trust and psychological safety. They, in turn, are key conditions for creative risk-taking (Gibson and Gibbs, 2006). Furthermore, office environment often signals organizational backing for innovation through dedicated spaces and visual signs (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

In comparison to onsite work, remote working environments can offer reduced distractions from office noises, and increased deep focus on the tasks, which may boost individual creativity (Bloom et al, 2015). Employees working from home may also feel more empowered and psychologically comfortable for experimenting idea without constant peer pressure (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2021). Nevertheless, shortage of informal, real-time feedback and the limitations of digital tools may interfere with team-wide innovation. Experts argue that innovation is not only about the quality of the idea, but also the path it goes through, where ideas are refined, shared, and executed, which can be limited in a virtual setting (Leonardi, 2021). Additionally, the lack of non-verbal communication may cause misinterpretation, making creative processes feel divided. (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Some research indicates that while remote work may support individual tasks, it may not fully imitate the social dynamics needed for breakthrough (Gibson and Gibbs, 2006; Sytch et al., 2023).

The rise of hybrid work after the epidemic, has introduced new complexities in understanding the innovation. While the hybrid models aim to unite the best of the best worlds, team constructive collaboration of onsite work, and flexibility of remote work, the effectiveness of it has mixed reviews. It is suggested that innovation in hybrid environments highly depends on team sync, organization's support, and internal communication (Leonardi, 2021; Gratton, 2021). Without careful insights, hybrid settings may trigger in the "worst of both worlds," where neither collaboration nor individual work is supported effectively (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

Much of the existing research on remote and hybrid work mentions the outcomes of productivity, satisfaction, and communication (Choudhury et al., 2021), while innovation remains untouched as a subjective experience. In addition, studies have adopted quantitative methodologies, which can be useful for generalization, often fail to capture the detailed emotional and cultural conditions that effect innovative behaviour (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

By focusing on employee perspectives across multiple work models, this study enriches more context sensitive approach of innovation in the post-pandemic workplaces. Using qualitative interviews, it plans to reveal how individual employees understand their capabilities to innovate, collaborate, and express their creative ideas in remote, hybrid and onsite locations. In doing so, it contributes to the transforming literature on organizational innovation.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study applied qualitative research to explore how the employees perceive innovation in remote, onsite and hybrid work environments. Given the subjective nature of research questions, semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow for in-depth, flexible exploration of individual perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The main goal is to get contextual information on how different work settings affect the conditions and outcomes of innovation.

A total of twenty participants were interviewed, from different companies, large multinational companies, such as British Petroleum, Citi Bank, ExxonMobil, Sanofi and so on. Interviewers were selected in a way to ensure diversity across industries, positions, age groups. Participants included employees from various sectors, finance, marketing, banking, IT. All participants were over 21 years old, had at least one year of work experience in their current roles, and were employed in hybrid, onsite, or remote settings.

Interviews were conducted between February and March 2025 via video conferencing platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. Each session lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency, and flexibility to get proper individual response from the employees. Topics covered included understanding innovation, positive and negative sides of their working environment, collaboration habits, and organizational support.

All interviews were audio-recorded with consent of participants, and then the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Attention was paid to both shared and divergent experiences to find the common patterns as well as specific nuances.

### IV. RESULTS

#### *A. Innovation Feels Easier When You Can Bounce Ideas Off People*

Participants unanimously agreed that the onsite component of a hybrid work environment facilitates spontaneous, informal conversations, which are critical for fostering innovation. Majority of them described how being physically present, even part-time, helped them to reconnect with their colleagues and initiated creativity which was hard to do when doing fully remote work. In finance, where problem-solving often requires collaboration and quick feedback (e.g., from team lead, IT teams), these hallway conversations or quick desk visits were essential for troubleshooting complicated issues or generating new innovative ideas. These physical proximity was viewed as a catalyst for creativity, which made idea sharing more rapid and dynamic.

One of the participants who works as a hybrid financial analyst stated that, “When I am onsite, just catching up with a teammate during the coffee break can lead to fresh ways to tackle some problems. That rapid energy cannot happen on Microsoft Teams.”

Several participants, stated that, onsite days felt like innovation “boosters”, allowing them to build trust that later enhanced the effectiveness of remote collaboration.

#### *B. Remote Work Offers Focus, But Not Always Recognition*

While onsite days helped innovation thrive through interaction, remote working environments were praised for letting have deep focus and uninterrupted thinking. Participants reported that, while working remotely, they were able to get into deep analysis, and become focused on their work without distractions, any office chatter or spontaneous meetings. This focus time was crucial for the early phase of generating new ideas, or process improvements.

For instance, one of the respondents who works as a business analyst at stated that, “At home, I can easily concentrate on my work with my everyday tasks, and get fresh ideas which helps me to complete my job much faster”.

However, besides the advantages of getting new ideas and so, there were some concerns about the idea visibility. Several workers reported that, their efforts of getting new ideas, could become invisible, unless it was shared in meeting or documented.

To support, an interviewee who works as a team-leader describes the experience by saying, ‘Sometimes I innovate in silence - no one hears about it unless I bring it up. In hybrid settings, especially while working remotely, it often feels like you are working solo’.

This sense of invisibility led to mixed feelings, as working remotely can support idea generation, yet those ideas may go unnoticed and unrecognized.

### *C. Innovation Gets Lost in the Zoom Shuffle*

In hybrid teams, the virtual component introduced a paradox: while meetings were essential for coordination, they often limited spontaneous innovation. Participants described virtual meetings as too structured and agenda-driven, leaving very little room for idea exchanges or brainstorming. 'Zoom fatigue' emerged as a significant barrier to creative engagement, as back-to-back meeting calls drained the energy needed for innovation.

One individual who also works as a team-leader, described remote days as being filled with endless calls and tight agendas, leaving little room for the kind of free idea sharing that happens more naturally in the office.

Participants also mentioned difficulties with social bonding in virtual settings, which reduced trust and psychological safety for risk-taking. Hybrid workers felt that innovation was often scheduled and formalized online, losing the human touch in between.

### *D. Autonomy Encourages Quiet Innovation*

The hybrid work model granted employees a degree of autonomy that enabled experimentation, particularly on remote days. Many respondents reported that they felt empowered to try new methods, test new automations, or improve their working habits when not physically supervised.

One participant, who works in IT sector, described the experience as follows: 'Being away from the office lets me try out new things without immediate evaluation. It feels like having my own innovation lab.

This freedom supported a quieter, less visible form of innovation that occurred in the 'shadows,' often documented informally or shared later in meetings. Nevertheless, this type of innovation relied heavily on individual motivation and self-discipline, with some participants expressing concerns about the lack of formal acceptance across teams.

### *E. ONSITE WORK FEELS MORE REWARDED*

Participants consistently mentioned that being physically present at work increased the likelihood of their innovative contributions being seen and rewarded. Onsite days offered them the opportunity to present their ideas directly to decision-makers and receive immediate feedback.

An employee explained it this way: “When I’m at work, my ideas get more airtime because I can express myself more easily, and my coworkers provide feedback or take action more quickly than when I’m

working from home. It feels like being visible makes it easier to gain validation, and innovation tends to have a greater impact.

This perceived reward mechanism contributes to a motivation cycle, where onsite workers tend to engage more creatively than when working remotely. However, some believe that the success of hybrid work in enhancing innovation depends on how well companies or organizations structure their communication and recognition systems.

## V. DISCUSSION

### *A. Remote Work: Deep Focus Versus Visibility Challenges*

The findings from this study strongly support existing research that highlights remote work as a facilitator of deep focus and uninterrupted periods of creativity (Bloom et al., 2015; Amabile, 1996). Interviewees repeatedly mentioned how working from home allows them to escape common office distractions, such as background noise, unplanned interruptions, and especially frequent meetings, which interfere with the flow of creative thinking. The increased autonomy and reduced distractions create an environment that fosters quiet innovation, where employees can experiment independently, without feeling rushed, and develop ideas at their own pace.

However, the data from the interviews also reveal a downside of hybrid work: reduced visibility and recognition of contributions. Many participants expressed frustration that their efforts—ones they believed could positively impact their coworkers—went unnoticed. This “invisibility” can lead to feelings of disconnection and undervaluation, which may result in demotivation and a sense of being overlooked. This finding aligns with Leonardi’s (2021) research on the social challenges of virtual work, where employees may struggle to maintain their presence within teams. Without deliberate processes for acknowledging innovation in remote contexts, organizations risk losing the full benefits of employees’ creative potential.

### *B. Onsite Work: Spontaneous Innovation and Social Dynamics*

In contrast, the onsite component of hybrid work was consistently associated with spontaneous, informal interactions that serve as catalysts for innovation. This supports the arguments of Fayard and Weeks (2007), who emphasized the significance of physical interaction for idea exchange. Every participant described how unplanned hallway conversations, encounters during coffee breaks, and quick face-to-face brainstorming sessions sparked new insights and helped solve problems more quickly. These interactions foster social bonding and trust among coworkers, which are essential for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

However, the study also highlights a critical issue. While onsite work provides ideal conditions for innovation, it can simultaneously introduce social pressure, as noted by Gratton (2021). Participants observed that, despite generating bright ideas, they often felt constrained by social dynamics that limited their creativity. Additionally, onsite work can involve distractions and interruptions that may undermine focus. These contrasting aspects of onsite work clearly show that it is up to companies and organisations to foster diverse thinking and ensure psychological safety for their employees.

### *C. The Role of Management: Support, Communication, and Recognition*

Across both remote and onsite working environments, the study highlights the critical role of managerial support, a structured communication environment, and a recognition system for innovation to thrive in hybrid work models. Effective leadership is essential to bridge the divide between physical and virtual workspaces, ensuring that innovative ideas are heard, captured, and rewarded—regardless of where employees work. Participants emphasized that managers who follow these basic steps help them take risks and share ideas without fear of being dismissed. In doing so, managers create the necessary conditions for

innovation to be heard and flourish. This finding also aligns with Choudhury, Foroughi, and Larson's (2021) research on the importance of leadership in hybrid teams.

Clear communication protocols and collaborative team meetings were also identified as key accelerators. Recognition emerged as another important factor, as the study shows that employees feel more motivated to generate innovative ideas when they feel heard and acknowledged. Therefore, organizations must implement equitable recognition systems for employees working remotely or in hybrid settings. Failing to do so risks leaving remote workers feeling excluded and may weaken the collaborative spirit.

To summarize, the hybrid work model presents both opportunities and challenges for innovation. However, if organizations can strike the right balance between the needs of remote and onsite employees—by offering strong managerial support—they can create a dynamic environment where uninterrupted innovation can thrive.

#### *D. Solutions*

To foster innovation in hybrid work environments, organizations must take specific steps that address the challenges of both remote and onsite settings. One key solution is for organizations to allow workers to work from home when their tasks require deep focus, and to strategically allocate them to the office when collaborative tasks need to be done with the team. Companies should also institute virtual spaces where feedback will be available spontaneously, without lengthy delays. By doing this, they can create an environment where remote workers do not feel left behind.

An equal recognition system is also essential, ensuring that innovative ideas are being rewarded by upper management regardless of whether they originated in the office or at home. Managers should receive training on how to build trust with remote workers and foster strong relationships. Systems should be accessible to everyone, allowing individuals to share their ideas freely without fear of getting dismissed.

Overall, by updating policies and providing training for top management, companies can create hybrid environments where every employee feels encouraged to share ideas and be part of the team.

## *VI. CONCLUSION*

This study aims to explore how different working environments—particularly hybrid models—influence employees' understanding of innovation. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with professionals from diverse sectors and backgrounds, the findings reveal that the location where people work not only affects how they perform tasks and consume information, but also how they understand, engage with, and integrate innovative ideas.

While discussions around hybrid versus traditional work environments have largely focused on productivity and task completion, this research highlights that innovation is shaped by more marginal and context-specific dynamics.

One of the key conclusions of this study is that no working environment inherently guarantees innovation. Rather, each model—remote, onsite, or hybrid—has distinct benefits and drawbacks. Remote work fosters autonomy, deep thinking, and fewer distractions, leading some participants to describe it as “quiet innovation.” However, these innovations often go unnoticed due to a lack of structured platforms for sharing, which in turn undermines workers' motivation.

In contrast, onsite work facilitates face-to-face interactions and informal communication, which can spark spontaneous ideas. Yet, the same environment can also lead to mental setbacks, such as feelings of pressure, frequent distractions, or unpleasant conversations in which ideas are lost and never revisited.

Hybrid work attempts to balance the advantages of both worlds, but without deliberate structure and strong leadership, it can lead to worse outcomes.

These findings support prior literature (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Leonardi, 2021) and extend it by demonstrating that employees' perceptions of innovation are closely tied to recognition, interaction, and communication. In short, simply offering hybrid work options does not guarantee

innovation. Instead, innovation flourishes when employees feel recognized, heard, included, and supported by their teams and top management.

In light of these insights, organizations must rethink how innovation is emerging across different working environments. One key recommendation is that organizations should create intentional virtual channels for informal idea exchange. These can be easily set up using any conferencing platform. By doing so, they can ensure that everyone's voice is heard and not overlooked.

The main reason for this is that people have become accustomed to receiving instant feedback from coworkers and managers due to traditional pre-pandemic work styles. They still expect the same responsiveness in the "new work world." However, newly created tools should not fully replace in-person creativity but should serve as an accepted alternative and encourage team members to actively participate even when working remotely.

Secondly, organizations must establish systems that ensure remote employees' innovative ideas are seen and acknowledged by both their teams and the broader company. Research clearly shows that recognition plays a pivotal role in motivating individuals to take risks and share their ideas openly. To get the best out of team members, upper management should also undergo formal training on how to manage hybrid teams, evaluate diverse opinions, and foster a sense of belonging. This can include developing specific metrics that evaluate both onsite and hybrid workers equally. Equal recognition can enhance innovation and allow both organizations and employees to thrive together.

Finally, the study recommends embracing hybrid-specific innovation practices. Rather than attempting to force both work environments into one model, organizations should leverage the unique strengths of each. For example, virtual brainstorming sessions can allow both onsite and remote employees to contribute ideas in a setting where everyone is heard and recognized. Additionally, companies might schedule specific days when all employees work remotely or in the office, so everyone can experience both environments.

In conclusion, the future of innovation in the workplace will not be determined solely by whether work is done onsite or remotely. It will depend on whether the organization has taken essential steps to ensure work stability and maximize employee performance. Leadership must evolve, communication channels must be revised, and continuous improvement must be maintained. Recognition must also be adapted to reflect the reality of hybrid work. By designing systems that value employee creativity, companies and their people can grow and succeed together.

.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*. Westview Press.
- [2] Anderson, N., Potocnik, K., & Zhou, J. (2014). Innovation and creativity in organizations: A state-of-the-science review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(S1), S55–S68.
- [3] Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J., & Ying, Z. J. (2015). Does working from home, work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(1), 165–218.
- [4] Choudhury, P., Foroughi, C., & Larson, B. Z. (2021). Work-from-anywhere: The productivity effects of geographic flexibility. *Strategic Management Journal*, 42(4), 655–683.
- [5] Fayard, A. L., & Weeks, J. (2007). Photocopiers and water-coolers: The affordances of informal interaction. *Organization Studies*, 28(5), 605–634.
- [6] Gibson, C. B., & Gibbs, J. L. (2006). Unpacking the concept of virtuality: The effects of geographic dispersion, electronic dependence, and national diversity on team innovation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 51(3), 451–495
- [7] Gratton, L. (2021). How to do hybrid right. *Harvard Business Review*, 99(3), 66–74.

- [8] Leonardi, P. M. (2021). COVID-19 and the new technologies of organizing: Digital exhaust, digital footprints, and artificial intelligence in the wake of remote work. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(1), 243–248
- [9] Wang, B., Liu, Y., Qian, J., & Parker, S. K. (2021). Achieving effective remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic: A work design perspective. *Applied Psychology*, 70(1), 16–59.
- [10] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101
- [11] Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- [12] Amabile, T. M., & Pratt, M. G. (2016). The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation in organizations: Making progress, making meaning. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 157–183
- [13] Bartsch, S., Weber, E., Büttgen, M., & Huber, A. (2020). Leadership matters in crisis-induced digital transformation: How to lead service employees effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Service Management*, 32(1), 71–85
- [14] Leonardi, P. M. (2021). COVID-19 and the new technologies of organizing: Digital exhaust, digital footprints, and artificial intelligence in the wake of remote work. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(1), 249–253.
- [15] Sytch, M., Rivkin, W., & Stensaker, I. (2023). From face-to-face to screen-to-screen: Redefining organizational collaboration in virtual work. *Academy of Management Perspectives*. Advance online publication.
- [16] Waizenegger, L., McKenna, B., Cai, W., & Bendz, T. (2020). An affordance perspective of team collaboration and enforced working from home during COVID-19. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 29(4), 429–442
- [17] Kniffin, K. M., Narayanan, J., Anseel, F., et al. (2021). COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action. *American Psychologist*, 76(1), 63–77.
- [18] Van der Lippe, T., & Lippényi, Z. (2020). Co-workers working from home and individual and team performance. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35(1), 60–79.
- [19] Baert, S., Lippens, L., Moens, E., Sterkens, P., & Weytjens, J. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis and telework: A research survey on experiences, expectations, and hopes. *IZA Discussion Paper Series*, No. 13229.
- [20] Spreitzer, G. M., Cameron, L., & Garrett, L. (2017). Alternative work arrangements: Two images of the new world of work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4, 473–499.
- [21] Allen, T. D., Golden, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2015). How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(2), 40–68.