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# The Change of Game: Remote Working is a New Highway in the New Normal

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**Abstract:** *The outbreak of COVID-19 produced drastic changes in every business activity & placed severe strain on human resource management activities. Although in fighting the disaster, companies found remote working as the shadow of light that may provide safety to employees and also provide a safe way to fulfill routine tasks and responsibilities. The facility of remote working is also beneficial in the new normal, and therefore, most companies are using it as a strategy and tool to increase the morale and satisfaction of their employees. However, the strategy also has some negative consequences, but there is a severe lacking of research on this issue, especially with respect to developing & Asian countries. Therefore, the major purpose of this research is to analyze the impact of remote working in the new normal on employee job satisfaction through serial mediation of employee relaxation and employee morale. Therefore, the data has been collected from IT sector SMEs from Pakistan, and analysis is made through SMART-PLS. The findings of the study indicated that SMEs are opting for the new normal strategy of working in order to optimize employee morale and increase the level of employee job satisfaction. However, further research work is optimal in order to understand the issue more clearly with respect to the SME sector in Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** New-Normal, Remote Working, Work from Home, Employee morale & Job Satisfaction

## Background

The outbreak of the pandemic known as COVID-19 caused severe disturbance to every person, activity, and business all over the globe. In fact, all humans, as well as industries, were forced to revamp their working practices on an immediate basis. The Pandemic also produced negative emotions as well as psychological responses and, therefore, resulted in mental emergencies. The statement is valid as everyone was threatened by the outbreak of the virus, and the chances of getting affected increased day after another. On the other side, working in isolation caused an increase in workloads as well as mental pressure due to heterogeneous working. Hence, in order to develop innovative solutions, managers tried to use the virtual world as the contemporary work setting to provide leverage, comfort, flexibility & ease to their subordinates in order to manage workload & required work activities effectively (Naskar & Thomas, 2021). In fact, that was the requirement of time as COVID-19 reshaped the understanding as well as the way of doing business. The statement is true in several affected countries, and governments forced organizations to provide leverage to their employees in the form of working from home. Thus, according to one of the leading global research firms, 50% of the organizations allowed 81% of their workforce to avail of work-from-home facilities (Abbasi et al., 2020; Pattnaik & Jena, 2020).

However, working in isolation may also cause an increase in workloads as well as mental pressure (Naskar & Thomas, 2021), and mental pressure may result in desperation (Wang *et al.*, 2019). Relating the relationship with an employee, it has also been found that depression causes low working morale & decreases employees' level of productivity (Sajjad, Mukhtar & Yaseen, 2022). However, employee morale is very important for productivity as it is reflected effectively upon satisfaction level, zeal, and

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commitment and also on overall attitude. Employee morale is also a driver of organizational business and profitability. In fact, there is a direct relationship between employee morale and the profitability of the firm (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020).

Thus, during COVID-19, well-known IT companies used the policy of remote working to provide relaxation and ease to their workforce (Du Plessis, 2022). The policy is not only found helpful in attaining organizational and individual benefits but also found helpful in attaining societal benefits. However, there are some hindrances & challenges for organizations as well as employees, although through capitalizing on advanced technologies win-win situation has been achieved in applying the policy of remote working in the wake of the pandemic. In fact, a survey from developed sides of the world reveals that hybrid working is the preferred way of doing work, and working from home is a new form of a conventional workplace. In fact, remote working is also evident from the post-pandemic working plans of reputed firms like Facebook, Microsoft, Google, etc. An employee survey in this regard by Robert Waters' in 2021 also reflected that 40% of respondents would prefer to work from home throughout the year, while 27% prefer to have 50% of work assignments from home (Du Plessis, 2022).

## Introduction

In recent times, the use of technology is perceived as the major force behind the change in organizational work practices. In fact, remote working is becoming possible only through the use of technology, which is actually changing the notion that in order to be productive, one must spend a certain number of work hours on the office premises. This phenomenon is used interchangeably as remote working, telework, telecommuting, etc. (Du Plessis, 2022). In fact, working from home was quite common in developed countries like Australia, even before the outbreak of COVID-19. However, making this applicable to lower-level employees was found to be quite difficult due to a lack of employee work consistency, underperformance, and lack of technology. However, due to the spread of the pandemic, soft human resource practices were implemented to encourage employees to work by placing concern for their health & well-being. Thus, working from home may become the new normal as the pandemic also provides the opportunity to be more creative, especially in the service industry (Williamson et al., 2020).

In fact, remote working may also produce a win-win situation as employers will gain benefits through the reduction of office-related costs, equipment-related costs administrative expenses while workers will have better work-life balance & job satisfaction. Thus, it will also benefit organizations through enhancing organizational commitment (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

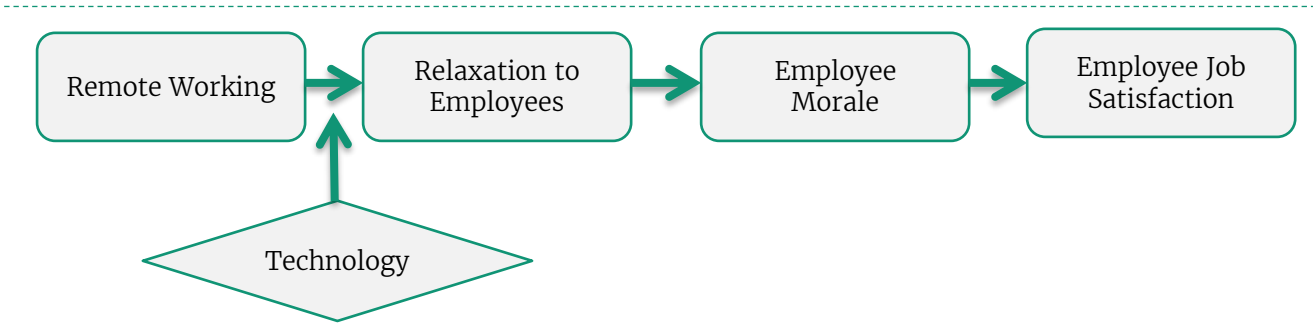
## Statement of Problem

Remote working appears to be an effective tool during the pandemic, especially for maintaining public health, and aids significantly in increasing employee performance & job satisfaction. However, in order to attain a sustainable work-life balance, there is a need for more research work on remote working practices (Ng, Lit & Cheung, 2022). In fact, it looks mandatory to conduct more research, as Abdullah et al. (2020) indicated that working from home has more positives as compared to negatives. The study also indicated that the findings of the research may be applicable to any scenario when working in the traditional way is not possible. In fact, the linkage of remote working with employee job satisfaction has also been proved by the latest study by Ng et al. (2020), which recommends further research work in other Asian countries.

## Theoretical Framework

The framework of the study is based on the JD-R theory, as indicated by Bezuidenhout (2022). The theory is based on the combination of conversation of resource model, job demand-control model as well and job-demand-control-support model. There are two major drivers of JD-R theory, i.e., a motivation promotion process & health impairment process. The positive health impairment process is associated with the availability of required resources to make employees achieve their required tasks. In fact, the gist of the JD-R theory is in providing a framework for understanding how employee well-being might be developed through balancing between job demands and resources. Hence, by keeping the JD-R theory as the base, the research uses remote working as the independent variable for making research effective under the new normal.

Similar was indicated and highlighted by Abdullah et al. (2020), Ng et al. (2022), and Williamson et al. (2020). Remote working may provide relaxation to employees (Du Plessis, 2022), which may induce employee morale and result in employee job satisfaction (Shakir et al., 2020; Pattnaik & Jena, 2020). Although attaining the fit and win-win condition is not possible through effective and efficient technology, as indicated by Du Plessis (2022) & also supported by JD-R theory.




## Major Research Questions

RQ 1: How remote working facilities by SMEs is beneficial in the normal?
RQ 2: How does remote working influence the working of employees of SMEs?
RQ 3: Is efficient technology mandatory for leveraging remote working practices by SMEs?

## Purpose & Significance of the Research

The study is one of the initial works to understand the impact of remote working on employee job satisfaction in the new normal. Most of the prior studies indicated the use of remote working in the wake of the pandemic and provided suggestions for the new normal. On the other side that analyzes, the role of remote working is mainly associated with developed and western sides of the world. However, rare studies are used to translate remote working towards job satisfaction, except for Ng et al. (2022). Although the study does not evaluate the reasons for the increase in employee performance, neither was conducted in the real new normal, i.e., post-pandemic scenario.

Therefore, this study is based upon the indications of Abdullah et al. (2020) and Williamson et al. (2020) in order to determine the serial mediation impact of the remote working facility on employee job satisfaction. Hence, the study is pervasive in nature and is significantly important for researchers, academicians, and practitioners in order to understand the significance of remote working facilities on employee job satisfaction in the new normal.

## Literature Review

Remote working is a situation in which employee mainly works from home, and there is no obligation of online connectivity. One may connect to team members through email or phone. Working from home is a win-win condition as employees may alter their schedule to meet their preferences and may also spear time for self-development, improvement & growth (Negulescu & Doval, 2021). The outbreak of COVID-19 is increasing the preference for working from home. The management of well-known IT firms prefers their employees to work from home. A similar was indicated d by the work practices of Apple Inc. Facebook, Google, etc. On the other side, one of the other studies indicated that most companies are planning to shift 20% of their workforce to remote working. The facility was not only helpful with respect to employees' health but also cut the unnecessary time and travel costs of employees. Hence, the reflection of the work-from-home facility has been reflected not only in societal benefits like the reduction of carbon footprints but also in increased employee morale & employee productivity. However, employees with complex job that does not require much social collaboration & support perform better while working in a remote environment (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020).

Similar were the indications from the survey conducted by Abdullah et al. (2020) that respondents believe that working from home fosters their productivity. Moreover, there is no impact of working in isolation with emotional exhaustion. However, communication with colleagues is mandatory for solving

issues and problems. Similarly, supervision is also an essential element required for effective working that has also been available due to the efficient use of technological platforms (Negulescu & Doval, 2021).

In fact, working from home provides more autonomy to employees, which is required to perform contemporary work and will also enhance employee job satisfaction. In fact, these forms of models were found fruitful amid COVID-19, and their effective application ensures the attainment of personal and professional demands. However, employees who were not supplemented with the right mix of technological equipment failed to deliver the required work. However, COVID-19 was a crisis and forced organizations to transfer to remote working on an immediate basis, but with technological advances, the facility to work from must remain valid for the employees even in the normal (Niebuhr *et al.,* 2022). Studies from the SME sector also yield similar results where remote working was not preferred previously, but when it is practiced due to the outbreak of the pandemic, it resulted in employee morale as well as job satisfaction (Barabaschi *et al.,* 2022). Therefore, we must adapt to the new normal work settings and focus on the opportunities and growth factors of the trend instead of focusing on the hurdles and problems (Negulescu & Doval, 2021).

## Research Hypotheses

**$H_1$A:** There is a relationship between the remote working of IT employees from SMEs in the new-normal working scenario and employee relaxation.

**$H_2$A:** Effective use of technology moderates the relationship between the remote working of IT employees from SMEs in the new-normal working scenario and employee relaxation.

**$H_3$A:** There is a relationship between employee relaxation of IT employees from SMEs under new-normal working scenarios & employee morale.

**$H_4$A:** There is a relationship between the morale of IT employees from SMEs under new-normal working scenarios & employee job satisfaction.

**$H_5$A:** Technology moderates the relationship of remote working of IT employees from SMEs in the new-normal working scenarios and employee relaxation.

**$H_6$A:** There is a serial mediation of relaxation of employees and employee morale between the relationship of the remote working facility and employee job satisfaction in SMEs.

## Research Methodology

Research methodology is the base of any research. It encompasses all the major parts of research, e.g., research strategy and approach for data collection & analysis (Žukauskas, Vveinhardt & Andriukaitiene, 2018). However, the gist of the research methodology is to solve the research problem (Sileyew, 2019); therefore, it is further bifurcated into two parts, i.e., a) Research Design & b) sampling design (Al Kilani & Kobziev, 2016).

## Research Design

The study is connecting the dots as per the recommendations of Ng et al. (2020) to work on the linkage of remote working in the new normal on employee job satisfaction with respect to Asian countries. Hence, it is related to epistemology, which is perceived as the philosophy of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2015) and the philosophical stance required to connect philosophy with data collection Vveinhardt (2018) and is post-positivism Žukauskas et al. (2018). The study setting is non-contrived, the nature of the experiment is a field experiment, and the researcher's interference is moderate in nature (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Hence, by applying these implications, the research strategy is a survey, and the unit of analysis is individual (Saunders et al., 2015).

## Sampling Design

The study uses non-probability (Ng et al., 2022) in order to collect from managers from managerial level employees of IT sector SMEs from Karachi. The questionnaire was the research instrument that was circulated through online mediums as used by Niebuhr et al. (2022). However, both of the studies mentioned in the sampling design are not industry-specific and collected data generically. However, literature suggested that in the new normal use of remote working, the facility has been adopted mostly

by IT firms like Facebook, Google, Apple Inc., etc. (Du Plessis, 2022). On the other hand, Pakistan is a country that is heavily dependent upon SMEs for economic and social development (Zafar et al., 2017). On the other side, COVID-19 also makes it clear that working from home is effective even for SMEs who do not perceive working from home as an effective tool previously (Barabaschi et al., 2022).

Hence, in association with Donati et al. (2021), data has been collected from employees as teleworkers' perception & well-being have a relationship with the organizational plans and strategy to endorse remote working. Moreover, SMEs are perceived as the engine for economic growth (Khan, 2015), and software development is totally convertible to work from home (Hasan et al., 2021). Moreover, the IT sector has massive growth potential in Pakistan (Javed, 2020); thus, the data has been collected from IT professionals and engineers from SMEs who are experiencing the phenomenon in new-normal. The sampling technique was non-probability sampling, and the sampling method was snowball sampling, as used by Memon et al. (2022). Although that was qualitative research and based on phenomenology, as this study is conducted in new-normal and jobs associated with software and application development can easily be transformed to work from home. The total number of circulated questionnaires was 400, but due to improper responses in some of the questionnaires, the research was conducted on a sample of 275. Thus, the response rate is 68.75%, out of which 60% are male and 40 % are female, and the sample size is adequate to conduct the study as it matches the 10-10 rule of analysis (Marcoulides & Saunders, 2006) through SMART-PLS

## Research Instrument

The instrument used in this research is the form of an adapted questionnaire that has 5 points following the Likert scale as used by Ng et al. (2022). Although all the variables and elements are not from one study, in order to increase content reliability, the study uses a hybrid of several studies to formulate a questionnaire. Other studies that are used for the development of the questionnaire are Bellman and Hübler (2020), Molino et al. (2020), Prasad et al. (2020)

## Statistical Testing & Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is an especially fruitful tool for research problems with latent variables. The second-generation multi-variate tool has been rationalized through the inner model & outer model (Wong, 2013) with the purpose of indicating significant paths in the inner model & also highlighting other significant impacts in the inner & outer models.

The purpose of the inner model is to reflect the relationship between latent variables so as to infer and analyze the relationships, while the outer model is used for the measurement of latent variables through their observed elements. SEM as the tool might also be implemented through various mechanisms, e.g., variance-based, co-variance-based, and web-based approaches known as Generalized Structured Components. However, preferring PLS-SEM over other mechanisms is based upon several advantages, as it is the best alternative for a co-variance-based approach and is also workable on a small sample size. Other than this, SMART-PLS is also workable on models having less probability of correct model specifications & theoretical assumptions (Vijayabanu & Arunkumar, 2018).

### Figure 1

*Outer Loading and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

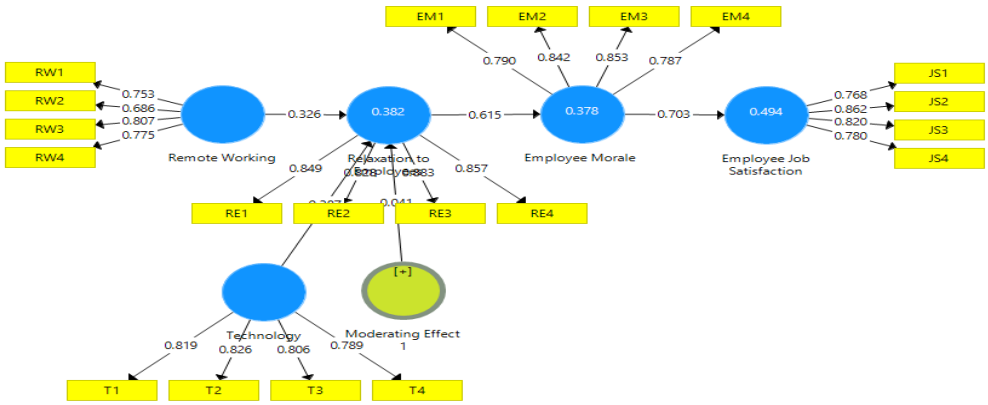


Figure 1 indicates to indicate outer-loading for each indicator. In fact, it is a form of factor loading that is required to verify the reliability of every indicator used in the research model (Afthanorhan, 2013). However, 0.70 is the least acceptable value for any of the indicators (Trianasari *et al.,* 2022). Though indicator values between 0.60 & 0.70 may also be included in the inclusion, it does not produce a harmful impact on the overall reliability of the variable (Sander & Teh, 2014).

Thus, in light of these criteria, there is no need to exclude any element, as there is only one element in the model with (0.686) outer loading.

## Construct Reliability and Validity

### Table 1

*Construct Reliability & Convergent Validity*

| | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.823 | 0.829 | 0.883 | 0.654 |
| Employee Morale | 0.836 | 0.838 | 0.890 | 0.670 |
| Moderating Effect 1 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Relaxation to Employees | 0.877 | 0.880 | 0.915 | 0.730 |
| Remote Working | 0.755 | 0.770 | 0.842 | 0.573 |
| Technology | 0.826 | 0.826 | 0.884 | 0.656 |

Table 1 is used to indicate construct reliability & convergent validity. According to Hair et al. (2017), construct reliability has been evaluated through reliability indicators in the table, i.e., Cronbach's alpha, Goldstein rho, and composite reliability, while convergent validity is measured through composite reliability & AVE. The minimum acceptability of Cronbach's alpha is 0.4 & composite reliability is 0.6 (Vijayabanu & Arunkumar, 2018), although for convergent validity presence of AVE with values of 0.5 or above is termed sufficient (Wong, 2013). Hence, according to the mentioned criterion for construct reliability and convergent validity, the model is found to be satisfactory and valid for applying inferential statistical testing.

## Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

### Table 2

*Discriminant Validity (HTMT)*

| | Employee Job Satisfaction | Employee Morale | Moderating Effect 1 | Relaxation to Employees | Remote Working | Technology |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Job Satisfaction | | | | | | |
| Employee Morale | 0.842 | | | | | |
| Moderating Effect 1 | 0.399 | 0.431 | | | | |
| Relaxation to Employees | 0.724 | 0.716 | 0.293 | | | |
| Remote Working | 0.841 | 0.786 | 0.589 | 0.660 | | |
| Technology | 0.895 | 0.780 | 0.542 | 0.669 | 0.882 | |

Table 2 is posited to indicate discriminant validity through the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), which is perceived as the most reliable tool to indicate discriminant validity (Shoukat et al., 2021; Iqbal *et al.,* 2021). The cutoff value for the tool is 0.85, above which the discriminant validity cannot be assured (Hair *et al.,* 2019).

## R Square

### Table 3

*Predictive Accuracy*

| | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|---|---|---|
| Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.510 | 0.502 |
| Employee Morale | 0.548 | 0.541 |
| Relaxation to Employees | 0.582 | 0.570 |

Table 3 indicates predictive accuracy that is also termed as quality criteria and reflected through the values of R-Square. That is actually the prediction of change in the dependent variable on the base of a 1% change in the independent variable. The minimum value that is acceptable to reflect the appropriateness of the model is 0.25, while 0.50 and 0.75 are termed moderate and excessive (Wong, 2013; Rashid et al., 2021). Hence, in light of the criteria, there is a significant change in the variables of the research model with a 1% change in the independent variable.

Figure 2 & Table 4 are there to reflect the path coefficient for inferring and analyzing relationships on the basis of t-statistics and p-values. The analysis is based upon a structural (inner) model related to SMART-PLS (Silaparasetti, Rao & Khan, 2017), and the benchmark values for t-statistics & p-value the benchmark is 1.97 or above and 0.05 or lower (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, in the light of the criterion, there is a valid relationship between remote working with the relaxation of employees, relaxation of employees with employee morale, and employee morale with employee job satisfaction. Similarly, the use of technology is found to have a significant impact over-relaxation of employees. However, there is no significant relationship between technology in the moderating role between remote working and the relaxation of employees. Therefore, legitimate to reject $H_1O$, $H_2O$, $H_3O$ & $H_4O$ as there is a relationship between entire progressions of related variables except for the moderation effect of technology between remote working. Thus, on the basis of statistical analysis study failed to reject $H_5O$.

**Table 4**

*Path Coefficient*

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (\|O/STDEV\|) | P Values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Morale -> Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.703 | 0.701 | 0.048 | 14.613 | 0.000 |
| Moderating Effect 1 -> Relaxation to Employees | 0.041 | 0.047 | 0.043 | 0.950 | 0.343 |
| Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale | 0.615 | 0.614 | 0.084 | 7.290 | 0.000 |
| Remote Working -> Relaxation to Employees | 0.326 | 0.338 | 0.119 | 2.746 | 0.006 |
| Technology -> Relaxation to Employees | 0.387 | 0.387 | 0.122 | 3.165 | 0.002 |

Table 5 is used to indicate specific indirect effects to illustrate mediation and serial mediation analysis. The criteria followed to reflect the relationship is the same as the one highlighted by Hair et al. (2019), i.e., the minimum t-statistics value is 1.97, and the maximum p-value is 0.05. Hence, in light of these criteria, it is effective to reflect that other than serial mediations from the moderating effect of technology, all the mediations and serial mediations are found to be valid for the study. Therefore legitimate to reject H5O, as statistical analysis indicated the presence of serial mediation of relaxation of employees and employee morale between the relationship of the remote working facility and employee job satisfaction.

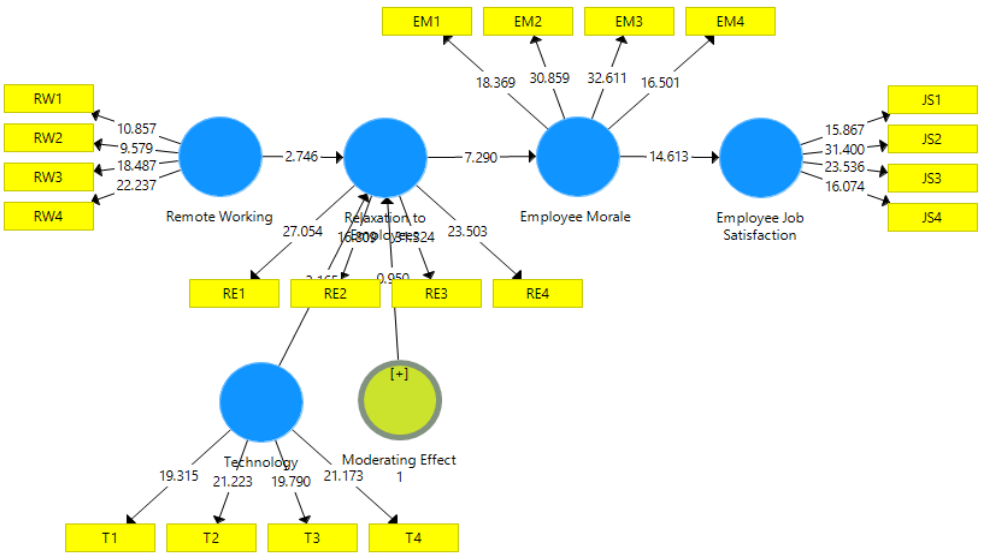
**Table 5**

*Specific Indirect Effect*

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (\|O/STDEV\|) | P Values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderating Effect 1 -> Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale -> Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.018 | 0.020 | 0.019 | 0.949 | 0.343 |
| Remote Working -> Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale -> Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.141 | 0.147 | 0.062 | 2.286 | 0.023 |
| Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale -> Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.432 | 0.431 | 0.074 | 5.829 | 0.000 |
| Technology -> Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale -> Employee Job Satisfaction | 0.167 | 0.170 | 0.067 | 2.475 | 0.014 |
| Moderating Effect 1 -> Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale | 0.025 | 0.029 | 0.026 | 0.948 | 0.343 |
| Remote Working -> Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale | 0.201 | 0.209 | 0.084 | 2.401 | 0.017 |
| Technology -> Relaxation to Employees -> Employee Morale | 0.238 | 0.241 | 0.090 | 2.639 | 0.009 |

**Figure 2**

*Path Coefficient*




## Conclusion and Discussion

The significant relationships between all the progressions in the research actually signify the use of JD-R theory as well as indications of Bezuidenhout (2022). In fact, all the relationships, i.e., remote working and relaxation of employees, employee relaxation and employee morale & employee morale and employee job satisfaction, are found to be significant. Thus, it is optimal to indicate the findings of the study are also consistent with Abdullah et al. (2020), Du Plessis (2022), Ng et al. (2022), and Williamson et al. (2020).

Moreover, with the indication that remote working is effective in increasing morale as well as job satisfaction, the findings of the study are also consistent with Negulescu and Doval (2021). Although this study is based upon data collected from IT personnel from the SME sector, it does not indicate any negatives. Thus, the findings are against Pattnaik and Jena (2020), which indicated that complex working is not supported by remote working.

Thus, the study is not in line with Pattnaik and Jena (2020), as data collection from various IT personnel having different genders & different job responsibilities does not reflect any negative on remote working. However, the use of technology as a moderator does not produce any impact on the relationship between remote working & relaxation of employees.

Thus, findings look to be inconsistent with Negulescu and Doval (2021), but technology itself was found to be creating a positive impact on the relaxation of employees, which means the use of technology is a must to practice remote working. Thus, the findings are consistent with Niebuhr et al. (2022) as well as with Barabaschi et al. (2022), as the findings of the study are also consistent for employees of SMEs. Overall, the study signifies the testing made through PLS-SEM as most of the assumptions and associations predicted by the study are found to be significant except for one of the moderating effects of technology. However, studies on office design or office ergonomics also indicated continuous monitoring may also produce a negative impact on employee job satisfaction as well as well-being. The statements are especially applicable to emotional labor and employees from call centers, etc. (Hollan et al., 2002). Similar indications are also made (2021), as electronic monitoring may hamper the level of job satisfaction and increase the level of stress (Kalischko & Riedl, 2021). Therefore, it is effective to believe that the use of technology may not make employees more relaxed and increase their morale, but it is mandatory to implement work from home.

## Area for Future Research

After detailed statistical testing & analysis, it has been recommended that future research in this regard may explore the impact of remote working on teachers in the new normal. The other dimension is to group IT-related employees on the basis of sectors of SMEs, like production food production, food processing, transportation, etc. These indications are valid as, according to Hasan et al. (2021), after IT-related work, the second topmost work that is transferable to work from home is teaching. Moreover, dividing IT-related workers into specific industry may provide a better understanding and clarifies the role of moderation of technology more effectively.

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