Virtually Even: Status Equalizing in Distributed Organizations

Rebecca Hinds,[a,*] Melissa Valentine,[a] Katherine DeCelles,[b] Justin M. Berg[c]

[a] Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305; [b] University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 3E6, Canada; [c] University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109
*Corresponding author

Contact: rebecca.hinds16@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4849-8162 (RH); mav@stanford.edu,
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7517-4054 (MV); katy.decelles@rotman.utoronto.ca, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6321-1591 (KD);
justberg@umich.edu, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3381-6925 (JMB)

Abstract. In distributed organizations, perceived status differences between workers are ubiquitous and harmful. Yet research suggests that once they are formed, status beliefs in organizations become entrenched in hierarchies and are hard to dismantle. In an inductive qualitative study, we observed how established status differences between remote and in-person workers in distributed organizations dissolved during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when everyone began working remotely. We use these data to theorize a novel status-equalizing process through which remote workers came to see themselves on an "equal playing field" with their in-person peers. We theorize how this status equalizing occurred through workers' changing their "in-person default" use of technology—that is, their new behavior challenged embedded cultural practices that had treated the in-person workplace experience as the standard, normal, and valued perspective, implicitly guiding how employees used technology. Workers adopted new and more inclusive technology practices—including the use of asynchronous communication, greater codification of work, and virtual socializing—which resulted in remote workers perceiving new and more equal communication standards, access to information, and opportunity for social connection. As a result, these workers reported feeling less negatively stereotyped and treated more fairly in their virtual interactions with colleagues, fostering feelings of inclusion and deepening relationships across the previously established status divide. At a time when many organizations are grappling with the challenges of distributed, remote, and hybrid work, our research illuminates how inclusive technology practices can help nullify entrenched status imbalances.

Keywords: status • digital technology • electronic communication • remote work • qualitative research

Remote workers have long struggled to obtain the same status as their in-person peers. Although many organizations are increasingly adopting remote[1] and hybrid-remote workforces, perceptions of intergroup status differences (the relative amount of subjective prestige, respect, and admiration that people confer on another individual based on their social group membership (Blau 1964, Ridgeway and Correll 2006, Magee and Galinsky 2008)) often plague distributed organizations, where employees are geographically dispersed. For instance, employees who telecommute or work at offshore or peripheral offices are often regarded as having lower status than those in central offices (Orlikowski and Yates 1994, Cramton 2001, Orlikowski 2002, Metiu 2006, Hinds and Cramton 2014, Kim 2018). A great deal of research also documents how remote workers more generally are perceived to be lower in status than those who work in the office (Nilles 1994; Weisband et al. 1995; Wiesenfeld et al. 1999, 2001; Bartel et al. 2012; Munsch et al. 2014; Kossek et al. 2015). This status difference can impair distributed workers' relationships,

create conflict, and contribute to remote workers struggling to feel a sense of belonging and organizational identification (Wiesenfeld et al. 2001, Hinds and Mortensen 2005, Metiu 2006, Polzer et al. 2006, Thatcher and Zhu 2006, Bartel et al. 2012, Belle et al. 2015). As a result, it is important for scholars and organizations to understand how this common and harmful intergroup status difference can be mitigated, such that distributed workers perceive one another as equals.

Established research suggests that distributed workforces can sometimes modify these perceived status differences, but this research has focused on aligning distributed workers' physical and temporal distance via in-person interactions (Maznevski and Chudoba 2000, Hinds and Kiesler 2002, Nardi and Whitaker 2002, Orlikowski 2002, Mattarelli and Gupta 2009, Mortensen and Neeley 2012, Wilson et al. 2012, Hinds and Cramton 2014, Rhymer 2023). Yet implementing regular in-person interactions for distributed workers might not always be possible or feasible for organizations, especially as a substantial number of employees globally

plan to work remotely for the long term (Barrero et al. 2023). Distributed workforces will continue to rely on virtual communication and collaboration tools, which are known to shape status distinctions among workers (Weisband et al. 1995, Owens et al. 2000, Armstrong and Cole 2002, O'Leary et al. 2002, Hinds and Bailey 2003, Hinds and Mortensen 2005, Metiu 2006, Peña et al. 2007). Thus, organizational scholarship on remote work has not yet explained how to close status differences in fully distributed workgroups.

Established theory and research on status in organizations more broadly show that once a status hierarchy is in place, it's quite difficult to change. Established status beliefs in organizations are sticky, durable, entrenched, and resistant to change (Ridgeway 1991, 2014; Tilly 1998; Anderson et al. 2001; Podolny 2005; Stewart 2005; Metiu 2006; Neeley 2013; Bendersky and Pai 2018). Once formed, status differences in organizations typically stabilize (Ridgeway 1991, Podolny 2005, Johnson et al. 2006, Magee and Galinsky 2008, Bendersky and Hays 2012), and individuals tend not to update their status beliefs (Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000, Magee and Galinsky 2008)—even after being provided with new information (Hamilton et al. 1990, Podolny 2005, Milanov and Shepherd 2013). Individuals in higher-status positions often defend and legitimize their advantages, hoarding opportunities and resources (Tilly 1998, Metiu 2006), whereas those in lower-status positions often rationalize the inequality (Jost and Banaji 1994, Jost et al. 2004). Importantly, although status characteristics theory explains how status beliefs form around noticeable group differences (e.g., in-person versus remote (Berger et al. 1977, Webster and Foschi 1988)), it does not explain how entrenched intergroup status gaps—with unequal expectations and opportunities—might be reduced.

More recently, research on status dynamics has examined how status differences in organizations can change (see Bendersky and Pai 2018). Much of this work has focused on the role of "jolts" in this process—events that alter group tasks and goals, in turn requiring new ways of accomplishing work (Tost 2011). For example, jolts can prompt individuals to perceive opportunities for changes in shared status beliefs, leading them to engage in status-striving behaviors (Wee et al. 2023). Jolts can also alter task-relevant expertise that could shape the status of different workgroups within organizations (Barley 1986, Chizhik et al. 2003). However, research also shows that jolts can provoke threat perceptions and resistance, which may undermine attempts to alter the social order (Neeley 2013, Neeley and Dumas 2016, Wee et al. 2023, Lee 2024). For example, employees may refuse to accept changes in status if they deem them unearned or illegitimate (Neeley and Dumas 2016, Doyle and Lount 2023) and defend their status positions when feeling threatened (Case and Maner 2014). Furthermore, although jolts may create opportunities for

status changes in organizations, research shows that extant status hierarchies may be replaced by new—albeit still unequal—social orders (Bianchi et al. 2012, Neeley 2013), or perpetuate unfair status differences in new ways (Alonso and O'Neill 2022, Cardador et al. 2022). As a result, scholars have a limited understanding of how established intergroup status differences within an organization can be successfully mitigated.

We began our study to better understand these processes during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when most organizations moved, at least temporarily, to remote-only virtual communication. We used this as an opportunity to study what happened to remote workers' established status beliefs based on the initial remote/in-person distinction. We focused on the experiences of workers who were fully remote before the COVID-19 pandemic and who could offer insight into their experiences when their on-site peers switched to remote work. We use these data to theorize a novel *status-equalizing* process, whereby remote workers came to perceive a new, equal status with their in-person peers, and as a result, experienced a greater sense of belonging in their organizations. Unlike earlier technological disruptions, which introduced new tools (e.g., email, videoconferencing), we discovered that organizations and workers were, for the most part, using the same technologies for distributed work as before the COVID-19 pandemic—yet they had fundamentally changed *how* they were enacting these technologies in ways that were more inclusive. Their new practices included more reliance on asynchronous communication, greater codification of work, and virtual socializing. We found that using technology in these alternative ways challenged the established status beliefs based on remote work: remote workers felt less negatively stereotyped and more fairly evaluated, and new relationships formed and deepened across the previously established status divide. To explain these shifts, we draw on the concept of "default culture" (Cheryan and Markus 2020), arguing that workers' new technology practices counteracted an implicit cultural bias that had treated the in-person experience as the prototypical, normal, and valued perspective implicitly guiding how to use technology to coordinate distributed work. As a result, we document how the intergroup status gap between in-person and distributed workgroup members was successfully mitigated, despite maintaining physical and often temporal distance that required virtual communication tools.

Our findings yield fresh theoretical insights for research on distributed work and organizational status and offer practical guidance for using technology to diminish harmful status beliefs. Additionally, our research question—how entrenched status hierarchies in organizations can be mitigated—is especially timely and important given the prevalence of hybrid workforces (Barrero et al. 2023, Bloom et al. 2023).

Perceived Status Differences in Distributed Work

Research has shown that individuals who do not work from a central, colocated work site are often perceived as lower status in their organizations (Nilles 1994; Wiesenfeld et al. 1999, 2001; Metiu 2006; Bartel et al. 2012; Munsch et al. 2014; Kossek et al. 2015). Scholars have noted that this is because remote workers' colleagues are physically and often temporally distant (Wilson et al. 2012, Golden and Ford 2025) and therefore do not observe them working ("out of sight, out of mind" (McCloskey and Igbaria 2003, p. 19; see also Hinds and Bailey 2003)). As a result, colleagues often make negative assumptions and attributions about remote workers, including how they spend their time, eroding trust and casting doubts about remote workers' commitment and performance ability (Gainey et al. 1999; Cramton 2001, 2002; Cooper and Kurland 2002; Elsbach et al. 2010). Furthermore, remote workers often perceive themselves as lower in status than their in-person peers because they feel unjustly stereotyped, left out of important decisions and informal communications, unfairly treated, and devalued (Nilles 1994, Wiesenfeld et al. 1999, Bartel et al. 2012, Munsch et al. 2014, Kossek et al. 2015). For example, Bartel et al. (2012) conducted multiple surveys at large technology firms and presented evidence that remote workers, because of their physical isolation, felt less respected, valued, and included by their coworkers.

Consistent with this, research illustrates several interactional problems that arise when workgroups are distributed versus colocated, which can manifest in inequalities. First, technologies cannot convey the richness of real-life interaction, which can make rapport-building and cooperation difficult (Kiesler and Cummings 2002, Hinds and Bailey 2003). In addition, collocated group members often ignore remote group members, resulting in distinct subgroups with little interaction between them (Bos et al. 2004). Further, these subgroups often develop their own norms for communication, with collocated group members communicating more informally and spontaneously, giving them greater access to information and limiting shared knowledge (Cramton 2001). By contrast, remote group members often rely more on formal and scheduled electronic communications, which have information disadvantages as in-office workers do not tend to systematically use electronic communication, often relying on face-to-face, spontaneous communication that is not logged electronically (Hinds and Mortensen 2005, Metiu 2006, O'Leary and Mortensen 2010). Such communication differences also create problems for workgroup cohesion, trust, and collaboration (Mortensen and Neeley 2012, Cheshin et al. 2013). A lack of clear norms and social cues in distributed workgroups can create ambiguity, unaccountability, and anonymity that can facilitate interpersonal mistreatment in distributed

workgroups (Keating et al. 2024). This is consistent with research conducted with internal digital communications (email, calendars, messaging, and calls) at Microsoft during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yang et al. 2022), which showed that with the rapid shift to fully remote work in 2020, the collaboration network became more siloed between workgroups and individuals relied more on asynchronous communications. Further, a meta-analysis of telecommuting studies showed that workers who are remote (versus collocated) experience more social isolation, less visibility in the organization, and fewer networking opportunities, resulting in inequalities in career development (Gajendran and Harrison 2007; see also Vander Elst et al. 2017).

Some earlier research shows that it might be possible to mitigate perceived status differences among distributed workers, providing important insights into how status divides are inherently tied to the physical and temporal distance between distributed workers (Wilson et al. 2012). For example, in their study of a top technological manufacturing equipment producer, Maznevski and Chudoba (2000) found that team interactions were more effective when distributed workers used face-to-face interactions that were intermixed with periods of technology-supported communication. In-person interactions align both physical and temporal distance, at least temporarily, and therefore help reduce perceived status differences by improving trust, fostering cohesion and familiarity, limiting miscommunication, and increasing information exchange (Daft and Lengel 1986, Maznevski and Chudoba 2000, Hinds and Kiesler 2002, Nardi and Whitaker 2002, Orlikowski 2002, Hinds and Mortensen 2005, Mattarelli and Gupta 2009, Mortensen and Neeley 2012, Hinds and Cramton 2014, Rhymer 2023). Kneeland and Kleinbaum (2025) examined how a large corporate law firm's corporate offsite (a large in-person corporate meeting) shaped the social networks among workers. This research found that the offsite meeting increased trust, closeness, and awareness about who-knows-what among employees, as well as increased networking attempts among all employees—even those who did not attend the event itself. However, they still found an inequality between the in-person event attendees and nonattendees, such that those who attended the offsite also gained greater network ties. Greater in-person interaction between distributed workgroup members can also reduce reliance on negative stereotypes and biases (Barley 1986, Hollingshead and Brandon 2003, Salas et al. 2013) and increase social connection (Hinds and Kiesler 2002, Rhymer 2023). Therefore, although this research documents that it might be possible to reduce perceived status differences among distributed workers, we are limited in our understanding of how to do so among workers who remain physically and/or temporally distant and therefore must rely on virtual communication

tools—that is, the very definition of distributed workers (Olson and Primps 1984). Our theorizing specifically applies to contexts where consistent in-person interaction is not viable, such as fully distributed teams, global organizations, or remote-first organizations.

It's important to note that much of the research on remote work and status dynamics was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. Although remote work was already increasing before the pandemic (Keating et al. 2024), since the pandemic, rates of remote and hybrid work have increased significantly. Researchers have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated remote work adoption at a pace equivalent to nearly 40 years of prepandemic growth (Barrero et al. 2021). In 2019, only 7% of paid workdays in the United States were remote (Barrero et al. 2021). By 2025, that number plateaued at around 26%. As of early 2025, the most common work arrangement in the United States remains full-time on-site (61%), followed by hybrid work (26%) and fully remote work (13%). This represents a significant shift from prepandemic norms. The growing prevalence of hybrid work highlights the need to revisit earlier literature and underscores the importance of studying mixed-mode workplaces where remote and in-office employees interact, as well as the role status dynamics play in how workplace technologies are used.

Status in Organizations

To engage these questions, we situated our study in status characteristics theory (Berger et al. 1977, Webster and Foschi 1988, Wagner and Berger 1993). Status characteristics theory explains that status differences often emerge because noticeable differences across individuals' social cues, called *status characteristics*, can become associated with expectations of employees' competence, worth, and contributions. Scholars distinguish between two types of status characteristics: (1) diffuse, which are stereotypical properties of social groups in society more broadly that inform others' expectations of performance (such as gender, race, and age (Berger et al. 1998)), and (2) specific, which are characteristics of individuals that are relevant and salient (more narrowly) to certain tasks, such as cognitive ability. These characteristics, imbued with beliefs about who is expected to be more or less competent, create a structure in the social order that organizes the informal social hierarchy (Berger et al. 1972). For example, characteristics associated with higher status in societal beliefs (Correll and Ridgeway 2003)—such as being male—affect organizational members' expectations and attributions of competence that favor men (versus women).

Regardless of the form, status characteristics portray a rank order of who is granted status, which becomes shared, collectively legitimated, and stabilized (Ridgeway and Berger 1986, Walker and Zelditch 1993, Berger

et al. 1998, Pratto 1999, Correll and Ridgeway 2003, Kilduff and Galinsky 2013). Those afforded higher status are granted more opportunities and resources (Merton 1968, Sutton and Hargadon 1996, Magee and Galinsky 2008), reinforcing, reifying, and legitimating the social order as meritocratic (Ridgeway 1993, Walker and Zelditch 1993, Correll and Ridgeway 2003). People in groups lower in status are also motivated to believe that their place is justified and legitimate (Jost et al. 2004). Beliefs about the social order become shared, and they guide interactions among employees (Ridgeway and Erickson 2000). These beliefs are often defended even when new information arises—because our existing beliefs affect how new information is processed in path-dependent ways (Hamilton et al. 1990, Podolny 2005, Milanov and Shepherd 2013), and those ascribed high status often hoard privileges and exclude low-status group members (Weber 1978, Tilly 1998, Vallas 2001, Metiu 2006).

Whereas past scholarship has focused mostly on how status hierarchies emerge and become entrenched (Magee and Galinsky 2008, Wee et al. 2023), recent research has explored *status dynamics*—the ways status beliefs shift over time (Bendersky and Pai 2018). This work shows that individuals can elevate their standing by displaying dominance or prestige (Halevy et al. 2012, Cheng et al. 2013, Case and Maner 2014) and through agentic actions such as prosocial helping or voice (Flynn 2003, Flynn et al. 2006, Blader et al. 2016, McClean et al. 2018), engaging in cultural status-maintenance practices (Alonso and O'Neill 2022), and making valued task contributions (Ridgeway et al. 1994, Bendersky and Shah 2012). Research on status dynamics also shows that changes to individuals' status can occur via "jolts," which can alter individuals' relevant and observable task-based skills, changing others' expectations and the perceived value of their contributions (Anderson and Kilduff 2009). However, jolts can also trigger an individual's sense of threat or opportunity for a relative change to their status, or a sense of status mutability (Hays and Bendersky 2015). In turn, feelings of threat and opportunity can motivate individuals to learn or demonstrate new visible skills, engage in more prosocial behaviors (Wee et al. 2023), or behave in status-defending ways that resist changes to the status hierarchy (Case and Maner 2014, Kakkar et al. 2019), shaping individual status conferral processes.

Most research on status dynamics (reviewed above) emanates from microlevel scholars who study *individuals'* status changes and trajectories in organizations (see Pettit and Marr 2020). There is less understanding about whether and how unequal *social groups* in organizations, such as remote versus on-site workers, can successfully mitigate existing status differences. Among this small body of research, one paper reported on how a new organizational policy flipped the status

associated with employees' language, changing which language-defined social groups were granted high status (Neeley 2013, Neeley and Dumas 2016). However, this observed change to social groups' status was not evidence of equalization because it created a new inequality. Nor was this status change consensually accepted—many workers actively resisted the change and deemed it illegitimate (Neeley 2013). The study by Bianchi et al. (2012) also examined status dynamics of social groups in organizations, finding that the status characteristics of social groups in wider society (i.e., the higher status generally being granted to those relatively younger in age and having more education) did not translate into a status hierarchy within an emergent organization. This was because workers came into the organization with shared beliefs that these status characteristics were not legitimate indicators of work performance expectations. Although this paper is important because it points to how shared beliefs about a status characteristic's legitimacy can shape emergent social group status hierarchies to be more equal in organizations, it examined a nascent organization—where status beliefs had not yet become entrenched. Finally, Cardador et al. (2022) studied status dynamics in a mature and male-dominated occupation (surgery) and found that women who achieved high status nonetheless incurred an unfair and costly burden of extra work (known as *status-leveling behaviors*). Together, these studies point to mixed findings: although status between social groups can become more equal under certain conditions (e.g., when there are shared legitimacy beliefs in a nascent organization), efforts to shift entrenched hierarchies in organizations can generate new forms of inequality. Therefore, extant scholarship does not explain whether and how an entrenched intergroup status gap can be closed to result in a shared perception of equity.

Interpretive Lens: Default Culture

To analyze and theorize a process of status equalization, we draw from research on "default culture" in organizations (Cheryan and Markus 2020, Cardador et al. 2022) to explain how the taken-for-granted organizational culture underlies the established status beliefs and the maintenance of the status hierarchy. We argue that technology is often used in distributed organizations in ways that reinforce an *in-person default*, which we define as a cultural bias that implicitly treats the in-person workplace experience as the prototype of what is the standard, normal, and valued perspective. The literature on cultural defaults in organizations is nascent, and it has focused to date on masculine defaults in particular. We extend this literature by explaining how our findings on the status differences between in-person and remote workers illustrate a novel form of defaults in organizations. Importantly, defaults are

distinguished from other forms of bias through how they create a cultural foundation that implies preferences for one group over another and that shapes organizational policies, practices, interactions, norms, and artifacts. Defaults typically benefit majority groups, and people in the minority (or with minority interests) are often "defaulted" into options that are not ideal (Sunstein 2013, Beshears et al. 2016, Schmader 2023).

Defaults refer to the often-unseen cultural practices that give one group an advantage over another, creating and reinforcing disparities, rather than outward hostility toward a specific group. For instance, ingrained cultural preferences for certain modes of communication could inherently favor an advantaged group (Cheryan and Markus 2020). Defaults are distinct from inequitable treatment. One might assume that equity is achieved by treating all individuals the same—extending the same resources and practices to all workers, regardless of group, for example. However, this "equality" often entails treating low-status groups according to the dominant group's default practices, overlooking whether those defaults are biased. In this sense, equalizing treatment can reinforce the norms and practices that created the disparity in the first place.

We argue that the solution currently offered in the distributed work literature to reduce status differences between remote and in-person workers is parallel to this: by positioning in-person interaction as the means through which status differences and their challenges can be solved, it further instantiates the prescriptive value of the in-person default. By contrast, we inductively build theory that explains how organizations can dismantle the in-person default culture guiding the use of technology—and the related psychological and social implications—to equalize status and generate feelings of inclusion among distributed workers.

Methods
Research Context: Remote Work Changes in California During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Our study focuses on remote workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. We call those who were already working remotely before the pandemic "experienced remote workers." As lockdowns ensued and most physical workplaces closed, millions of people who previously worked mainly from their organizations' physical offices made unprecedented moves to working remotely from home (Brynjolfsson et al. 2020, Kniffin et al. 2021, Neeley 2021). We refer to these individuals as "newly remote workers." One survey of human resources professionals estimated that half of organizations had transitioned over 80% of their workforce to remote work during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gartner 2020). In March 2020, some U.S. states, including California, where many of our informants'

companies were headquartered, issued stay-at-home orders, prompting companies to implement work-from-home mandates (Procter 2023). This shift to remote work for the entire workforce of various companies represented an "extreme case" (Eisenhardt 1989, Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007), meaning it was a situation markedly different from typical organizational changes. Rarely do such large groups of workers experience such a fundamental shift in how work is performed (i.e., from working in-office to remotely). Extreme cases are theoretically useful because they can highlight dynamics, mechanisms, and relationships more clearly than in more routine settings. Because extreme cases amplify the visibility of novel processes or patterns, they allow researchers to observe and understand key dynamics at play more easily. We saw this "extreme case" of remote work changes at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as a unique opportunity to examine the social dynamics of distributed work and technology. We were able to explore the lived experience of experienced remote workers as they navigated their organizations' transitions to remote work (Charmaz 2006).

Data Collection

In March 2020, six California Bay Area counties issued the nation's first shelter-in-place orders, which mandated that residents stay home except for essential activities (San Francisco Chronicle Staff 2020). This order affected many organizations, including retail stores, restaurants, gyms, and salons. However, software technology companies, whose operations were largely conducive to remote work, continued to allow most employees to work from home (Procter 2023). In May 2020, we began recruiting participants for interviews on remote work and technology use through our personal and professional networks. We initially recruited participants who were experienced remote workers and, as such, had worked remotely at companies where their colleagues worked from colocated offices before the pandemic. From May to August 2020, we conducted semistructured interviews with these participants (Brinkmann and Kvale 2009). Interview questions included "How has the change to fully remote work affected you?" and "Has your prior remote work experience changed the way others in your organization see you or your role, now that everyone is remote?" (see the full protocol in the appendix). Interviews lasted on average for about 40 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and all participants were assured that the interviews were voluntary and confidential.

Throughout our first dozen interviews and related analysis, we noticed that many people described the move to remote work as having "leveled the playing field." We understood that they were describing a sense that something that had been unequal was shifting toward greater equality, which inspired us to turn to the status literature, particularly on equalizing processes, to help analyze and interpret these descriptions. We conducted two additional rounds of interviews as our data collection and analysis evolved (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Dougherty 2002). During the second data collection phase in November 2020, we conducted 19 more interviews, for a total of 31. At that time, COVID-19 cases had surged, and California had reintroduced restrictions on on-site working, requiring many nonessential indoor businesses to close or severely limit operations (Procter 2023). At this point, more than six months after the COVID-19 pandemic began, organizations had started to adjust their resources, policies, and cultural norms in response to sustained remote work. We expanded our interview protocol to continue to develop our inductive theorizing and understanding. We also added questions to our interview protocol related to these structural changes, including, for example, "Has your organization provided any new resources or support for employees since the pandemic?" These new data provided additional evidence of our existing codes, and minor changes to the coding scheme. During this period, we conducted another 28 interviews with experienced remote workers.

In December 2020, we collected 18 additional interviews. During this month, California's stay-at-home orders had been renewed "indefinitely" (Procter 2023). These additional interviews focused on analyzing direct accounts from new remote workers—that is, people working predominantly in-person in their companies' offices before the shift. We asked participants about their perceptions of remote work and remote workers before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, whether these perceptions had changed, and whether they believed the changes would endure. We concluded interviews when we saw that our participants were describing similar changes in their organizations and consistently referencing the equalizing of previously high-status groups, giving us confidence that we had reached theoretical saturation.

Sample

Our sampling approach was guided by the dimension of remote work classifications. Specifically, we aimed to learn from both "higher-status" in-office workers and the "lower-status" experienced remote workers about their work experiences and perceptions. We used a snowball sampling approach, leveraging one of the author's professional networks to identify individuals with prior experience working remotely. Given our research interests, we were aware of several companies with some remote work populations and specific employees who had been working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic. As we began conducting interviews, participants referred us to additional remote

workers within their own organizations as well as employees at other companies.

Our full sample included 77 full-time employees working at 39 unique software companies. Of the 77 participants, 59 employees ("experienced remote workers") were working remotely at companies where most of their colleagues were working in-office until March 2020, when the COVID-19 restrictions began. Additionally, of the 77 participants, 18 ("new remote workers") had worked predominantly on-site in an office until the work-from-home orders. Because of the composition of our networks, our outreach led us to focus on the technology sector and employees within the United States. Of the 39 software organizations, 35 were based in the United States, and the other four were based in Australia (2), Canada (1), and India (1). Two of these four also maintained U.S. headquarters. Among the 35 U.S.-based organizations, 19 were based in the California Bay Area (including in San Francisco, Sunnyvale, San Jose, Palo Alto, and Menlo Park). Two organizations each were based in Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, New York, Texas, and Washington, and one each was based in Colorado, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Ohio. These companies varied in employee size, ranging from less than 50 employees to over 200,000 employees. Although we do not have detailed data on the organizations' remote workforce composition before the pandemic, participants described remote work as being relatively uncommon in these organizations. This aligns with national data showing that, in 2019, only about 7% of paid workdays in the United States were conducted remotely (Barrero et al. 2021).

When conducting the interviews, we did not ask participants to identify their gender, race, or ethnicity because it was not the focus of our initial analysis. After we had collected the interview data, we recognized that our interpretive theory—the defaults literature—has origins in gender dynamics. This prompted us to examine the gender composition of our sample. We then coded gender based on participants' first names and voices in recorded interviews. Although this is an imperfect way of attributing gender and this stratification of our sample, it allowed us to estimate gender distribution. Based on this approach, 47 participants had names typically associated with women and 30 typically associated with men (i.e., suggesting that the sample was 61% female). However, we acknowledge that we do not know how individuals personally identify. Stratified by remote work status, the final sample consisted of 50% women (9 out of 18) in the new remote category and 64% in the experienced remote category (38 out of 59). In terms of location, 86% of our participants (66 out of 77) and 81% of our remote participants (48 out of 59) worked in the United States, whereas the remainder worked in Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and India. Example job titles included Director of

Executive Communication, UX Designer, Principal Writer, Senior Software Engineer, and Field Marketing Manager.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis involved an iterative and inductive coding approach, cycling between empirical observations and relevant literature. As Locke et al. (2022) note, such coding is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We developed a coding strategy that allowed us to move "bottom up"—starting from participants' lived experiences and actions and building toward a theoretical narrative. This approach aligned with our theoretical aims of developing new theory from a new empirical setting. Our coding approach is best characterized as constructivist (Charmaz 2006) and followed an iterative, multistage coding process, beginning with open coding, focused coding, and axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008, Saldana 2016), supported by theoretical memoing and ongoing engagement with relevant literatures (Emerson et al. 2011, Locke et al. 2022).

During the open-coding phase, we applied participant-driven descriptive codes, using gerunds to capture specific actions, behaviors, and sentiments expressed in interviews. We began by independently coding a subset of transcripts, followed by collaborative discussions to calibrate interpretations. Early in our open-coding process, codes like "being hypervisible before the pandemic" captured how remote workers felt pressured to prove their productivity. As we moved toward focused coding, we recognized broader underlying patterns, leading us to aggregate open codes (e.g., "responding quickly through technology to develop trust" and "feeling a constant pressure to respond immediately") into more theoretically focused themes (e.g., "feeling pressure to communicate asynchronously"). We created and revised our codebook throughout the inductive research process. The earlier codes were broader, for instance, capturing more general workplace experiences, and the later coding was more fine-grained or detailed. For example, our later coding focused more on the particular technology practices in the paper's emerging theoretical framework and the psychological mechanisms we were theorizing as related to these practices.

An illustrative challenge during this phase was distinguishing asynchronous communication from work codification, as both involved shifts in information flow. Our initial codes, such as "documentation," sometimes blurred these concepts. However, as we engaged in constant comparison analysis, it helped us refine these distinctions. We came to understand that work codification primarily concerned access to information (reducing informal knowledge gaps), whereas asynchronous communication centered on shifting availability norms and expectations, specifically by reducing the pressure for immediate, synchronous responsiveness.

During the latter focused coding phases, we concretized our theoretical framework by centering on how technology practices contributed to status equalizing. Initially, we had conceptualized status differences as emerging from the distinction between remote and in-office work. However, through our inductive analysis, we came to recognize that the core driver was not the existence of remote work itself, but the transformation of technology practices that had previously reinforced an in-person default culture. One illustrative moment came from an experienced remote work participant (Kanan, P35), who described having previously advocated for more asynchronous communication from their manager to no avail. After the organization shifted to remote work, however, the manager publicly changed their stance. Kanan (P35) described:

> My manager made a post … "now that I see what remote is like, I'm gonna make a conscious effort to be more available on chat to have more written communication" … And when I saw that, I felt really like … I was really upset … I was like, "What the fuck dude? Are you serious? Like, I've been trying to get this through to you for a year and a half!"

This moment highlighted for us that the barriers to adopting asynchronous practices were not necessarily technological, but often cultural and norm-driven. This realization was consistent with prior research on organizational technology practices, showing that the key shifts required to transition to asynchronous communication in distributed teams are often cultural and rooted in established norms, rather than technological (Rhymer 2023).

Our final focused coding was structured around three major categories: synchronous versus asynchronous communication, documentation practices, and virtual socializing. This coding strategy systematically compared prepandemic and pandemic-era practices in each of these categories. For example, in the synchronous versus asynchronous communication category, we coded descriptions from before the COVID-19 pandemic: "Communicating less frequently as a remote worker," "Experiencing negative perceptions," and "In-office workers lacking asynchronous communication skills." We coded these descriptions from during the pandemic: "In-office workers using asynchronous channels more," "Gaining new asynchronous muscles," and "Feeling less FOMO" as asynchronous communication became normalized. Similar before/during shifts were coded for the documentation and virtual socializing categories, highlighting the evolution of workplace technology practices and norms.

To refine our model and deepen our theorizing, we engaged in analytic diagramming as we inductively developed our theory (Emerson et al. 2011, Langley and Ravasi 2019). Specifically, we developed process models to visualize the interplay between communication practices, technology enactment, and status dynamics. This helped us articulate how the same technologies that had previously reinforced status hierarchies began to level the playing field through shifts in their use and accompanying psychological mechanisms. Our final conceptual model (Figure 1) emerged through this iterative process of refinement, guided by constant comparative analysis and theoretical integration. Although we explored alternative framings—such as interpreting the shift as a technology adoption process—we ultimately foregrounded status-equalizing mechanisms, as our data indicated that the key transformation was not which technologies were used, but how they were enacted in practice.

Our interview data were our primary source of data because they captured employees' lived experiences. We cross-referenced some archival data (such as organizations' press releases and blogs) along with the interview data. The archival data were used to help validate that the practices that respondents were describing were organization-level changes, rather than idiosyncratic changes that occurred just on their specific teams. The archival data documented how practices changed over time, whereas participants described how they experienced and perceived those changes.

Through this iterative engagement between data and theory, our analysis ultimately revealed that technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic was not just a functional shift but a cultural and status transformation. Through our in-depth coding process, we learned that the move from synchronous to asynchronous communication was not merely about flexibility—it fundamentally altered workplace interactions, challenging entrenched status hierarchies and enabling greater parity between remote and in-office workers.

Findings

Overall, our findings describe a process of *status equalizing* in distributed organizations—that is, previously disconnected lower-status remote workers described coming to feel genuinely equal with their higher-status in-person peers who became new remote workers (illustrated in Figure 1). We theorize this happened as workers began to use technology in new ways that dismantled an implicit in-person "default" culture, creating conditions that led to remote workers feeling more equal, and closing the intergroup status gap. Our data suggest that the process broke down the previously established and entrenched status differences without creating a sense of threat or resistance to the change, and importantly, did so without reifying the in-person interaction default.

Below, we present evidence of the initial status differences between remote and in-person workers, consistent

Figure 1. (Color online) The Status-Equalizing Process in Distributed Work
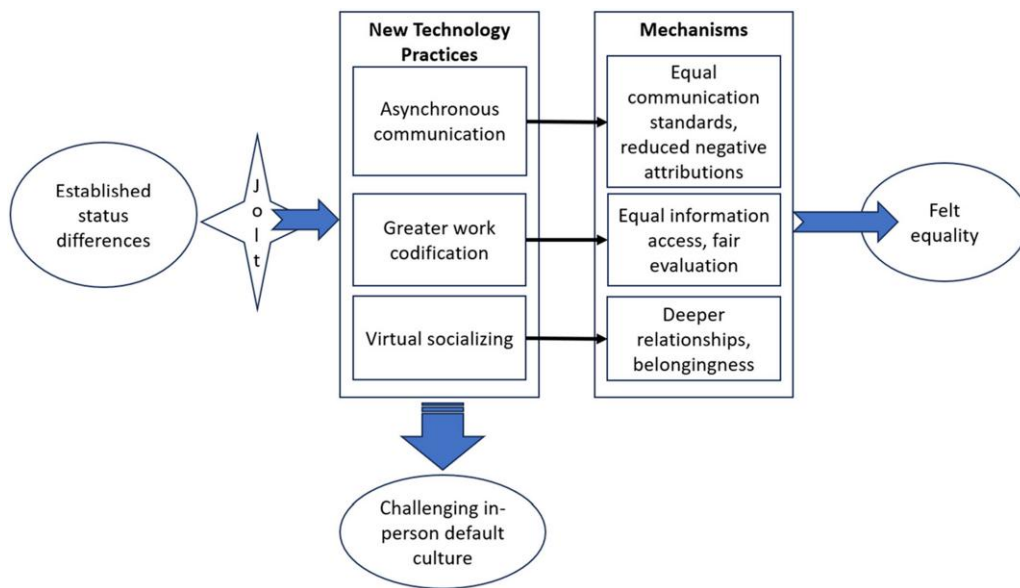
with prior research. We then present findings that illustrate three ways workers used technology in ways that dismantled elements of an in-person default culture. For each, we identify the psychological mechanisms that explain why these changes contributed to a growing perception of greater equality among workers.

Perceived Status Differences in Distributed Work

Individuals in our sample who were working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic perceived themselves as lower status than their colleagues who worked in the office. For example, one remote worker summarized the perceptions of many in saying they felt "like second-class citizens" (Stuart, P52). Consistent with the distributed work literature, remote workers described feeling as though in-office colleagues held negative stereotypes about them. This included an association of remote workers with a lack of professionalism, often colloquially referred to as "wearing pajamas" (Quentin, P47), or a general sense of laziness. Quentin (P47) described:

> I've gotten so many … working from bed jokes … I've done this for three and a half years now, there hasn't been a day where I worked from my pajamas, unless … I was sick, and shouldn't have been working anyway … I think that's the one big misconception is that people work from home because there's laziness involved.

Respondents also described how their colleagues were doubtful that remote workers could be productive without being physically present. As one (Zelda, P59) remote worker said, there was an assumption that "if you're not being watched, you're not going to work."

These negative attributions also extended to assumptions about the commitment of remote workers, such as having "one foot out the door" (Anya, P5). Another remote worker (Edwina, P19) explained: "There's a perception that if you're not at the headquarters in the office every day, you're not as invested in your career."

New remote workers who were working in an office before the jolt also described the lower-status perceptions of remote workers. As one new remote worker (Missy, P60) said:

> You don't think about what you don't see. So I think it's harder to have a sense of just how hard someone is working when they're far away … that kind of uncertainty … even if it's subconscious, has a neutral to maybe slightly negative impact overall on your perception of that person.

Another new remote worker (Louis, P75) echoed these sentiments: "People used to say, 'Oh, and you work remote?' It was like, you're not working … You're working in your bed. It definitely, definitely had that reputation sometimes."

Jolt-Triggered New Technology Practices

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 acted as a jolt that compelled most workers in the companies we studied to shift to remote work. This shift triggered significant changes in how workers used existing technologies. Notably, in most cases, the technologies themselves were not new to the organization; rather, it was employees' enactment of the technology that evolved. As one new remote worker (George, P73) observed, the situation "emphasized the power of some

of these technologies that already existed, as opposed to … creating new ones."

Our data revealed three ways that workers changed their use of technology following the jolt: a shift to asynchronous communication (communication that does not require or entail a real-time response), greater work codification, and virtual socializing, which we discuss in more detail below. We theorize that these changes contributed to workers' newfound perceptions of equality, and we illustrate that this was because the new practices helped to dismantle elements of an in-person "default" culture. That is, both remote workers and their in-person colleagues described how they changed their use of technology in ways that altered default work practices that had previously benefited in-person workers. We next describe the changes made to each of these default practices and present evidence of the psychological and relational mechanisms explaining why we theorize that these changes ultimately produced feelings of greater equality.

Shift to Asynchronous Communication. After the jolt, our respondents described a notable shift from synchronous use of technology, which had benefited in-person workers, to more asynchronous use of technology, which they perceived as more equitable. Prior to the shift, synchronous communication norms often put remote employees at a disadvantage, making them feel they needed to be perpetually online. This was due to the bias that remote workers believed they faced: their in-person peers assumed that remote workers were not working very hard and were even lazy. Remote workers thus felt a strong pressure to respond immediately to communications in real time, leading to heightened pressure and even paranoia. Val (P58) explained:

> That was something that was a recommendation by other [remote] people … to me, saying it's going to be challenging, because you really have to make an effort to be visible. So you know, people don't forget about you … I think that advice probably is one of the reasons that gave me paranoia to be always on, and always available, and if someone message me, then like at 7 pm, whatever, I have to respond right away, just so they know that I'm available … Part of it was that being always on, always responding immediately to whatever it is.

Nick (P45) described a similar pressure to respond synchronously:

> I learned the quickest way to build trust … is to respond as quickly as you can … One thing that I tried to stay consistent with was my response time, over channels like Slack and email, because if someone is pinging you over Slack, the expectation, at least on their end, is that they would receive an immediate response … I wanted to make sure that I could basically be there when they needed me … If I wasn't

communicating with them on a regular basis, they didn't really know what I was doing or what I was up to.

Another remote worker (Holly, P32) described this same experience of pressure: "I felt like I should just be super available … Slacks at like six o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning, if someone on the East Coast hits you up, I responded." Exme (P23) explained how she would use email in highly synchronous ways as she was "obsessive about making sure that I'm online on my computer, that I have everything open [so] that I'm responding really quickly to email." Remote workers described how in-office workers thought they would always be available for meetings and other communications. As Edmond (P18) put it:

> They just bombarded me with random requests and random questions, or random meetings at all types of hours … I would get meetings at 2 am, and then another one like 7 am, and then 8 pm. Just because the assumption was, "Oh, you work from home, so you got it good."

Yet upon experiencing the jolt, whereby almost all employees at the companies we studied worked remotely, our participants described a pronounced shift in their organizations toward a more asynchronous use of technology, which led to more realistic communication expectations. As organizations moved to work remotely, the reliance on synchronous communication became unsustainable for all—not just lower-status employees—thereby easing the pressure and visibility issues remote workers had long faced. Steph (P51) reflected:

> I also feel that people are getting smarter and better at collaborating … that's actually made things more efficient, and I've been able to easily walk away … and come back and get work done and feel more productive vs. when you're the only person that's remote you feel like you need to be on constantly because you just want that perception to be there that you are engaged.

Val (P58) described the shift away from paranoia:

> [Before the pandemic, I felt like] Oh my gosh, I can' go to the bathroom because what if someone you know Slacks me, messages me, and I don't respond right away? Like there was this paranoia … but now it's changed completely.

Reva (P48) elaborated, "Now again that we're kind of on an even playing field. I don't feel as pressured to be … super overly communicative, which is great." The use of document-sharing and collaboration platforms such as Google Docs and Slack was ramped up to facilitate asynchronous workflows. Participants described using collaborative project management tools like Trello more frequently, which allowed workers to

independently update tasks and track progress, thereby reducing dependence on real-time interactions. One long-time remote worker (Fantine, P26) described how the use of asynchronous project management tools increased: "[Everyone's] been moving more toward an async update process … you mostly just post your updates and text on [project management platforms]." She explained how this meant that she felt less pressure to respond immediately:

> Because you can see the whole view of everything that's being worked on at once. So that's good for executives to monitor what's going on instead of bothering me personally, on, you know, an update for a certain project.

Across the participants and companies we studied, although there was an understanding of the need for timely responses, the expectation of immediate replies softened, acknowledging the varied schedules and rhythms of remote work. Arthur (P65) described how people who were new to remote working now experienced the pressure of constant availability, giving them a new perspective: "Someone who might have never been remote at all [will have] a hard time if they feel they have to answer every email and every Slack message all the time, they have to go to every meeting." They further explained that this led to a change in perspective, as the mentality became "No, you don't have to do that, you can work at your own pace as long as you get your work done." Arthur (P65) described these new norms that no longer defaulted to an in-person perspective:

> There are … these courtesy, unspoken rules … don't feel like you have to answer everything all at once, like all day, it allows people to … be able to contribute, when they can't, there are times where people have to come together on a call … [it's not] needed to kind of bounce ideas off each other constantly.

William (P77), a new remote worker, described this same change to asynchronous communication at their company:

> When this first started … I definitely felt obligated to work harder or to prove that I was working … [to] show extra initiative … And, you know, my boss was not looking over my shoulder, I wanted to make sure that she knew I was working. And I think since then, I've relaxed a little bit … When I was working at home [at the onset of the pandemic], I felt the need to kind of check in more often, ask them more questions than maybe I would have asked … just as an opportunity to show I was online and doing things … And I feel like it wasn't just me. I think when it first started, the first couple months of working remotely, you know, everybody was putting meetings on my calendar, everybody was calling me every five minutes. Again, everybody's kind of trying to remind each other that they are there, they are working. They're

not just slacking off. But yeah, definitely, especially in the last two months or so, I've noticed that I don't do that anymore … I don't panic if I haven't talked to my boss that day. I don't assume that she assumes that I'm just slacking off and, you know, going to the park. I assume that she knows that I'm working at least on some level.

Synchronous communication, although still present, became more intentional and meaningful, supporting a continuous flow of work without the immediacy of spontaneous interactions. One company adopted "core collaboration hours," which were set periods that were dedicated to real-time collaboration. After the company implemented these hours, we learned from archival documents that the company reported that nearly two-thirds of employees had adopted an "async by default" mindset. Our participants reported a new questioning of the constant need for meetings, shifting toward a more judicious use of synchronous meetings. Multiple companies implemented new "no meeting" days. Grace's (P30) company implemented "Focus Fridays" where employees were instructed to cancel internal meetings. Celeste's (P10) company ran a "Get Stuff Done" week where employees were instructed to cancel all meetings. Workers began to focus on making meetings more productive and meaningful rather than defaulting to them for every discussion and decision. Douglas (P72) described:

> Having a meeting-heavy schedule is already a general problem. And so something that we've really focused on lately at [Company] was how do we do more work asynchronously, so that your meetings can be more productive and can create that space?

Holly (P32) added: "In the beginning … we were all in a lot more meetings. And then I think, recently, we started to say like, does this actually need to be a meeting? Like, let's scale back with Zoom calls." This change meant that the felt expectation to constantly be available and attentive, which previously was felt only by the remote workers, was diminished. One remote worker (Reva, P48) expressed relief over this change, noting it alleviated the need to be "super vocal and super overly communicative" and perpetually engaged in communication.

Thelma (P54), a product manager, observed that by "walking a mile" in the shoes of remote workers, new remote workers started to experience the challenges of remote work and made changes to mitigate them. Livia (P36), reflecting on her in-office experience, noted the lack of context she had before about the delays in communication inherent in remote work. She explained, "You can't just walk over and say, 'Hey, you know, popping in here.' It's different. And so everyone's kind of learning these new behaviors." Agnes (P2), a director of customer advocacy, echoed this sentiment: "I think

people probably have more of a common understanding of what it's like to be remote, [where you are not] able to just walk down the hallway and talk to somebody."

Arthur (P65) explained how these communication processes became more inclusive than what used to be done, as they adapted to how "everyone works," rather than "just being in the office and popping your head in and saying 'Hey, I got a question.'" By being inclusive of how "everyone works," asynchronous technology use helped to dismantle the in-person default because it mitigated the unrealistic expectations previously felt by only remote workers.

Other representative quotes on asynchronous communication are shown in Table 1.

Greater Work Codification. The second way that participants described technology use changing from an in-person default was through a shift from casual information flow to a focus on using technology for *work codification*, which we define as the documentation and formalizing of information and work products, which made them accessible to all. Initially, information flow in these organizations was characterized by an informal and organic nature, such as via impromptu meetings or chance encounters, which left out remote workers. As one remote worker (Diana, P14) explained:

> People talk about the watercooler chat and say, "Oh, this is something that's come up or might affect you, but it's not something that I would have officially told you, outside of this." That's something that you miss [as a remote worker]. So that can be things like staffing on projects, or even smaller things like how benefits work, like what benefits particularly are offered at the company. It's easy to have a better sense of that I think when you're near people making those decisions.

Amanda (P3) described feeling that there was an "inequity of access to information" for remote workers,

who could not "find information that's more easily available to people in the office." They reflected that without "accessible documentation, remote people are left scrambling trying to figure things out." This was often described as a way that remote workers felt excluded or "missing out." As Edwina (P19) reflected:

> A lot of times you're like the last to know about certain things … They're all in the office together. And what happens in the office are a lot of impromptu meetings or information sharing. And, you know, watercooler conversations are actually valuable about the work you're doing or brainstorming or ideas. And so you're definitely missing out on that.

Our participants described how in-office workers sometimes unintentionally contributed to this lack of accessibility of information by not using shared digital channels (Kanan, P35) or forgetting to dial them into a conference call for a meeting (Timmy, P55). This suggests an implicit default of in-person work was at play, depriving remote workers of access to useful information. Amanda (P3) added:

> I routinely miss[ed] out on opportunities that my employer, my colleagues in offices have, like, for instance, there was a leadership event that happened and … I didn't find out about it until afterward, and I should have been at that event. I just didn't find out because … I didn't know it was happening.

Ultimately, this lack of information accessibility contributed to remote workers' feelings of lower status. As Stuart (P52) explained, "in a nutshell, oftentimes, remote employees have felt like they're second-class citizens, don't have access to … the same channels."

By contrast, after the jolt, our participants described the emergence of new technology practices that increased the codification of work and, as a result, provided more equal information access. One company launched a biweekly email to managers that summarized the more important information that managers

Table 1. Representative Quotes Demonstrating More Asynchronous Communication

Using technology in primarily synchronous ways	Using technology asynchronously
[There was the perception] that well, your computer's right there, right? So there's really no reason why you can't like log on and answer this question for me.—Spike (RW, P50)	I feel like I'm really effective working remotely more than I thought I would be. I can get a lot done … Depending on the day and what my Slack looks like, I can get a lot done really quickly with zero distractions.—Alexandra (OW, P63)
There was still this expectation [from my manager] of like "at 6 p.m., I'm going to call you and I'm going to expect [you] to be present and be able to answer questions."—Sue (RW, P53)	It kind of evens the playing field where people can just Slack me and ask for things vs. before, there was more of an expectation of like, you have a relationship, you're in the office, you dropped by their desk. But I think it's kind of opened up the opportunity of like who I can support as well.—Caroline (OW, P69)
The assumption, at least during the workday, was that you're working, and that you're at home. So there's really no excuse to not respond.—Nick (RW, P45)	If it has some kind of asynchronous aspect to it, I think people will be more open to it. Because that's a lot of what we do today. It's like a lot of asynchronicity.—Sue (RW, P53)

Note. "RW" denotes participants who were working remotely before the pandemic, and "OW" denotes newly remote participants who were working on-site before the pandemic.

ought to share with their coworkers. Participants described increased recording of video meetings and an increased reliance on written records, ensuring that important discussions and decisions were accessible to all workers, including less senior ones. Evilyn (P22) described, "It's all in transcripts. You know, the paper trail … through emails or through Slack, you can point back to things." Umbra (P57) described:

> Those who were in the office before would typically have tap-on-the-shoulder conversations or, you know, have coffee chats in the office and talk, and those things don't get recorded. Now I think people are using those collaboration docs and Slack more than they were, so people who used to be in the office are now adopting those same practices. And so it's actually better for me in a way, too, because I don't have to wonder if there were some, like huddle talks that people just didn't post about … I just feel like now, because everyone's forced to communicate something via online, it's more likely to be clearer and done more often.

Gigi (P29), an experienced remote worker, described this increase in codification: "They're having more conversations [on Slack] and are getting better about summarizing conversations on our staff mailing list." Myrtle (P43) explained, "There's a sense of like equal opportunity now because there are no longer meetings where you're thinking 'Wow, I'm like one of the few people that's not at an office with all these people getting the facetime or speaking time.'" Jesse (P33), a software engineer, shared a similar reflection:

> There used to sort of be this nagging feeling that like maybe, you know, me or other remotes were missing out on something by not being in the office and there was maybe some sort of serendipity that we were losing out on or some sort of chance holy encounter that we were missing out on. And it has been nice to not think about that.

Kanan (P35) described how his manager shifted to more documentation of work communications:

> He's communicating more in written forms, which is positive and helps track his thoughts. And also it provides accountability for him and for the whole team's actions. So yeah, being more forward with using written content, wikis, shared Google Docs, you know, writing things in chat … he will share documents with us about his thought process and things that he's doing, which is far more inclusive.

Our participants also described how these new practices helped to enhance fairness in evaluations—in particular, for who was given credit and blame. Caroline (P69), a new remote worker, described how the shift to documentation increased proper attribution:

> Because there's a written record, it's easier to see who's responsible, rather than everyone relying on their own memory or just like their own biases in a

physical meeting … When things happen, and they're written down, there's a record, so it can be copied exactly, rather than "Oh, I think you've said this." And then yeah, I think part of that is just like, there's an expectation that people are more thorough and communicative on digital channels, which opens up the pool of people who can be involved.

Respondents shared how these changes curtailed opportunities for misrepresentation (Caroline, P69) and undue credit (Catherine, P70). As Celeste (P10) recounted, "There was a lot of 'blame game' that happened … because, you know, there wasn't a concept of documenting what I was telling them." By contrast, Minnie (P42) explained that with greater codification, these dynamics were minimized:

> A lot of people are … reading the transcriptions, which obviously designate who said what … They can see directly who said what. So I think that's probably helped with assigning the correct thoughts to the correct people, that, you know, were being stolen in the past.

Other representative quotes on work codification are shown in Table 2.

Virtual Socializing. The third way that the enactment of technology changed to break the in-person default involved a shift from impromptu in-person socializing to virtual socializing. This shift was crucial because it addressed a key way that employees form deep relationships and feel a sense of belonging. Before the change, remote workers described missing the chance to bond with their colleagues. As Faith (P25) reflected:

> They would do the fun stuff, right. You would miss out on … there was a lot of, you know, fun. [such as a] chili cook-off, or the holiday party, or whatever it is, those events where you just get to bond personally. And even just like Friday afternoons, when you would have the all-hands meeting and everyone would have a beer.

Remote workers described being previously excluded from opportunities to develop deeper connections because social opportunities were organic and informal—and if remote workers were included, they were an afterthought rather than fully accommodated. As Johann (P34) put it, "Just throwing a Zoom link on an event is not necessarily making something remote-inclusive." However, the prevailing use of technology at the time was transactional and work-focused, which left little room for the development of genuine, non-work-related connections. Holly (P32) explained:

> You definitely miss the social aspect, right? They all have their inside jokes, they all go to lunch monthly, and all those things that we didn't do … So they do hang out in the office … so those things, yeah, you definitely miss out on when remote … When you're not remote, even if you don't work with them, you

Table 2. Representative Quotes Demonstrating Greater Work Codification

Little, ad hoc documentation	Documentation to codify work
They didn't find a huge motivation to, you know, document well, and I would constantly push for it, I would constantly ask them.—Celeste (RW, P10)	I think I've already seen a lot of good changes in it … They're sharing documents, videos training, discussions, chat in public forums. So, even if something happened, and I was not going to return to work for a week, all my all my work is there for [everyone] to see so it's not like I just left.—Steph (RW, P51)
They just didn't have like … any sort of formal documentation or training on how to collaborate and keep people in the loop on decisions. So when we had people working across different time zones, and never in the same meeting at the same time, or whatever it may be, we just didn't have the follow through.—Umbra (RW, P57)	They've gotten in the habit of putting together like, they'll take turns each week, they'll put they'll record like a five- or six-minute video from their, from their home, just to keep us updated, just to keep communication flowing.—Barbara (RW, P6)
Without that documentation … it's really hard to know for sure, like, hey, has, you know, a project crossed this certain threshold? Like, rather than waiting to see somebody in the hallway, you've got to be able to like, check a Trello board or Confluence page to see what's happened there.—Quentin (RW, P47)	Everyone needs to use messaging or need to agree on information, communicate through the messaging app, right? Slack or whatever people use. And then so that makes it much easier to actually make sure you don't lose in communication.—Charles (OW, P71)

see them and you make, you know, elevator conversations or snack conversations when you're in the [employee] kitchen.

An experienced remote worker (Annie, P4) also captured this sentiment, stating:

> I know I'm the only person who [was] remote at that time … But if I can be honest, like this does frustrate me and it … bums me out. I'd like … not just … [having] people reach out to me on Slack when they have a question about work but also like, "Let's just talk and, like, be friends."

Importantly, workers also reported noticing social cues that led to a feeling of "two separate groups and not everyone is on the same playing field" (Diana, P14). Gigi (P29) echoed: "Before they [in-office workers] were kind of like their little unit of in-person people." Myrtle (P43) described it as an "unspoken divide" between in-office workers and remote workers. These quotes illustrate how status differences between remote and in-person workers had shaped and reinforced social networks that were not overlapping between remote and in-person workers—relationship patterns that could have easily persisted even when all workers were at home, given the importance and path-dependent nature of status based on initial social network ties.

A notable shift toward more virtual socializing emerged within organizations, enhancing inclusivity among both experienced remote workers and those who were new remote workers. Holly (P32), describing this change, noted:

> Everybody's more included … they're doing book clubs … They have like an ice breakers channel [on Slack] … So like Throwback Thursday, post pictures in this channel … I feel so much more included now because now we still … do our marketing happy hours, but now they're all virtual … so the circle's kind of combined.

William (P77), a new remote worker, reflected on how virtual socialization through activities like a virtual Halloween costume contest fostered genuine connection:

> I was talking to people who I had been emailing back and forth with for months, that I didn't really consider human beings, you know what I mean? Like, I just hadn't thought of them as people. Until you, you know, you start talking to them about costumes, and you're telling each other stories, and you're laughing about things, you're making fun of each other, and you're learning about their family.

One of the key changes involved virtual socializing around non-work-related subjects, like interests and hobbies, aligning with more recent research that finds that nonwork settings can act as "relational holding environments," helping coworkers build positive relationships (Schinoff et al. 2025). This helped previously remote and newly remote individuals develop deeper multiplex relationships. At Maggie's (P38) company, employees began to start scrum meetings by asking a personal question like "What's your favorite song?" Maggie (P38) described how new practices like this one helped foster deeper multiplex relationships: "Every day, we're learning something about each other. And then someone made a Spotify playlist of all that, all those random songs." Employees at another company started to participate in virtual fitness classes together (Quentin, P47), and others participated in escape room-like activities (Agnes, P2). Quentin (P47) explained that with the new opportunities to connect with coworkers outside of work tasks, "we can be open and honest and much more of our full selves with one another." Additionally, organizations ensured that experienced remote workers' participation was fully supported in—rather than excluded from—shared social events, bonding opportunities,

and fun. For instance, remote happy hours were established for all, as Faith (P25) disclosed:

> [We do] a bi-weekly or bi-monthly happy hour. And I think that very well would be an in-person event … that would be really hard for me to participate in … whereas now it's a virtual thing where we do like a fun activity and everyone's remote and everyone has a beer if they want one … and so there is like that bonding that, I think, I probably would miss out on elements of them forming relationships if I were remote and they were in-person.

Virtual socializing helped all workers, regardless of their location, feel more included and connected. It removed unequal access to social events and connections across the status divide. Todd (P56) described:

> So, despite everyone's best effort to include us, which was frankly quite good, there would be things like this and this on the margins … There'd be a social activity at the end of the week, and people might go and get a drink and connect. And suddenly, that was also inclusive of people working from home, because that was everyone.

These changes created opportunities for deeper social relationships. Billy (P7), a long-time remote worker, explained: "I think there's a better shared understanding of my character and my sense of humor and other things that aren't as apparent … when you're talking strictly business." Brody (P8) described, "I've worked with you for four years. But I now got a tour of your house. I now know … What's your dog look like?" He added, "This is actually interesting. It's actually improved [my relationships at work] … I bet you're hearing this, but it's improved because we've made a concerted effort to connect." Ultimately, virtual socializing transcended traditional business interactions, fostering a work environment where colleagues connected on a more personal level and made remote workers feel "totally included" and "equal to my peers" (Reva, P48). Myrtle (P43) described how there's "no more of that sense of like, unspoken divide between the people who work in San Francisco, at the [company's headquarters] and the people who are all remote." Anne (P64), a new remote worker, described:

> I also think remote workers are included [more] … I mean, all of the lunches are now virtual. All of the social events are virtual … Granted, it's a little bit harder for, I think, people who used to be in the office, but I think it's a collective benefit.

In sum, by making more casual, personal interactions more accessible through virtual socializing, all workers were able to reap the psychological and relational benefits that were previously exclusive to the default of informal, in-person socializing—thereby helping workers who were remote before the change feel more connected with and equal to their on-site counterparts. Stuart (P52) described:

> Everyone else's world is also all online. They're not walking from one desk to another, but instead, they'll probably say something in the common chat room … it becomes second nature once you learn the tools of the trade, you know, chat, video, etc. But oftentimes people working in an office will have different tools to get their job done and now everyone's using the same tool set. Yeah, and part of that is standardized, like the [daily standup] is on our calendar, we, you know, dial in at that time and … just catch up. But there's other points of touching base or other points of communication that … are more frequent, because I think we're all sort of in the same practice, like we're all kind of in the same channels, whereas previously we were in different channels.

Other representative quotes on virtual socializing are shown in Table 3.

Discussion

This paper theorizes how entrenched status hierarchies in distributed organizations can be dismantled—not through new technologies or physical proximity—but through the day-to-day reconfiguration of how existing technologies are used. Our analysis focuses on explaining how these established status beliefs evolved through a process we called *status equalizing*, which we theorize occurred as new technology practices challenged the default cultural assumption that technology use should mimic and support in-person work. Unlike past technological shifts—such as the adoption of email—this shift did not emerge from the introduction of new tools, but from a collective change in how existing technologies were used. Our findings detail the mechanisms underlying these effects: when newly remote workers changed the default ways technology had been used, remote workers experienced positive social, behavioral, and psychological effects, which translated into a newfound sense of equality.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings offer three key theoretical contributions—focused on distributed work, organizational status, and default cultures. Each illustrates how the shift to remote work disrupted and reshaped long-standing assumptions in these domains.

Distributed Work. First, our findings contribute to the interdisciplinary research on distributed work by theorizing a novel process through which workers can overcome the common and harmful status difference that often emerges between in-person and remote workers. Importantly, we theorize a process that does not rely on in-person interactions to reduce the physical and temporal distance between workers. Instead, our theory

Table 3. Representative Quotes Demonstrating Virtual Socializing

No virtual socializing	Virtual socializing
[A] distancing kind of situation that happens when you're a remote worker, where they're all kind of hanging out … And I'm not there. And I'm not really privy to that.—Annie (RW, P4)	Beforehand, [Slack] was mostly just for asking coworkers' questions at the moment. But now it's become a lot more of a social outlet, I would say for myself, and a lot of people— Exme (RW, P23)
There are, like, fun little events happening. That, you know, previously, there would be parties in the office, or they would do you like, you know, like a pumpkin carving for October or whatever. But, you know, you couldn't really participate as a remote person. And now, there's been a lot of thought put into, okay, what can we all do together over Zoom, with very minimal cost, but still have fun.—Fantine (RW, P26)	There's like a baking [shared interest channel], there's one for people with dogs, to create smaller communities, you know, within an organization … And most of them right now are in the form of a Slack channel.—Val (RW, P58)
The team that I was working on was like 11 people. And so one of whom was remote, and oftentimes, all the gatherings would be in person. And so he was oftentimes excluded. So it could be a lunch, it could be like a special event after work or that sort of thing … In fact, it was a disadvantage, just because he missed out on all the socializing.—Anne (OW, P64)	What started to emerge is like this interesting culture of overall rallying around fitness [which] actually forces you to meet new people that work around the world, around the United States, that you have a similar common interest. And so that's been kind of fascinating is like, we're now all bonding over new things that we all have in common.—Brody (RW, P8)

points to the importance of challenging default culture and related practices, which are often assumptions that are taken for granted about how work is done. The process of equalization, we theorize, addresses the default cultural practices that had advantaged in-person workers: differential visibility of work performance, information disparities (via work codification), communication standards (via more asynchronous work), and relational challenges and subgroup formations (via virtual socializing). We found that organizations adopting these new virtual communication practices fostered stronger interpersonal relationships based on trust and mutual understanding (reducing misunderstandings and negative attributions) and shaped employee camaraderie and cohesion through shared social experiences and self-disclosure, fairer and more transparent information exchange and equal access to documentation, and better-aligned work process expectations, such as scheduling and communication. This research, therefore, also contributes by explaining novel processes for *how* digitally mediated groups can ameliorate status disparities, rather than assuming that digital communication itself either causes or remedies status inequalities, as prior research has suggested that computer-mediated communication can lead to more equal status dynamics (Dubrovsky et al. 1991), that open-source and digitally native communities may prioritize alternative forms of status (Bianchi et al. 2012), and that digital collaboration tools can reproduce or disrupt inequality (Elliott et al. 2022, Conzon 2023, Doering and Tilcsik 2025).

Importantly, our theory highlights how, by adding more in-person interaction, organizations may reinforce the in-person default as the normal and ideal way to work. This is counterintuitive because in-person interactions are generally seen as a remedy to distributed work challenges, helping to build trust and improve relationships. Our findings suggest that such an approach may ultimately be counterproductive, or its effects may be temporary in terms of remedying distributed workgroup status problems (Weisband et al. 1995). Moreover, our findings show how status changes occurred even as the technologies remain unchanged, which departs from past studies wherein status changes occur because new technology—such as computed tomography (CT) scanners (Barley 1986) or algorithmic systems (Beane 2019)—is introduced, highlighting different skillsets that alter performance expectations.

The practices we observed warrant situating within existing work on distributed collaboration. Prior studies argue that synchronous exchanges are especially valuable online because they curb misunderstandings and delays (Cramton and Hinds 2004), improve real-time coordination (Hinds and Mortensen 2005), and foster a shared social identity (Polzer et al. 2006). This prior work implies that effective remote interactions should replicate the conversational tempo of colocated teams. Our findings point to a different pathway: over time, the group embraced asynchronous communication as the default, and members stopped interpreting delayed responses as a sign of laziness or incompetence. This shift aligns with the concept in Schinoff et al. (2020) of relational cadence—the mutually understood rhythms that let distributed coworkers anticipate when and how interactions will occur, thereby deepening multiplex ties. Classic relational theory helps explain why cadence matters. Geographic and temporal proximity normally accelerates closeness (Fehr 1996), and predictable, responsive exchanges are a precondition for trust (Altman and Taylor 1973). In our setting, the original remote versus on-site divide undermined that cadence, but once expectations reset around asynchronous norms,

members could reestablish the interpersonal responsiveness needed to build strong relationships.

Prior research has shown that information access and shared knowledge, including a feeling of missing out on useful information, might be particularly challenging for remote workers (Kiesler and Cummings 2002, Kraut et al. 2002, Olson et al. 2002, Orlikowski 2002). Our findings extend this research by showing that when the technology used for documenting work products and meetings was more in line with the in-person default (i.e., used infrequently, haphazardly), remote workers felt that on-site workers' information-sharing was insufficient. The remote workers reported struggling to access task-relevant information that they felt they needed to perform their work, and to feel as though they were evaluated fairly, contributing to a sense of inequality with their in-person colleagues. However, when distributed organizations used technology to promote documentation following the jolt, this ensured more equal access to information across the status divide, and importantly, ameliorated a belief held by remote workers that they were missing out on important but informally distributed information. The documentation also helped ensure that proper credit was given for the work completed, enhancing fairness by having a consultable record of who did and said what in the course of producing work, and codifying these work efforts so they could be accessed widely and transparently.

Several studies conducted in the workplace have found beneficial outcomes when people can express and be appreciated for their authentic selves at work (e.g., Thatcher and Greer 2008, Cable et al. 2013, Van den Bosch and Taris 2014, Pillemer and Rothbard 2018). Building on this work, our inductive study revealed how implicit norms guiding *when* social interaction and activities were appropriate (i.e., not during distributed meetings) and *how* they should occur (i.e., in-person, informally) had favored the in-person experience and inhibited remote workers from sharing and feeling valued for their fuller selves. By making socializing virtual, it provided distributed workers with casual opportunities where they felt more comfortable engaging in self-disclosure and informal socializing, which supported the development of relationships across the previously established status differences. We note that these events were often organizationally sanctioned, which likely contributed to this outcome because it helped to negate the often emergent, organic nature of social events that occur in-person, whereby people may selectively invite known, already-close others. Such a process could have maintained existing subgroups that have been documented as problematic to distributed work in previous distributed work research (e.g., Cramton and Hinds 2004, Polzer et al. 2006, Mattarelli and Gupta 2009, O'Leary and Mortensen 2010), reinforcing existing status divides. At the same time, our participants nonetheless described the interactions that occurred during these events as voluntary, pleasant, and genuine (i.e., they did not feel forced). These social interactions allowed workers to feel newly appreciated and "seen"—indicating higher-quality connections forming between workers (Methot et al. 2016) and maybe even the seeds of a more positive interpersonal organizational culture like companionate love (Barsade and O'Neill 2014).

Status in Organizations. Our research also advances organizational theory on status by illuminating how a common and harmful intergroup status hierarchy in organizations—between in-person and remote workers—can be negated. That is, we document and theorize the behavioral, psychological, and social mechanisms explaining the newfound feelings of equal status among workers. This departs from prior theory which has emphasized the immutability of status differences in organizations (e.g., Ridgeway 1991, Tilly 1998, Podolny 2005, Magee and Galinsky 2008, Bendersky and Hays 2012), how jolts can create new status hierarchies (Barley 1986, Neeley 2013, Neeley and Dumas 2016), and how shared beliefs can prevent an emergent status difference from forming in an organization (Bianchi et al. 2012). That is, we build theory on how an existing intergroup status difference can be *mitigated* and theorize that this occurred by changing default cultural practices that had acted as a maintenance mechanism for the status hierarchy. This is also novel in contrast to previously examined mechanisms of status dynamics, which focus on how jolts create new task-relevant skills or skill visibility or policies that introduce new inequalities, or trigger changes to individuals' dominance, prosocial, or task contribution behavior that shape their personal status in the organization (see Bendersky and Pai 2018). In other words, past research shows that jolts can create new status characteristic-based disparities (e.g., nonnative language proficiency (Neeley 2013, Neeley and Dumas 2016)), and individuals can behave in ways that benefit their personal status (e.g., Flynn 2006), but we theorize how and why a jolt led to the delegitimation of an established status characteristic for a social group. Importantly, we find that this occurred *without* it being replaced with a different status characteristic or hierarchy (Neeley 2013) or introducing another form of inequality such as unequal, additional work (e.g., Cardador et al. 2022). This could be why we did not observe the negative reactions (resentment, threat, resistance, and distrust) that past research has found when a new status difference is introduced in organizations (Neeley 2013, Neeley and Dumas 2016). That is, workers felt equal and fairly treated, rather than a sense of injustice coming from a new social order, and both groups imbued the change with legitimacy.

We note the likely importance of the genuine social connections that occurred across the previously established status divide, given that status literature shows that preexisting social networks are one mechanism through which status differences are continually reenacted even when the initial status characteristic is no longer relevant (e.g., Podolny 2005). Because the social network changed, there was no longer a meaningful and distinct out-group for either side to feel threatened by. In addition, all workers, even those who lost relative status, benefited from the changes to the default practices in terms of their workplace experience becoming easier, fairer, and more enjoyable, and it was a change that was seemingly interpreted as warranted, and thus legitimate. Further, although the temporary shift to remote work early in the COVID-19 pandemic may have facilitated the practices being adopted because workers had little choice, they appear to have done so willingly, rather than begrudgingly. Our participants described how and why these changes meaningfully shifted their workplace interactions, perceptions, and relationships, and in the short term, we did not find that these changes were abandoned when they were no longer absolutely necessary. This, we believe, is evidence of a cultural change in shared beliefs, a necessary component for status differences to change and stabilize. Although status scholars have mentioned that established status beliefs can lose significance or legitimacy over time, there was previously little theoretical understanding about how this occurs (e.g., Ridgeway et al. 2009), and instead, theory has been rooted in understanding how status beliefs are constructed, spread, defended, and reinforced (e.g., Webster and Foschi 1988, Ridgeway 1991, Tilly 1998, Troyer 2003).

Defaults in Organizations. Our work also contributes to the small but growing conversation on default cultures in organizations (e.g., Cheryan and Markus 2020, Cardador et al. 2022), which to date has focused on understanding how cultural defaults maintain gender inequality in organizations. Here, we discovered how organizations created implicit "in-person" cultural defaults in their technology practices that were contributing to the experienced inequality between remote and in-person workers. The reification and expectations of technology practices that likely formed at a time when most workers were in-person were newly questioned and changed. Like low-status groups in the workplace who might model high-status actors' behaviors to try to improve their position (Alonso and O'Neill 2022), remote workers had been adjusting their behavior to attempt to fit in with default in-person expectations. Yet, research shows that when the lower-valued social category changes their behavior to address a cultural default, it can be unsuccessful (e.g., He and Kang 2021) or it can burden the marginalized with additional work

(Cardador et al. 2022). By contrast, we observed a process of instantiating more inclusive technology practices at work, which challenged the underlying cultural assumptions about how distributed collaboration can and should be accomplished. As a result, breaking the in-person default culture helps to explain why, in our context, status differences were not continually reenacted, despite having already formed.

Our research expands the concept of cultural defaults by showing and understanding how they maintain an inequality in organizations that is distinct from gender. Future research and scholarship should examine how other status characteristics may imply cultural defaults that shape key practices and outcomes in organizations. In our research, we only examined one form of cultural default (in-person), but future scholarship should consider how multiple defaults may coexist and how this could disadvantage (or advantage) intersectional workers. By making implicit cultural defaults that contribute to inequalities in organizations more visible, we can better understand why status beliefs are so difficult to change and thus make progress toward more inclusive organizations where employees feel fairly evaluated based on their actual contributions and work performance.

Limitations and Boundary Conditions

There are limitations to our work that warrant attention and future research. First, although our inductive theory-building approach was appropriate for this study because the shift to remote work fundamentally altered work conditions and related research was nascent (Edmondson and McManus 2007), it is not conducive to making causal claims. Our proposed model, as shown in Figure 1, does not imply causal linkages. The arrows are not literal but imply iterative and recursive processes. Future research can deductively test the relationships among the practices and mechanisms of status equalizing that we outline, and how they relate to downstream consequences such as employee satisfaction, productivity, engagement, turnover, and career advancement.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic that constituted the jolt in the study may have resulted in unique circumstances that shaped teamwork (Whillans et al. 2021) and feelings of compassion due to experiences of shared suffering and global uncertainty (Batson et al. 1983). As the pandemic made this change at least temporarily necessary, it likely had greater legitimacy than similar changes otherwise would have had. This may mean that outside of this context, equalizing may be more difficult. As previously noted, the technology practices that changed in our setting, at the time, may have benefited all workers, who could more effectively accomplish their remote work collaborations as a result. Although we believe that the same practices could

function similarly in our current world of work, this would depend on in-person workers being willing to adopt the changes and seeing them as legitimate—otherwise, as prior work shows, resistance may arise. Therefore, future research should investigate the extent to which the model outlined here explains status equalizing in contexts outside of a pandemic-triggered jolt, and how such conditions might be modified to allow equality to prevail by dismantling implicit defaults that benefit only some workers at the expense of others. Further, we do not examine long-term consequences of the jolt. Although our participants expressed confidence that their newfound status would be stable, we do not know whether and how this may have changed as companies reverted to prepandemic arrangements. This is important, because although the pandemic fundamentally altered distributed work and potentially introduced a "new normal" that work no longer requires face-to-face interaction (see Keating et al. 2024), it remains unclear to what extent distributed work may revert or advance in unexpected ways that could alter the processes and practices theorized here.

Third, our study focused on individuals working remotely in the software industry. In a sense, the software industry may be a conservative context in which to examine status equalizing, given the prevalence and familiarity with technology and distributed work in this industry. Future research can investigate how structural changes impact distributed employees in other industries who may experience steeper learning curves in adopting technologies to accommodate remote work, and whose organizations may have comparatively weaker capabilities to support remote work. Additionally, because we studied different software organizations, we did not theorize the situated differences across specific organizations that could impact status dynamics. Relatedly, although we take a broad view of distributed work, there are a variety of forms and configurations of distributed work (such as global teams, hybrid workers, and solo telecommuters; see Griffith et al. 2003, O'Leary and Mortensen 2010) that we do not account for in our theorizing; such configurations may be important to consider in future research on the management of status in distributed work.

Fourth, our study focused on the COVID-19 pandemic period and may not fully generalize to postpandemic work environments, where organizational policies and attitudes toward remote work have continued to evolve. In the wake of the pandemic, many companies adopted new hybrid and remote work policies. For example, Dropbox announced in 2023 that employees could work remotely 90% of the time (Royle 2024). However, some organizations have since reversed these policies under "return to office" (RTO) mandates. Google, for instance, initially required a three-day-per-week office presence in 2021, but by 2025 had urged employees to return every workday (Zeff 2025). Similarly, Amazon expanded remote flexibility during the pandemic but later mandated that many employees return to the office (Bindley and Rana 2025). However, given that approximately 39% of full-time U.S. workers currently work in remote or hybrid arrangements—and that percentage has remained largely stable since 2023 (Barrero et al. 2021, 2025)—we believe the dynamics we observed remain relevant.

Finally, we did not ask participants about their race, ethnicity, or other important demographic variables. Our model does not encompass other status characteristics in the workplace, such as national culture, language, race, gender, people with disabilities, sexual orientation, and other marginalized identities. Status dynamics based on these characteristics may be distinct from our context (for instance, it is often not possible for people with different status characteristics to actually embody one another's work experience, such as race, like in our study). Further, our research examines status, not power, leadership, or formal authority (Lee 2024), which may show different mechanisms or effects (Anicich et al. 2016, Hays et al. 2022). In our work, we examine *intergroup* status differences, rather than individuals within a group navigating status differences. Future work may benefit from examining how the dynamics we find here may also be potentially fruitful for reducing the press of hierarchy in such intrateam settings as well—a topic on which the literature has long called for more work (e.g., Hollenbeck et al. 2011; Greer et al. 2017, 2018; Lee 2024). We urge researchers to investigate how different and multiple status characteristics may show different patterns in processes related to organizational status with these potential team dynamics in mind (May 2015, Hancock 2016, Wingfield and Chavez 2020).

Practical Implications and Conclusion

It seems almost certain that more employees will continue to work remotely than before the COVID-19 pandemic. As organizational leaders contemplate the extent to which they will embrace remote work, our study urges organizations with distributed workers that rely predominantly on virtual communication tools to recognize that this may contribute to harmful status inequalities between employees. Recent surveys have shown that digital collaboration tools have significantly evolved, which may help to provide paths toward equitable communication across remote and in-person workers, challenging the traditional view that face-to-face interaction is the best way to coordinate (Elliott et al. 2022). Our study not only highlights these evolving opportunities but also offers a set of actionable practices to help managers and workers implement virtual communication tools and distributed work arrangements more effectively.

Our study illuminates the importance of deliberately promoting asynchronous communication in distributed work environments, which can reduce inequalities in the felt pressure on remote workers to be constantly available and the negative attributions and performance expectations that come from not "seeing" someone constantly working. Our paper also emphasizes the importance of documentation and transparent, broad access to information, which may require selecting appropriate digital platforms and ongoing training. Our study also urges managers to consider instituting virtual socializing in which all workers (remote and on-site) are given opportunities and supported in socializing with one another via technology. This could manifest in various forms, including virtual coffee breaks or online game nights, aimed at fostering a cohesive dynamic and nurturing multiplex relationships that extend beyond professional interactions. By facilitating these interactions, organizations can create a more inclusive climate where remote workers feel more authentically connected to their in-person peers, forming relationships that change social networks and subgroups, and other status-maintenance mechanisms. Collectively, these practices offer promising ways to help break the mold of in-person-centric culture, paving the way for a more inclusive environment where technology supports all types of distributed workers, a critical objective for the bevy of distributed organizations in our present and future world of work.

Appendix. Interview Protocols

Semistructured interview protocol 1: For first 31 interviews (previously remote workers)
- Tell me about your role at Company X.
- How often did you work remotely before the pandemic?
- What does working remotely mean to you?
- How has the pandemic affected your work?
- How has the change to fully remote work affected you?
- What would you say has been the biggest change for you since your company transitioned to fully remote work?
- How much did you collaborate with members of your team before the pandemic?
- How has your relationship with your team changed since the pandemic began?
- How has your relationship with your manager changed since the pandemic began?
- Would you say your productivity has been affected by the change to fully remote work? How so?
- Have you formed any new relationships with people at your company since the pandemic began that you don't think you would have otherwise formed?
- Have your roles and responsibilities changed since the pandemic started?
- Do you feel more recognized now since your company has transitioned to working remotely all the time? How so?
- Has there been anything that has surprised you about how your team has transitioned to fully remote work?
- What's the biggest misconception about remote work?

- Has the way you think about the meaning or purpose of your work changed since the pandemic? If so, how?
- Has your work identity—or the way you define yourself in your work role—changed since the shift to remote work? If so, how?
- Has your prior experience with remote work changed the way others in your organization see you or your role since the shift to remote work? If so, how?
- Has the shift to remote work created any new opportunities for you to utilize your prior experience with remote work?
- Have you been able to utilize your remote work experience to help others in your organization?
- As someone who was primarily working remotely before the pandemic, have there been any downsides or challenges for you now that everyone is working remotely?
- Do you feel less unique now that everyone is working remotely? If so, how do you feel about this change?
- Have there been any ways in which your prior experience with remote work has backfired or worked against you since the switch to everyone working remotely?

Semistructured interview protocol 2: For second set of 28 interviews (previously remote workers)
Questions added to interview protocol:
- What do you think were your coworkers' opinions of remote workers before the pandemic?
- Was your manager supportive of you working remotely before the pandemic? How so?
- Were your team members supportive of you working remotely before the pandemic? How so?
- What do you think your coworkers' perceptions of you were when you first transitioned to remote work?
- How did you feel treated by your peers and managers when you were remote?
- What were the benefits of working remotely (if any)?
- What were the disadvantages of working remotely (if any)?
- What does working remotely mean to you?
- What do you think were your coworkers' opinions of remote workers after the pandemic began?
- Has your work itself changed since the pandemic began? If so, how?
- Has your work behavior changed since the pandemic began? If so, how?
- Now that most everyone is working remotely, has this changed your working remotely experience compared to before? If so, how?
- Has your organization provided any new resources or support for employees since the pandemic?
- Do you think your experience of working remotely will be different after the pandemic ends? If so, how?

Semistructured interview protocol 3: For last set of 18 interviews (new remote workers)
Questions pertaining to prepandemic experiences:
- Tell me about your role at your company.
- Can you describe your company's philosophy around/approach to remote work before the pandemic?
- What were your relationships with people at your company who were working remotely before the pandemic like before the pandemic?

- What were your perceptions of your coworkers who were working remotely before the pandemic?

Questions pertaining to experiences during the pandemic:

- Have your opinions of remote workers/remote work changed since the pandemic started?
- Have your relationships with people who were working remotely before the pandemic changed at all?
- Has your work itself changed since the pandemic began? If so, how?
- Has your work behavior changed since the pandemic began? If so, how?
- Has your organization provided any new resources or support for employees since the pandemic?
- What do you think the benefits of working remotely are (if any)?
- What do you think the disadvantages of working remotely are (if any)?
- Do you think the remote work experience is different in any way for women?
- Do you think your experience of working remotely will be different after the pandemic ends? If so, how?

Endnote

[1] We define remote work broadly as "work performed away from a central work site" (Olson and Primps 1984, p. 98). This definition encompasses individuals who adopt "telecommute" or "telework" arrangements, and members of "globally distributed teams" (GDTs) or "virtual teams" who perform work away from a central "onshore" work site.

References

Alonso NM, O'Neill O (2022) Going along to get ahead: The asymmetric effects of sexist joviality on status conferral. *Organ. Sci.* 33(5):1794–1815.

Altman I, Taylor DA (1973) *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York).

Anderson C, Kilduff GJ (2009) The pursuit of status in social groups. *Current Directions Psych. Sci.* 18(5):295–298.

Anderson C, John OP, Keltner D, Kring AM (2001) Who attains social status? Effects of personality and physical attractiveness in social groups. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 81(1):116–132.

Anicich EM, Fast NJ, Halevy N, Galinsky AD (2016) When the bases of social hierarchy collide: Power without status drives interpersonal conflict. *Organ. Sci.* 27(1):123–140.

Armstrong DJ, Cole P (2002) Managing distances and differences in geographically distributed work groups. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 167–189.

Barley SR (1986) Technology as an occasion for structuring: Evidence from observations of CT scanners and the social order of radiology departments. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 31(1):78–108.

Barrero JM, Bloom N, Davis SJ (2021) Why working from home will stick. NBER Working Paper No. 28731, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Barrero JM, Bloom N, Davis SJ (2023) The evolution of work from home. *J. Econom. Perspect.* 37(4):23–49.

Barrero JM, Bloom N, Davis SJ (2025) Survey of working arrangements and attitudes. https://wfhresearch.com/research-and-policy/.

Barsade S, O'Neill OA (2014) What's love got to do with it? A longitudinal study of the culture of companionate love and employee and client outcomes in a long-term care setting. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 59(4):551–598.

Bartel CA, Wrzesniewski A, Wiesenfeld BM (2012) Knowing where you stand: Physical isolation, perceived respect, and organizational identification among virtual employees. *Organ. Sci.* 23(3):743–757.

Batson CD, O'Quin K, Fultz J, Vanderplas M, Isen AM (1983) Influence of self-reported distress and empathy on egoistic versus altruistic motivation to help. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 45(3):706–718.

Beane M (2019) Shadow learning: Building robotic surgical skill when approved means fail. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 64(1):87–123.

Belle SM, Burley DL, Long SD (2015) Where do I belong? High-intensity teleworkers' experience of organizational belonging. *Human Resource Development Internat.* 18(1):76–96.

Bendersky C, Hays NA (2012) Status conflict in groups. *Organ. Sci.* 23(2):323–340.

Bendersky C, Pai J (2018) Status dynamics. *Annual Rev. Organ. Psych. Organ. Behav.* 5(1):183–199.

Bendersky C, Shah NP (2012) The cost of status enhancement: Performance effects of individuals' status mobility in task groups. *Organ. Sci.* 23(2):308–322.

Berger J, Cohen BP, Zelditch M Jr (1972) Status characteristics and social interaction. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 37(3):241–255.

Berger J, Fisek MH, Norman RZ, Zelditch M Jr (1977) *Status Characteristics and Social Interaction: An Expectation-States Approach* (Greenwood, Westport, CT).

Berger J, Ridgeway CL, Fisek MH, Norman RZ (1998) The legitimation and delegitimation of power and prestige orders. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 63(3):379–405.

Beshears J, Dai H, Milkman KL, Benartzi S (2016) Framing the future: The risks of pre-commitment nudges and potential of fresh start messaging. Working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Bianchi AJ, Kang SM, Stewart D (2012) The organizational selection of status characteristics: Status evaluations in an open source community. *Organ. Sci.* 23(2):341–354.

Bindley K, Rana P (2025) Inside Amazon's messy push to bring everyone back to the office. *Wall Street Journal* (February 28), https://www.wsj.com/tech/amazon-office-remote-rto-commute-ea57fcc4.

Blader SL, Shirako A, Chen YR (2016) Looking out from the top: Differential effects of status and power on perspective taking. *Personality Soc. Psych. Bull.* 42(6):723–737.

Blau PM (1964) *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (Wiley, New York).

Bloom N, Han R, Liang J (2023) How hybrid working from home works out. NBER Working Paper No. 30292, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Bos N, Shami NS, Olson JS, Cheshin A, Nan N (2004) In-group/out-group effects in distributed teams: An experimental simulation. *Proc. 2004 ACM Conf. Comput. Supported Cooperative Work* (Association for Computing Machinery, Chicago), 429–436.

Brinkmann S, Kvale S (2009) *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Sage, Los Angeles).

Brynjolfsson E, Horton JJ, Ozimek A, Rock D, Sharma G, TuYe HY (2020) COVID-19 and remote work: An early look at US data. NBER Working Paper No. 27344, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Cable DM, Gino F, Staats BR (2013) Breaking them in or eliciting their best? Reframing socialization around newcomers' authentic self-expression. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 58(1):1–36.

Cardador MT, Hill PL, Salles A (2022) Unpacking the status-leveling burden for women in male-dominated occupations. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 67(1):237–284.

Case CR, Maner JK (2014) Divide and conquer: When and why leaders undermine the cohesive fabric of their group. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 107(6):1033–1050.

Charmaz K (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA).

Cheng JT, Tracy JL, Foulsham T, Kingstone A, Henrich J (2013) Two ways to the top: Evidence that dominance and prestige are distinct yet viable avenues to social rank and influence. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 104(1):103–125.

Cheryan S, Markus HR (2020) Masculine defaults: Identifying and mitigating hidden cultural biases. *Psych. Rev.* 127(6): 1022–1052.

Cheshin A, Kim Y, Nathan DB, Ning N, Olson JS (2013) Emergence of differing electronic communication norms within partially distributed teams. *J. Personnel Psych.* 12(1):7–21.

Chizhik AW, Alexander MG, Chizhik EW, Goodman JA (2003) The rise and fall of power and prestige orders: Influence of task structure. *Soc. Psych. Quart.* 66(3):303–317.

Conzon VM (2023) The equality policy paradox: Gender differences in how managers implement gender equality–related policies. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 68(3):648–690.

Cooper CD, Kurland NB (2002) Telecommuting, professional isolation, and employee development in public and private organizations. *J. Organ. Behav.* 23(4):511–532.

Corbin J, Strauss A (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Sage, Los Angeles).

Correll SJ, Ridgeway CL (2003) Expectation states theory. Delamater J, ed. *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Springer, New York), 29–51.

Cramton CD (2001) The mutual knowledge problem and its consequences for dispersed collaboration. *Organ. Sci.* 12(3):346–371.

Cramton CD (2002) Attribution in distributed work groups. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 191–212.

Cramton CD, Hinds PJ (2004) Subgroup dynamics in internationally distributed teams: Ethnocentrism or cross-national learning? *Res. Organ. Behav.* 26:231–263.

Daft RL, Lengel RH (1986) Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Sci.* 32(5):554–571.

Doering L, Tilcsik A (2025) Location matters: Everyday gender discrimination in remote and on-site work. *Organ. Sci.* 36(2):547–571.

Dougherty D (2002) Building grounded theory: Some principles and practices. Baum JAC, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Organizations* (Blackwell, Oxford, UK), 849–867.

Doyle SP, Lount RB (2023) Rising above vs. falling below: When and why status change affects interpersonal helping in workgroups. *Organ. Sci.* 34(3):1157–1183.

Dubrovsky V, Kiesler S, Sethna B (1991) The equalization phenomenon: Status effects in computer-mediated and face-to-face decision-making groups. *Human Comput. Interaction* 6(2):119–146.

Edmondson AC, McManus SE (2007) Methodological fit in management field research. *Acad. Management Rev.* 32(4):1155–1179.

Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Acad. Management Rev.* 14(4):532–550.

Eisenhardt KM, Graebner ME (2007) Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Acad. Management J.* 50(1):25–32.

Elliott B, Subramaniam S, Kupp H (2022) *How the Future Works: Leading Flexible Teams to Do the Best Work of Their Lives* (Wiley, New York).

Elsbach KD, Cable DM, Sherman JW (2010) How passive 'face time' affects perceptions of employees: Evidence of spontaneous trait inference. *Human Relations* 63(6):735–760.

Emerson RM, Fretz RI, Shaw LL (2011) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago).

Fehr B (1996) *Friendship Processes* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA).

Flynn FJ (2003) How much should I give and how often? The effects of generosity and frequency of favor exchange on social status and productivity. *Acad. Management J.* 46(5):539–553.

Flynn FJ (2006) How much is it worth to you? Subjective evaluations of help in organizations. *Res. Organ. Behav.* 27:133–174.

Flynn FJ, Reagans RE, Amanatullah ET, Ames DR (2006) Helping one's way to the top: Self-monitors achieve status by helping others and knowing who helps whom. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 91(6):1123–1137.

Gainey TW, Kelley DE, Hill JA (1999) Telecommuting's impact on corporate culture and individual workers: Examining the effect of employee isolation. *SAM Advanced Management J.* 64(4):4–10.

Gajendran RS, Harrison DA (2007) The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: Meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *J. Appl. Psych.* 92(6):1524–1541.

Gartner (2020) Survey reveals 82% of company leaders plan to allow employees to work remotely some of the time. *Gartner* (July 14), https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/ 2020-07-14-gartner-survey-reveals-82-percent-of-company-leaders- plan-to-allow-employees-to-work-remotely-some-of-the-time.

Golden TD, Ford MT (2025) How much do we trust remote managers? Examining follower trust, construal, and performance. *Personnel Psych.* 78(2):253–276.

Greer LL, Van Bunderen L, Yu SY (2017) The dysfunctions of power in teams: A review and emergent conflict perspective. *Res. Organ. Behav.* 37(6):103–124.

Greer LL, de Jong BA, Schouten ME, Dannals JE (2018) Why and when hierarchy impacts team effectiveness: A meta-analytic integration. *J. Appl. Psych.* 103(6):591–613.

Griffith TL, Sawyer JE, Neale MA (2003) Virtualness and knowledge in teams: Managing the love triangle of organizations, individuals, and information technology. *MIS Quart.* 27(2):265–287.

Halevy N, Chou EY, Cohen TR, Livingston RW (2012) Status conferral in intergroup social dilemmas: Behavioral antecedents and consequences of prestige and dominance. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 102(2):351–366.

Hamilton DL, Sherman SJ, Ruvolo CM (1990) Stereotype-based expectancies: Effects on information processing and social behavior. *J. Soc. Issues* 46(2):35–60.

Hancock AM (2016) *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (Oxford University Press, New York).

Hays NA, Bendersky C (2015) Not all inequality is created equal: Effects of status versus power hierarchies on competition for upward mobility. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 108(6):867–882.

Hays NA, Li H, Yang X, Oh JK, Yu A, Chen YR, Hollenbeck JR, Jamieson BB (2022) A tale of two hierarchies: Interactive effects of power differentiation and status differentiation on team performance. *Organ. Sci.* 33(6):2085–2105.

He JC, Kang SK (2021) Covering in cover letters: Gender and self-presentation in job applications. *Acad. Management J.* 64(4): 1097–1126.

Hinds PJ, Bailey DE (2003) Out of sight, out of sync: Understanding conflict in distributed teams. *Organ. Sci.* 14(6):615–632.

Hinds PJ, Cramton CD (2014) Situated coworker familiarity: How site visits transform relationships among distributed workers. *Organ. Sci.* 25(3):794–814.

Hinds PJ, Kiesler S, eds. (2002) *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA).

Hinds PJ, Mortensen M (2005) Understanding conflict in geographically distributed teams: The moderating effects of shared identity, shared context, and spontaneous communication. *Organ. Sci.* 16(3):290–307.

Hollenbeck JR, Ellis APJ, Humphrey SE, Garza AS, Ilgen DR (2011) Asymmetry in structural adaptation: The differential impact of centralizing versus decentralizing team decision-making structures. *Organ. Behav. Human Decision Processes* 114(1):64–74.

Hollingshead AB, Brandon DP (2003) Potential benefits of communication in transactive memory systems. *Human Comm. Res.* 29(4):607–615.

Johnson C, Dowd TJ, Ridgeway CL (2006) Legitimacy as a social process. *Annual Rev. Sociol.* 32:53–78.

Jost JT, Banaji MR (1994) The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British J. Soc. Psych.* 33(1):1–27.

Jost JT, Banaji MR, Nosek BA (2004) A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psych.* 25(6):881–919.

Kakkar H, Sivanathan N, Pettit NC (2019) The impact of dynamic status changes within competitive rank-ordered hierarchies. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 116(46):23011–23020.

Keating DJ, Cullen-Lester KL, Meuser JD (2024) Virtual work conditions impact negative work behaviors via ambiguity, anonymity, and (un)accountability: An integrative review. *J. Appl. Psych.* 109(2):169–201.

Kiesler S, Cummings JN (2002) What do we know about proximity and distance in work groups? A legacy of research. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 57–80.

Kilduff GJ, Galinsky AD (2013) From the ephemeral to the enduring: How approach-oriented mindsets lead to greater status. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* 105(5):816–831.

Kim HY (2018) The mutual constitution of social media use and status hierarchies in global organizing. *Management Comm. Quart.* 32(4):471–503.

Kneeland MK, Kleinbaum AM (2025) Rewiring the organizational network: Corporate offsites and network tie formation. *Strategic Management J.* 46(1):209–241.

Kniffin KM, Narayanan J, Anseel F, Antonakis J, Ashford SP, Bakker AB, Bamberger P, et al. (2021) COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action. *Amer. Psychol.* 76(1):63–77.

Kossek EE, Thompson RJ, Lautsch BA (2015) Balanced workplace flexibility: Avoiding the traps. *Calif. Management Rev.* 57(4):5–25.

Kraut RE, Fussell SR, Brennan SE, Siegel J (2002) Understanding effects of proximity on collaboration: Implications for technologies to support remote collaborative work. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 137–162.

Langley A, Ravasi D (2019) Visual artifacts as tools for analysis and theorizing. Zilber TB, Amis JM, Mair J, eds. *The Production of Managerial Knowledge and Organizational Theory: New Approaches to Writing, Producing and Consuming Theory* (Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, UK), 173–199.

Lee MY (2024) Enacting decentralized authority: The practices and limits of moving beyond hierarchy. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 69(3):791–833.

Locke K, Feldman M, Golden-Biddle K (2022) Coding practices and iterativity: Beyond templates for analyzing qualitative data. *Organ. Res. Methods* 25(2):262–284.

Macrae CN, Bodenhausen GV (2000) Social cognition: Thinking categorically about others. *Annual Rev. Psych.* 51(1):93–120.

Magee JC, Galinsky AD (2008) Social hierarchy: The self-reinforcing nature of power and status. *Acad. Management Ann.* 2(1):351–398.

Mattarelli E, Gupta A (2009) Offshore-onsite subgroup dynamics in globally distributed teams. *Inform. Tech. People* 22(3):242–269.

May VM (2015) *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (Routledge, New York).

Maznevski ML, Chudoba KM (2000) Bridging space over time: Global virtual team dynamics and effectiveness. *Organ. Sci.* 11(5):473–492.

McClean EJ, Martin SR, Emich KJ, Woodruff T (2018) The social consequences of voice: An examination of voice type and gender on status and subsequent leader emergence. *Acad. Management J.* 61(5):1869–1891.

McCloskey DW, Igbaria M (2003) Does "out of sight" mean "out of mind"? An empirical investigation of the career advancement prospects of telecommuters. *Inform. Resources Management J.* 16(2):19–34.

Merton RK (1968) *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Simon and Schuster, New York).

Methot JR, Lepine JA, Podsakoff NP, Christian JS (2016) Are workplace friendships a mixed blessing? Exploring tradeoffs of multiplex relationships and their associations with job performance. *Personnel Psych.* 69(2):311–355.

Metiu A (2006) Owning the code: Status closure in distributed groups. *Organ. Sci.* 17(4):418–435.

Milanov H, Shepherd DA (2013) The importance of the first relationship: The ongoing influence of initial network on future status. *Strategic Management J.* 34(6):727–750.

Mortensen M, Neeley TB (2012) Reflected knowledge and trust in global collaboration. *Management Sci.* 58(12):2207–2224.

Munsch CL, Ridgeway CL, Williams JC (2014) Pluralistic ignorance and the flexibility bias: Understanding and mitigating flextime and flexplace bias at work. *Work Occupations* 41(1):40–62.

Nardi BA, Whitaker S (2002) The place of face-to-face communication in distributed work. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 83–110.

Neeley TB (2013) Language matters: Status loss and achieved status distinctions in global organizations. *Organ. Sci.* 24(2):476–497.

Neeley TB (2021) *Remote Work Revolution: Succeeding from Anywhere* (Harper Business, New York).

Neeley TB, Dumas TL (2016) Unearned status gain: Evidence from a global language mandate. *Acad. Management J.* 59(1):14–43.

Nilles JM (1994) *Making Telecommuting Happen: A Guide for Telemanagers and Telecommuters* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York).

O'Leary MB, Mortensen M (2010) Go (con) figure: Subgroups, imbalance, and isolates in geographically dispersed teams. *Organ. Sci.* 21(1):115–131.

O'Leary M, Orlikowski W, Yates J (2002) Distributed work over the centuries: Trust and control in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670–1826. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 25–54.

Olson MH, Primps SB (1984) Working at home with computers: Work and nonwork issues. *J. Soc. Issues* 40(3):97–112.

Olson JS, Teasley S, Covi L, Olson G (2002) The (currently) unique advantages of collocated work. Hinds P, Kiesler S, eds. *Distributed Work* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), 311–333.

Orlikowski WJ (2002) Knowing in practice: Enacting a collective capability in distributed organizing. *Organ. Sci.* 13(3):249–273.

Orlikowski WJ, Yates J (1994) Genre repertoire: The structuring of communicative practices in organizations. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 39(4):541–574.

Owens DA, Neale MA, Sutton RI (2000) Technologies of status management status dynamics in e-mail communications. Neale MA, Mannix EA, eds. *Research on Managing Groups and Teams* (JAI Press, Greenwich, CT), 205–230.

Peña J, Walther JB, Hancock JT (2007) Effects of geographic distribution on dominance perceptions in computer-mediated groups. *Comm. Res.* 34(3):313–331.

Pettit NC, Marr JC (2020) A trajectories based perspective on status dynamics. *Current Opinion Psych.* 33:233–237.

Pillemer J, Rothbard NP (2018) Friends without benefits: Understanding the dark sides of workplace friendship. *Acad. Management Rev.* 43(4):635–660.

Podolny JM (2005) *Status Signals: A Sociological Study of Market Competition* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ).

Polzer JT, Crisp CB, Jarvenpaa SL, Kim JW (2006) Extending the faultline model to geographically dispersed teams: How colocated subgroups can impair group functioning. *Acad. Management J.* 49(4):679–692.

Pratto F (1999) The puzzle of continuing group inequality: Piecing together psychological, social, and cultural forces in social dominance theory. Zanna MP, ed. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 31 (Academic Press, San Diego), 191–263.

Procter R (2023) Remember when? Timeline marks key events in California's year-long pandemic grind. *CalMatters* (July 31), https://calmatters.org/health/coronavirus/2021/03/timeline-california-pandemic-year-key-points/.

Rhymer J (2023) Location-independent organizations: Designing collaboration across space and time. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 68(1):1–43.

Ridgeway CL (1991) The social construction of status value: Gender and other nominal characteristics. *Soc. Forces* 70(2):367–386.

Ridgeway CL (1993) Gender, status, and the social psychology of expectations. England P, ed. *Theory on Gender: Feminism on Theory* (Aldine de Gruyter, New York), 175–197.

Ridgeway CL (2014) Why status matters for inequality. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 79(1):1–16.

Ridgeway CL, Berger J (1986) Expectations, legitimation, and dominance behavior in task groups. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 51(5):603–617.

Ridgeway CL, Correll SJ (2006) Consensus and the creation of status beliefs. *Soc. Forces* 85(1):431–453.

Ridgeway CL, Erickson KG (2000) Creating and spreading status beliefs. *Amer. J. Sociol.* 106(3):579–615.

Ridgeway CL, Johnson C, Diekema D (1994) External status, legitimacy, and compliance in male and female groups. *Soc. Forces* 72(4):1051–1077.

Ridgeway CL, Backor K, Li YE, Tinkler JE, Erickson KG (2009) How easily does a social difference become a status distinction? Gender matters. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 74(1):44–62.

Royle OR (2024) Dropbox CEO Drew Houston: Managers mandating RTO are just 'mashing the go-back-to-2019 button' and creating toxic relationships with staff. *Fortune* (April 17), https://fortune.com/2024/04/17/dropbox-ceo-drew-houston-managers-mandating-rto-return-to-office-mashing-go-back-to-2019-button-toxic-relationships-staff/.

Salas S, Jones JP, Perez T, Fitchett PG, Kissau S (2013) Habla con ellos—Talk to them: Latinas/Os, achievement, and the middle grades: Moving bilingual children beyond subordinated categories toward full engagement in relevant and authentic learning that embraces their communities. *Middle School J.* 45(1):18–23.

Saldana J (2016) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3rd ed. (Sage, Los Angeles).

San Francisco Chronicle Staff (2020) Timeline: How the Bay Area has combated the coronavirus. *San Francisco Chronicle* (June 19), https://projects.sfchronicle.com/2020/coronavirus-timeline/.

Schinoff BS, Ashforth BE, Corley KG (2020) Virtually (in)separable: The centrality of relational cadence in the formation of virtual multiplex relationships. *Acad. Management J.* 63(5):1395–1424.

Schinoff BS, Pillemer J, Rogers KM, Petriglieri JL (2025) Blurring boundaries in coworker relationships: How a nonwork setting becomes a relational holding environment. *Organ. Sci.*, Articles in Advance March 17, https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.17130.

Schmader T (2023) Gender inclusion and fit in STEM. *Annual Rev. Psych.* 74:219–243.

Stewart D (2005) Social status in an open-source community. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 70(5):823–842.

Strauss A, Corbin J (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Sage, Newbury Park, CA).

Sunstein CR (2013) Deciding by default. *Univ. Pennsylvania Law Rev.* 162:1–57.

Sutton RI, Hargadon A (1996) Brainstorming groups in context: Effectiveness in a product design firm. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 41(4):685–718.

Thatcher SM, Greer LL (2008) Does it really matter if you recognize who I am? The implications of identity comprehension for individuals in work teams. *J. Management* 34(1):5–24.

Thatcher SM, Zhu X (2006) Changing identities in a changing workplace: Identification, identity enactment, self-verification, and telecommuting. *Acad. Management Rev.* 31(4):1076–1088.

Tilly C (1998) *Durable Inequality* (University of California Press, Berkeley).

Tost LP (2011) An integrative model of legitimacy judgments. *Acad. Management Rev.* 36(4):686–710.

Troyer L (2003) The role of social identity processes in status construction. Thye SR, Skvoretz J, eds. *Power and Status*, Advances in Group Processes, vol. 20 (Elsevier Science Ltd., Amsterdam), 149–172.

Vallas SP (2001) Symbolic boundaries and the new division of labor: Engineers, workers and the restructuring of factory life. *Res. Soc. Stratification Mobility* 18:3–37.

Van den Bosch R, Taris TW (2014) The authentic worker's well-being and performance: The relationship between authenticity at work, well-being, and work outcomes. *J. Psych.* 148(6):659–681.

Vander Elst T, Verhoogen R, Sercu M, Van den Broeck A, Baillien E, Godderis L (2017) Not extent of telecommuting, but job characteristics as proximal predictors of work-related well-being. *J. Occupational Environ. Medicine* 59(10):e180–e186.

Wagner DG, Berger J (1993) Status characteristics theory: The growth of a program. Berger J, Zelditch M, eds. *Theoretical Research Programs: Studies in the Growth of Theory* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA), 23–63.

Walker HA, Zelditch M Jr (1993) Power, legitimacy, and the stability of authority: A theoretical research program. Berger J, Zelditch M, eds. *Theoretical Research Programs: Studies in the Growth of Theory* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA), 364–381.

Weber M (1978) *Economy and Society* (University of California Press, Berkeley).

Webster M, Foschi M (1988) *Status Generalization: New Theory and Research* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA).

Wee EX, Derfler-Rozin R, Carson Marr J (2023) Jolted: How task-based jolts disrupt status conferral by impacting higher and lower status individuals' generosity. *J. Appl. Psych.* 108(5):750.

Weisband SP, Schneider SK, Connolly T (1995) Computer-mediated communication and social information: Status salience and status differences. *Acad. Management J.* 38(4):1124–1151.

Whillans A, Perlow L, Turek A (2021) Experimenting during the shift to virtual team work: Learnings from how teams adapted their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Inform. Organ.* 31(1):1–12.

Wiesenfeld BM, Raghuram S, Garud R (1999) Communication patterns as determinants of organizational identification in a virtual organization. *Organ. Sci.* 10(6):777–790.

Wiesenfeld BM, Raghuram S, Garud R (2001) Organizational identification among virtual workers: The role of need for affiliation and perceived work-based social support. *J. Management* 27(2):213–229.

Wilson J, Crisp CB, Mortensen M (2012) Extending construal-level theory to distributed groups: Understanding the effects of virtuality. *Organ. Sci.* 24(2):629–644.

Wingfield AH, Chavez K (2020) Getting in, getting hired, getting sideways looks: Organizational hierarchy and perceptions of racial discrimination. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 85(1):31–57.

Yang L, Holtz D, Jaffe S, Suri S, Sinha S, Weston J, Joyce C, et al. (2022) The effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers. *Nature Human Behav.* 6(1):43–54.

Zeff M (2025) Sergey Brin says RTO is key to Google winning the AGI race. *TechCrunch* (February 28), https://techcrunch.com/2025/02/28/sergey-brin-says-rto-is-key-to-google-winning-the-agi-race/.

Rebecca Hinds is the head of the work transformation lab and head of thought leadership at Glean. Previously she was the head of the work innovation lab at Asana. Rebecca advises organizations around the world on how to improve collaboration and effectively adopt and implement new technologies such as artificial intelligence. She is the author of *Your Best Meeting Ever* (Simon & Schuster, 2026). Rebecca holds a BS, MS, and PhD from Stanford University.

Melissa Valentine is an associate professor at Stanford University and a senior fellow at the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI. She studies how technologies shape organizational design. She has won numerous best paper awards in both management and

computer science venues. She is the author of *Flash Teams: Leading the Future of AI-Enhanced, On-Demand Work.* Melissa earned her BA from Stanford and her PhD from Harvard.

Katherine DeCelles holds the Secretary of State Professorship at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Her research examines inequality, conflict, and emotion in organizations.

Justin M. Berg is an associate professor of management and organizations at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan. His research focuses on creativity and innovation. He studies how to successfully develop, evaluate, and implement creative ideas in and outside organizations over time. He received his PhD in management from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.