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Creative Self and Emotional Intelligence in the Evolving Workplace: A Cross-Regional Comparison of Remote and On-Site Employees in India

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Abstract

The rapid normalization of remote work has renewed interest in whether the physical setting in which people work shapes the psychological resources they bring to it. This study examined whether creative self-perceptions and emotional intelligence (EI) differ between employees who work from home (WFH) and those who work from the office (WFO), and whether these constructs vary by gender, among working adults across several regions of India. A sample of 319 employees completed the Short Scale of Creative Self (SSCS) and the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10) through an online survey. Pearson correlations and one-way analyses of variance were used to test the associations and group differences. Emotional intelligence was weakly but significantly associated with creative self-efficacy, while its associations with creative personal identity were not significant. Critically, no significant differences in EI or any creative-self dimension emerged between WFH and WFO employees, nor between women and men. These findings suggest that creative self-perceptions and EI may operate as relatively stable individual characteristics that are not strongly contingent on work location, a pattern with practical implications for the design of flexible-work policies.

Keywords: creative self, emotional intelligence, work from home, work from office, flexible work

Introduction

Work occupies a central place in adult life, functioning not only as a source of income but as a setting in which people exercise skill, apply judgment, and express important aspects of their identity. For most of the modern era, the answer to the question of where that work takes place was largely taken for granted: employees travelled to a shared, employer-controlled location and performed their duties there. Over the past three decades, however, that assumption has steadily eroded, and the question of where work physically happens has moved from the margins of organizational research to its centre. Understanding the consequences of this shift for various

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aspects like productivity, well-being, and the psychological capacities employees bring to their roles has become one of the defining concerns of contemporary work psychology.

Working from home (WFH) began gaining ground in the late twentieth century, when the spread of personal computing and reliable internet access made it feasible to perform many roles away from a central office (Allen et al., 2015). Early corporate adopters experimented with telecommuting in pursuit of greater productivity, lower overheads, and improved employee satisfaction. The traditional work-from-office (WFO) model, by contrast, has deep historical roots in the centralized workplaces of the industrial era, where physical co-location served the practical needs of supervision, coordination, and shared access to resources. Reinforced by a century of urbanization and commuting infrastructure, the office remained the dominant locus of professional work across most industries well into the twenty-first century. These two models embody fundamentally different configurations of autonomy, social contact, and structure, and it is precisely these differences that make their psychological consequences worth examining.

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed what had been a gradual trend into an abrupt, large-scale natural experiment. Within a matter of weeks in early 2020, organizations worldwide were compelled to shift substantial portions of their workforce to remote arrangements at a speed and scale that would otherwise have taken years to achieve. For many employees, this transition was involuntary and largely unprepared, blurring the boundaries between professional and domestic life and forcing rapid adaptation to digitally mediated collaboration. Crucially, the changes have proved durable: as the acute phase of the pandemic receded, many organizations did not simply revert to pre-pandemic norms but instead retained remote and hybrid models, prompting a sustained reconsideration of how much office space is genuinely necessary and what is gained or lost when employees work apart from one another.

As these arrangements have settled into permanence, a practical question has acquired real theoretical weight: does the mode of work meaningfully shape the psychological resources employees draw on to perform creatively and to manage their emotional lives? Two such resources are particularly consequential. The first is the creative self is an individual's perception of their own capacity for, and identification with, creative activity which underpins innovation, problem-solving, and adaptive performance. The second is emotional intelligence (EI), the set of

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competencies through which people perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions, and which shapes how they cope with stress, sustain motivation, and navigate interpersonal demands. Both are widely regarded as critical to individual and organizational success, and both might plausibly be affected by where work takes place. Remote settings offer autonomy and freedom from interruption but withdraw spontaneous social contact and immediate feedback; office settings provide collaboration and structure but impose commuting, distraction, and interpersonal friction. Whether these contrasting conditions translate into measurable differences in creative self-perception and EI remains an open empirical question.

This question carries particular significance in the Indian context, where a large, rapidly expanding, and demographically young workforce experienced one of the world's most extensive pandemic-era transitions to remote work, especially across the information-technology, services, and knowledge sectors. Yet comparatively little research has examined how Indian employees' creative and emotional functioning relates to their mode of work, and much of the existing evidence base on remote work derives from Western or East Asian samples whose cultural and organizational contexts differ in important ways. Studying these constructs among employees across several regions of India therefore addresses both a substantive gap and a need for evidence grounded in a distinctive labour-market setting. The present study takes up this task by directly comparing creative self-perceptions and emotional intelligence across WFH and WFO employees, and by examining whether these constructs differ by gender.

Theoretical Background

Several established frameworks help explain how the work environment might influence creativity and emotional functioning.

Componential Theory of Creativity

Amabile's (1983) componential model holds that creativity arises from the interaction of domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and most importantly for the present argument intrinsic task motivation. Because intrinsic motivation is sensitive to the surrounding environment, the model predicts that settings offering autonomy and adequate resources should

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support creative output. WFH and WFO settings differ in precisely these respects: the former typically affords greater autonomy and fewer interruptions, while the latter offers richer social stimulation and immediate feedback (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman's (1995) influential account organizes EI around self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies are theoretically consequential for both creative work and the management of work-related stress, and they may be differentially taxed across work modes like self-regulation and motivation under the isolation of remote work, empathy and social skill in the interpersonally dense office environment (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Higher-EI individuals are generally better able to sustain the positive affective states and perseverance that creative work demands (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011).

Job Demands–Resources and Boundary Perspectives

The Job Demands–Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) frames work modes as configurations of demands and resources: WFH may reduce commuting demands and office distractions while simultaneously withdrawing resources such as social support and spontaneous collaboration. Complementing this, Boundary Theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) and Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) draw attention to how the blurring of work–home boundaries in remote settings can deplete the very resources such as time, energy, psychological detachment on which creativity and emotional regulation depend. Together these frameworks generate competing predictions, leaving open the empirical question of whether work mode produces net differences in creative self-perception and EI.

The Present Study

Although prior work has examined creativity and EI separately in relation to remote work, comparatively little research has directly compared WFH and WFO employees on both constructs within a single sample, particularly in the Indian context. The present study addresses this gap.

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Specifically, it examines (a) the association between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of the creative self, and (b) whether emotional intelligence and creative self-perceptions differ as a function of gender and mode of work.

Review of Literature

Research on remote work, creativity, and emotional intelligence has expanded rapidly, much of it prompted by the pandemic-era shift to working from home. This section synthesizes that evidence around three themes: creativity in remote settings, emotional intelligence in remote settings, and individual differences particularly gender in both constructs.

Creativity and the Mode of Work

Qualitative work suggests that remote arrangements reshape rather than simply diminish creative collaboration. Tønnessen and Flåten (2023), studying IT professionals in Norway, described a "collective creativity paradox" in which the loss of informal face-to-face contact was partly offset by well-facilitated digital sessions, even as perceived digital barriers limited the exchange of ideas beyond close ties. Michinov and colleagues (2022), surveying 946 French employees during lockdown, found that workers with a "solitary" psychological profile reported more loneliness and stress and generated fewer ideas than those with an "affiliative" profile, underscoring that the creative impact of WFH is conditioned by individual disposition rather than uniform across employees.

Leadership and context also matter. Sammy (2021) found that ethical leadership exerted a strong positive effect on organizational creativity among Indonesian firms operating WFH programs, an effect mediated by followers' trust in their leaders. Lee and Kim (2022) similarly showed that family-supportive leadership communication enhanced the creativity of remote employees through improved employee–organization relationships, positive affect, and work–life enrichment, especially for those who preferred to keep work and home separate. In an educational setting, Paais and Souhoka (2022) reported that both WFH and creativity significantly predicted teacher performance during the pandemic. Examining the Indian context directly, Jaiswal and Arun (2022) identified role improvisation, stress, isolation, and self-initiated creativity as distinct dimensions of the WFH experience, noting that creative effort during the crisis was largely self-

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generated. Garlatti Costa and colleagues (2023) added an important boundary condition, showing that prior innovative work behaviour translated into remote creative behaviour only when work–home conflict and social isolation were both low.

Emotional Intelligence and the Mode of Work

A substantial body of evidence links emotional intelligence to favorable work outcomes in remote and conventional settings alike. Thi and colleagues (2021), studying Vietnamese university faculty, found that EI positively predicted both job satisfaction and creativity while work stress undermined satisfaction. Imani (2018) reported that EI was a stronger predictor of creativity than quality-of-work-life indicators, with self-awareness emerging as the most potent component. Silva and Coelho (2018), analyzing 519 Portuguese employees, found that EI positively influenced creativity, with worker attitudes mediating and individual success moderating the relationship.

Research focused specifically on remote work reinforces the relevance of EI. Anwar and colleagues (2020) found that EI moderated the relationship between WFH and organizational commitment in Pakistan's education sector. Across two studies of Malaysian public servants, Johar and colleagues (2021, 2023) reported significant associations between EI domains and perceptions of working from home. Janthong and colleagues (2022) likewise linked EI and communication factors to remote-work efficiency among employees of a multinational firm in Thailand. Scherer (n.d.) found that although remote work did not moderate job-related stress, ability EI significantly predicted work engagement, and Verma and colleagues (2024) synthesized evidence positioning EI as a determinant of employee engagement and satisfaction. Counterbalancing these findings, Venkateshwarlu (2021) reported that EI did not significantly moderate the demands–performance relationship, and Edward and Purba (2020) found that EI and the work environment influenced performance largely through organizational commitment, indicating that EI's effects are often indirect. Arar and Öneren (2021), surveying over 1,100 academics in Turkey, found that EI amplified the positive effect of workplace happiness on perceived performance, with work–life balance acting as a partial mediator.

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Individual Differences and Gender

Because the present study examines gender, evidence on individual differences is directly relevant. Dhillon and colleagues (2018) found that age and gender interacted to shape EI, even where their main effects were modest. Nasrin and Morshidi (2019) and a 2023 review (Yubetsu Codex, 2023) both engaged the common assumption that women manage emotions more effectively than men, concluding that observed gender differences are real but heavily shaped by socialization and societal expectation rather than fixed capacity. In the creativity domain, Tager-Shafrir (2022) showed that gender gaps emerge in complex and context-dependent ways: women's creative performance was relatively unaffected by evaluation, improved under encouragement to take risks, and was constrained more by external bias than by ability. Sundquist and Lubart (2022) offered an integrative review of emotion, EI, and creativity, mapping the field across the "seven Cs" of creativity and highlighting how much of the EI–creativity relationship remains underexplored.

Taken together, the literature suggests that work mode, EI, and creativity are linked but that the relationships are contingent on disposition, leadership, and context, and that gender differences where present are modest and socially mediated. These mixed findings motivate a direct comparison of WFH and WFO employees on both creative self-perception and EI.

Method

Participants

Participants were 319 employees working across several regions of India. Of these, 136 (42.6%) worked from home and 183 (57.4%) worked from an office. The sample was approximately balanced by gender, comprising 162 women (50.9%) and 156 men (49.1%); gender information was missing for one participant. Eligibility required a minimum of six months of work experience. Employees engaged in hybrid arrangements were excluded so that the comparison between WFH and WFO settings would remain unambiguous.

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Measures

Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms over a three-week period, with reminders sent to non-responders. Participants were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and were asked to respond independently and honestly. Completed responses were screened for incompleteness, and the cleaned data were analysed using SPSS.

Prior to participation, all respondents were presented with a description of the study's purpose and procedures on the first page of the Google Form. They were informed that participation was voluntary, that responses were anonymous and would be used solely for research purposes, and that they could withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained electronically: participants indicated their consent by [agreeing to a consent statement / selecting "I agree" before proceeding to the questionnaire].

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative design combining correlational and comparative components. The correlational component examined the association between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of the creative self. The comparative component examined differences in emotional intelligence and creative self-perceptions as a function of gender and mode of work.

Objectives

1. To examine the association between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of the creative self (creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity, and the composite creative self-concept).
2. To examine differences in emotional intelligence and creative self-perceptions as a function of gender and mode of work (WFH vs. WFO).

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Hypotheses

1. Emotional intelligence is significantly associated with the dimensions of the creative self.
2. Emotional intelligence differs significantly by gender.
3. Creative self-perception differs significantly by gender.
4. Emotional intelligence differs significantly by mode of work.
5. Creative self-perception differs significantly by mode of work.

Results

Analyses proceeded in three stages: sample description, descriptive statistics for the study variables, and inferential tests of the hypothesized associations and group differences. All inferential tests used an alpha level of .05.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of participants by mode of work and gender. The sample was somewhat weighted toward office-based employees and was close to evenly split by gender.

Table 1

Sample Distribution Across Work Arrangements and Gender

Characteristic	n	Percent	Valid %
Work from home	136	42.6	42.6
Work from office	183	57.4	57.4
Male	156	48.9	49.1
Female	162	50.8	50.9
Total	**319**	**100.0**	—

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Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the study variables appear in Table 2. Emotional intelligence was positively skewed, whereas the creative-self variables were negatively skewed, with the composite creative self-concept and creative personal identity in particular showing means below their medians and modes. These departures from normality should be borne in mind when interpreting the group comparisons that follow.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence and Creative Self Dimensions

Statistic	EI	CSE	CPI	CSC
Mean	22.58	21.18	17.51	70.53
Median	21.00	23.00	19.00	77.00
Mode	21	24	25	100
SD	8.36	6.91	5.99	23.01
Skewness	1.14	−.70	−.54	−.66
Kurtosis	1.12	−.68	−.83	−.71

Note. EI = emotional intelligence; CSE = creative self-efficacy; CPI = creative personal identity; CSC = creative self-concept.

Associations Between Emotional Intelligence and Creative Self

Pearson correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 3. Emotional intelligence showed a small but statistically significant positive association with creative self-efficacy ($r = .12$, $p < .05$) and with the composite creative self-concept ($r = .11$, $p < .05$), but its association with creative personal identity was not significant ($r = .10$). As expected, the creative-

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self dimensions were strongly intercorrelated (r = .89 to .97, p < .01). Thus, Hypothesis 1 received only partial support: emotional intelligence was reliably, though weakly, related to creative self-efficacy and the composite score, but not to creative personal identity.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix For Emotional Intelligence and Creative Self Variables

Variable	EI	CSE	CPI	CSC
EI	—			
CSE	.12*	—		
CPI	.10	.89**	—	
CSC	.11*	.97**	.97**	—

*Note. EI = emotional intelligence; CSE = creative self-efficacy; CPI = creative personal identity; CSC = creative self-concept. *p < .05. **p < .01.*

Differences by Mode of Work

A series of one-way analyses of variance tested whether emotional intelligence and the creative-self dimensions differed between WFH and WFO employees (Table 4). None of the comparisons approached significance: emotional intelligence, F (1, 317) = 0.18, p = .67; creative self-efficacy, F (1, 317) = 0.16, p = .69; creative personal identity, F (1, 317) = 0.05, p = .82; and creative self-concept, F (1, 317) = 0.10, p = .76. Hypotheses 4 and 5 were therefore not supported; mode of work was not associated with differences in either construct.

Table 4

ANOVA Results Comparing Remote and Office Based Employees on Emotional Intelligence and Creative Self

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Variable	SS (between)	df	MS (between)	F	p
Emotional intelligence	12.76	1	12.76	0.18	.67
Creative self-efficacy	7.84	1	7.84	0.16	.69
Creative personal identity	1.87	1	1.87	0.05	.82
Creative self-concept	50.95	1	50.95	0.10	.76

Note. df between = 1, df within = 317 for all comparisons (N = 319).

Differences by Gender

A parallel set of one-way analyses of variance examined gender differences (Table 5). Again, no comparison reached significance: emotional intelligence, F (1, 316) = 0.52, p = .47; creative self-efficacy, F (1, 316) = 0.52, p = .47; creative personal identity, F (1, 316) = 0.48, p = .49; and creative self-concept, F (1, 316) = 0.51, p = .48. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were therefore not supported; women and men did not differ on emotional intelligence or any creative-self dimension.

Table 5

ANOVA Results Examining Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence and Creative Self

Variable	SS (between)	df	MS (between)	F	p
Emotional intelligence	36.31	1	36.31	0.52	.47
Creative self-efficacy	24.87	1	24.87	0.52	.47
Creative personal identity	17.19	1	17.19	0.48	.49
Creative self-concept	271.42	1	271.42	0.51	.48

Note. df between = 1, df within = 316 (n = 318 with valid gender data).

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Discussion

This study set out to determine whether creative self-perceptions and emotional intelligence differ between employees working from home and those working from the office, and whether they vary by gender, in a sample of Indian employees. The central finding is one of consistent null differences: neither mode of work nor gender was associated with significant differences in emotional intelligence or in any dimension of the creative self. Emotional intelligence was, however, weakly but reliably related to creative self-efficacy and to the composite creative self-concept.

Interpretation of Findings

The absence of WFH–WFO differences challenges the common assumption that the physical work environment is a primary driver of creative and emotional functioning. One plausible interpretation is that creative self-perception and emotional intelligence behave more like relatively stable individual characteristics rooted in personality, cognitive style, and habitual emotion-regulation strategies than like states that fluctuate with work location (Feist, 1998; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). On this reading, employees carry their creative and emotional resources with them across settings.

A second, complementary interpretation concerns adaptation. As remote and hybrid arrangements have become routine, employees in both settings may have developed compensatory strategies structuring autonomy at home, protecting focused time at the office that equalize what might once have been sharper environmental differences (Demerouti et al., 2001). The small but significant link between emotional intelligence and creative self-efficacy is consistent with theoretical accounts in which emotional competencies support the confidence and persistence that creative work requires (Amabile, 1983; Brackett et al., 2011), even if those competencies do not differ by where the work is done.

The partial nature of the EI–creativity association also merits attention. Emotional intelligence related to creative self-efficacy and the composite score but not to creative personal identity. This pattern suggests that EI may be more closely tied to beliefs about one's capacity to

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perform creatively than to the more identity-laden sense of being a creative person, which is likely shaped by longer-term self-definition and less responsive to emotional skill.

Practical Implications

For organizations, the findings offer reassurance: because creative self-perception and emotional intelligence did not differ by work mode, flexible-work policies can be designed around productivity, preference, and well-being without concern that location alone will erode these psychological resources. Investments in cultivating creativity and emotional intelligence through training, coaching, and supportive leadership are likely to be worthwhile regardless of whether employees work remotely or on-site. For employees, the results underscore the value of individual adaptability and of strategies that sustain creative confidence and emotional regulation in either setting.

Theoretical Implications

The results align with trait-based accounts of personality, which hold that certain psychological characteristics are relatively enduring across situations (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and they invite caution toward models that attribute variation in creativity and emotional intelligence primarily to external work conditions. At the same time, the partial EI–creativity association indicates that the relationship between emotional and creative functioning is real but selective, and that future theorizing should specify which facets of creative self-perception are most responsive to emotional competence.

Limitations

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The sample, although adequate for the analyses conducted, was drawn from a limited range of organizations and may not represent the full diversity of the Indian workforce across industries, regions, and roles. The cross-sectional design captures a single point in time and cannot speak to how creative self-perception or emotional intelligence evolve with prolonged exposure to a given work mode, nor can it establish causal direction. Reliance on self-report raises the possibility of social-desirability and other response biases. Contextual factors that plausibly shape both constructs home-office quality,

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organizational support, leadership style, and team dynamics were not measured or controlled. Finally, both instruments, while validated and efficient, are brief; the SSCS may not capture every facet of work-relevant creativity, and the BEIS-10 offers a more compact assessment than longer EI measures. The non-normal distributions observed for several variables also suggest that future analyses might complement ANOVA with distribution-robust alternatives.

Future Directions

Future research could extend these findings in several ways. Longitudinal designs would clarify how creative self-perception and emotional intelligence develop as employees move between or settle into work modes. Direct study of hybrid arrangements excluded here for analytic clarity would address an increasingly common reality. Incorporating organizational culture, leadership, team dynamics, and the digital tools that mediate remote work would help identify the contextual conditions under which work mode does and does not matter. Comparative studies across industries and regions would test the generality of the present null findings, and intervention studies could evaluate whether targeted creativity and emotional-intelligence training yields comparable benefits in remote and on-site settings. Attention to job roles and to personality-driven preferences for particular work modes would further refine understanding of who thrives where.

Conclusion

Across a sample of 319 Indian employees, neither working from home nor working from the office, and neither being a woman nor a man, was associated with differences in creative self-perception or emotional intelligence; emotional intelligence was, however, modestly related to creative self-efficacy. These results suggest that the psychological resources underlying creativity and emotional functioning are largely portable across work settings. As flexible and hybrid work become enduring features of organizational life, this portability is encouraging: it implies that supporting employees' creativity and emotional intelligence is a matter less of where they work than of how they and their organizations choose to cultivate these capacities.

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