

The Future of Program Management: How Will Trends in Employment Style Affect Program Management?

Chen' Liang-Yin¹, Leyba, Michael¹, Montoya, Madison¹, McMillen, Aubriella¹, Sanchez Soto, Roselyn¹, Stewart, Linda M.^{1,2}

¹ Anderson School of Management, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA

² Syrinx Consultants

Abstract

The fast growth of working remotely and in hybrid ways has changed how businesses work together and has created challenges and opportunities for program management. Although there are more studies on remote working at the project or team levels, research on the impact of changing ways of working on how we perform program management across different industries is still limited. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how remote and hybrid work impacts coordination, leadership, oversight of performance, and governance in program management.

To conduct this study, we did a literature review using data that was published between 2015 and 2025. The sources for the study were taken from different databases and websites using keywords such as remote working, hybrid working, and program management. A total of six studies, which satisfied the inclusion criteria, were used to analyze the impact across three industries: software, construction, and the public sector.

These results suggest that future program management will depend on digitally enabled governance, trust-based leadership, and standardized hybrid coordination practices. This requires program managers to balance accountability and collaboration in increasingly fluid, distributed work environments.

Introduction

Program management is essential for coordinating multiple related projects, aligning organizational strategy, and ensuring effective communication among teams and stakeholders (Brown, 2014). As projects grow more complex and interconnected, program managers must oversee resources and outcomes across entire portfolios (Brown, 2014). Because of this role, the effectiveness of program management practices directly influences an organization's ability to deliver large-scale initiatives successfully.

Recent shifts in workplace structures, particularly the growth of remote and hybrid work, have significantly changed how teams collaborate and communicate (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Advances in digital collaboration tools and the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition (Ozimek, 2020). This led many organizations to adopt distributed work environments. Remote and hybrid models offer benefits such as flexibility and access to a wider talent pool (Mujtaba and Lawrence, 2024). However, they also create challenges for coordination, communication, and oversight, all of which are critical responsibilities of program managers.

Despite growing research on remote work, much of the literature focuses on team or project-level impacts rather than program management. Additionally, the effects of these workplace changes vary across industries. Fields such as software development are often well suited to remote collaboration (Topp et al., 2022), while industries like construction rely heavily on in-person coordination, and the public sector operates within unique regulatory and operational constraints.

The authors examine how program management practices have evolved across three industries: software, construction, and the public sector. This paper also explores how remote and hybrid work structures may shape the future of program management. By reviewing existing

literature, we identify key changes, challenges, and gaps that organizations must address as program management continues to adapt to modern work environments.

Definition of Research Problems

Program management has traditionally relied on centralized leadership, in-person collaboration, and direct supervision to coordinate multiple projects and align organizational objectives. However, recent workplace shifts, particularly the growth of remote and hybrid work, have significantly changed how organizations manage programs, communicate across teams, and monitor performance (Brown, 2014). Advances in digital collaboration tools and the widespread adoption of distributed work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated this transformation across many industries (Carrasco-Garrido, 2023).

One key research problem is understanding the evolution of program management practices within the software, construction, and public sectors. Historically, these industries relied heavily on physical coordination and hierarchical oversight. Today, many organizations rely more on digital communication platforms and outcome-based performance monitoring to coordinate distributed teams (El Khatib, 2023).

A second research problem involves how these changes may shape the future of program management. As organizations increasingly operate in hybrid or remote environments, program managers must develop new ideas related to digital virtual collaboration and data-driven oversight. Finally, there is an ongoing debate regarding whether remote, hybrid, or in-person work structures are most effective for program management (Microsoft, 2021). While remote work can improve flexibility and productivity, it may also create challenges related to communication, team cohesion, and oversight. This makes it important to identify gaps and develop strategies that better support program management in distributed environments (Goldberg and Priest, 2023).

Method

Literature review methodology

According to the University of Connecticut Library (2022), a systematic approach is essential in the research process, including planning, searching, organizing, analyzing, writing, and repeating. We conducted searches in databases and academic search engines, such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Business Source Complete, Wiley Online Library, the Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research, and Data-Smart City Solution, using the keywords: “remote work,” “hybrid work,” “program management,” “project management,” “software companies,” “public sector,” “construction companies,” and “government.” Inclusion criteria for sources were shown below.

- (1) Empirical, survey-based methodology (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods).
- (2) Peer-reviewed journal articles.
- (3) Applied and conference research.

See Table 1 for literature review parameter details. After initial searches and organization, we screened and narrowed the sources to ensure relevance to the focus of the authors’ research. Ultimately, we found six articles that met all criteria and were analyzed. Their findings were synthesized using a cross-industry comparative approach, which forms the basis of the Results section.

Table 1: Literature review parameters

<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Description</i>
Language	English
Time range	2015-2025
Database and academic search engine	ResearchGate, Wiley Online Library, Business Source Complete, the Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research, Data-Smart City Solution

Type of articles	Empirical, Peer-reviewed journal publications, Conference articles, Relevant policy or applied reports
Reference	Educational, commercial, industrial, governmental
Keywords	remote work, hybrid work, program management, project management, software companies, public sector, construction companies, and government

Industry-Specific Findings

This section presents industry-specific findings drawn from the selected literature, organized across the software, construction, and public sector domains. It examines how hybrid and remote work were implemented within each industry, the key operational and managerial impacts identified, and the structural constraints unique to each context. By analyzing these industries individually, this review establishes a foundation for cross-industry comparison and highlights implications for the evolving role of program management.

Software Industry

The two articles we selected for the software industry were *Work-From-Home and Its Implications for Project Management, Resilience And Innovation — A Global Survey On Software Companies* by Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022), and *The Impact Of Working From Home On The Success Of Scrum Projects: A Multi-Method Study* by Cucolaş and Russo (2022). Both studies examine the rapid transition to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic and analyze shifts in coordination, leadership, performance, and governance at the project level. While Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022) emphasize organizational adaptation and resilience across software firms globally, Cucolaş and Russo (2022) focus specifically on Scrum team execution and project success.

Regarding coordination, Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022) found that teams increasingly relied on intentionally planned communication through digital tools to sustain alignment, although coordination across time zones remained challenging. Similarly, Cucolaş and Russo (2022)

observed that Scrum ceremonies, such as daily stand-ups and sprint planning, played a stabilizing role in maintaining coordination in remote settings; however, these rituals required stronger discipline and structured facilitation. Both studies indicate that remote work heightened the need for deliberate and structured communication practices.

In terms of leadership, Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022) highlight a shift toward trust-based and autonomy-oriented management approaches. Managers faced increased cognitive and leadership demands in sustaining team resilience and engagement under remote conditions. Likewise, Cucolaş and Russo (2022) emphasize the critical role of Scrum Masters in facilitating team dynamics, fostering psychological safety, and proactively addressing conflict in virtual environments. Emotional intelligence and relational leadership were identified as important contributors to project success in remote Scrum teams.

Concerning performance, Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022) report a stronger reliance on outcome-based control mechanisms, including deliverables, milestones, and progress tracking, rather than behavior-based supervision. Maintaining a balance between autonomy and accountability was essential. Similarly, Cucolaş and Russo (2022) find that well-structured and consistently applied Scrum processes supported project success in remote contexts. However, both studies note that innovation, creativity, and complex problem-solving were more difficult to sustain in fully remote environments compared to in-person collaboration.

With respect to governance, Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022) suggest that additional digital structures and clearly defined processes were necessary to support decision-making and coordination. Cucolaş and Russo (2022) demonstrate that Scrum artifacts—such as backlogs, sprint reviews, and burndown charts—served as governance mechanisms by enhancing

transparency and traceability. Together, these findings indicate a shift toward digitally mediated, artifact-based governance in remote project environments.

Several implications for program management emerge from these findings. First, cross-project communication governance becomes increasingly critical, as program managers coordinate multiple projects, stakeholders, and teams (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022). Second, leveraging digital tools to enhance visibility across portfolio planning, execution, and monitoring is essential for maintaining alignment (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022; Cucolaş & Russo, 2022). Third, formalizing and standardizing hybrid or remote protocols across projects can improve consistency and facilitate performance evaluation at the program level (Cucolaş & Russo, 2022). Fourth, leadership approaches should emphasize autonomy, accountability, and outcome-based evaluation, particularly in geographically dispersed teams (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022; Cucolaş & Russo, 2022). Finally, actively fostering team resilience, managing dynamics, and supporting psychological well-being are necessary to sustain both short-term performance and long-term innovation.

Given the characteristics of the software industry, these findings may be context-specific. Software teams generally demonstrate higher digital maturity and familiarity with collaboration tools, which may have reduced the transition barrier compared to asset-intensive sectors such as construction or certain government functions. Additionally, established Agile practices supported adaptation to remote work. However, the dependence on structured ceremonies, team maturity, and leadership facilitation suggests potential vulnerability when discipline weakens. Moreover, reduced spontaneous interaction and tacit knowledge sharing constrains innovation over time. Therefore, examining multiple industries is important to determine whether similar patterns emerge and to assess how remote or hybrid models reshape broader program management practices.

Public Sector

Two articles were selected to explore hybrid work within the public sector and address its impact on the future of program management. “The Future of Hybrid Work in the Public Sector” written by Jeremy M. Goldberg and Doug Priest (2023), focuses on how the United States government (specifically New York’s public sector) transitioned to work-from-home and hybrid work styles following the pandemic. Whereas “Managing hybrid workers and teams in the public sector: from management by results to purposeful management,” by Judy Lundy et al. (2025) covers the current managerial capabilities addressing hybrid and work-from-home employment styles in the Australian public sector. Each one addresses different impacts in key areas (coordination, leadership, performance, and governance) while displaying the public sector's ability to adapt to hybrid work within the context of program management. The differing locations of focus within these articles also display a global effort to adopt hybrid work styles in the public sector.

Coordination between members of the workforce in the public sector is incredibly important, and Goldberg and Priest (2023) stress that the workplace will experience contention if thoughtful policies are not considered and implemented. The authors rationalize that thoughtful policies that incorporate the concerns of the workforce can help build trust, which improves coordination between managers (elected officials in this case study) and those in their workforce. Lundy et al. (2025) explain that there is importance of consistent connection and communication with their teams in a hybrid working environment because communication is the key to coordination. Both stress the importance of understanding and developing trust when approaching the development of hybrid work policies. In respect to program management, managers will need to specify program and project outcomes, timelines, and member responsibilities for hybrid work to benefit the public sector.

Leadership is a strong focus in Goldberg and Priest's (2023) case study because of the hierarchical nature of the government. They state that elected leaders determine the course of action across many agencies and other political issues can factor into their decisions surrounding hybrid work (Goldberg and Priest 2023). The nature of some government jobs creates difficulty when implementing hybrid work but encouraging managers to embrace it can create a workforce that works efficiently from various locations and can assist leaders with achieving outcomes and deliverables (Goldberg and Priest 2023). Leadership within the public sector differs from other industries in that some of the "managers" are elected, and some are appointed to carry out specific tasks, but thoughtful implementation of hybrid work may help the public sector compete with the private sector when it comes to job flexibility and delivering outcomes with team members in various locations.

Lundy et al. (2025) focused on performance within their findings, referencing the codebook's definition for performance as "measured by outcomes, objectives, deliverables and trust culture," explaining that managers are now focused on how delivering outcomes can be supported by a hybrid team. They recognized a shift that managers are making where delivering outcomes remained a focus, but the where and when of a project are being approached in a more reflective and flexible way (Lundy et al. 2025). Understanding that being in the office did not correlate to being productive, supported the concept of hybrid teams and their implementation if program deliverables could be defined and communicated to the team.

The direct term governance is not written in either of the authors' efforts, but the elements that comprise it are researched in depth across the three previous topics. The public sector lacks a defined digital structure making it hard to implement processes to support teams in a hybrid workspace, but the findings of these authors suggest that the foundation for hybrid implementation has already been set due to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings here are similar to our findings in the software industry. They create many implications in respect to program management. As previously stated, the hierarchical nature of the public sector relies on managers (elected officials) to create and adopt effective hybrid work policies that are compliant with bureaucratic standards. It seems that scalability is one of the largest barriers to hybrid implementation in the public sector as addressed by Goldberg and Priest (2023) when they stated that governments do not lack the technology or technical capabilities to have hybrid teams, but rather that the cost of implementation across the entire workforce is difficult to do. To effectively implement hybrid work policies, managers must emphasize a leadership approach that fosters consistent and meaningful communication, develop trust within their workforce to strengthen coordination and autonomy, set clear and relevant objectives to measure performance, and establish processes to guide teams in a hybrid work environment.

Construction Industry

The rapid expansion of hybrid and remote work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced project and program management practices across industries, including construction. Drawing from El Khatib et al. (2023) available through SHAREOK, this essay examines how hybrid and remote work were implemented, the key impacts on coordination, leadership, performance, and governance, the industry-specific constraints faced in construction, and the broader implications for program and project management.

Hybrid and remote work in the construction industry were largely implemented as adaptive responses to COVID-19 restrictions. According to El Khatib et al. (2023), organizations in the UAE construction sector transitioned administrative and managerial functions, such as planning, procurement coordination, financial management, and design meetings, to digital platforms while maintaining on-site execution for physical construction activities. Video conferencing tools, cloud-

based document management systems, and digital project management software became central to maintaining continuity. Similarly, Overturff (2021) explains that within the U.S. construction context, remote work was implemented selectively, primarily for roles involving design, estimating, scheduling, and project documentation. Field operations, inspections, and safety oversight remained site-based due to regulatory and operational requirements. In both studies, hybrid work emerged as the most feasible model, combining remote administrative coordination with essential in-person site supervision.

The shift to hybrid work produced notable impacts on coordination. El Khatib et al. (2023) found that remote collaboration tools improved scheduling flexibility and reduced travel time between offices and project sites. Meetings could be held more frequently, and documentation became centralized, which enhanced accessibility. However, coordination challenges also surfaced, particularly in complex technical discussions where in-person clarification would traditionally resolve misunderstandings quickly. Overturff (2021) similarly notes that while digital platforms facilitated communication, they sometimes reduced informal problem-solving interactions that occur naturally on-site. In construction, where precision and timing are critical, even small communication gaps can delay deliverables. Therefore, both studies emphasize the importance of structured communication protocols and clearly defined reporting channels to sustain coordination in a hybrid environment.

Leadership practices also evolved significantly under hybrid arrangements. El Khatib et al. (2023) highlight that traditional construction leadership relies heavily on physical oversight and direct supervision. Remote work required leaders to shift toward results-based management, focusing on deliverables rather than visible activity. This transition demanded greater trust, enhanced communication skills, and frequent virtual check-ins. Overturff (2021) reinforces this perspective, observing that managers who succeeded in remote environments demonstrated

adaptability, transparency, and strong interpersonal communication. Leaders had to maintain team cohesion, morale, and accountability without relying on physical presence. Digital literacy also became a critical competency, as project managers were responsible for navigating collaboration tools and ensuring team engagement. These changes suggest that leadership in construction is evolving from supervisory control toward strategic facilitation and performance management.

Performance outcomes under hybrid work were mixed but generally positive in administrative functions. El Khatib et al. (2023) report productivity improvements in planning and documentation tasks due to fewer workplace interruptions and reduced commuting time. Cost savings were observed through decreased travel and in-person meeting expenses. Overtuff (2021) similarly identifies increased efficiency in design coordination and estimating functions when supported by appropriate technology. However, both studies acknowledge performance risks. Technology gaps, insufficient training, and connectivity issues hindered some teams. Additionally, delays in communication occasionally slowed decision-making processes. In construction projects, where budgets and schedules are tightly controlled, even minor inefficiencies can affect overall project outcomes. Therefore, performance improvements were closely linked to investments in digital infrastructure and workforce training.

Governance structures were also reshaped by hybrid work adoption. El Khatib et al. (2023) note that digital documentation systems enhanced transparency and accountability, enabling more structured reporting and record-keeping. Remote tracking of project milestones supported oversight at the managerial level. However, governance challenges arose in quality assurance and regulatory compliance. Construction projects require frequent inspections and adherence to safety standards that cannot be fully monitored virtually. Overtuff (2021) similarly identifies concerns regarding oversight, emphasizing that remote supervision must be balanced with on-site verification to maintain compliance and risk control. Both studies indicate that governance

frameworks must become more formalized in hybrid settings, incorporating defined escalation procedures, clear responsibility matrices, and integrated risk management strategies.

In conclusion, the combined findings from El Khatib et al. (2023) and Overturff (2021) demonstrate that hybrid work can enhance flexibility, reduce costs, and improve administrative efficiency in construction project management when implemented strategically. However, industry-specific constraints prevent full remote adoption. Successful integration depends on strong leadership, robust governance frameworks, technological investment, and clear communication processes. For program and project managers, the transition toward hybrid models represents not merely a temporary adaptation, but a structural shift in how construction projects are coordinated, supervised, and delivered.

Results

Cross-industry comparisons

As discussed in the previous section, the three industries examined demonstrate both shared patterns and significant differences in how remote and hybrid work reshaped project and program management practices. Moving beyond industry-specific findings, this section adopts a cross-industry perspective to systematically analyze overarching patterns, limitations, and points of integration. The analysis begins by examining how the nature of work shapes coordination complexity, leadership approaches, and governance structures across sectors.

Nature of Work

The software industry was digitally enabled and knowledge-based prior to the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work during the COVID-19 pandemic, making the transition comparatively seamless. Its modular task structure and reliance on collaborative digital platforms made remote

work both feasible and scalable (Ågren et al., 2022). In contrast, the construction industry is inherently site-dependent and execution-driven. While firms adopted cloud-based tools for time tracking, documentation, and communication during the pandemic, on-site execution remained essential (Sparhawk, 2025). As a result, program and project managers continued to rely on close monitoring of schedules and control processes rather than shifting fully toward outcome- and autonomy-based oversight as seen in software environments.

The public sector presents a hybrid structure similar to construction in terms of partial feasibility. The coordination challenges arise particularly when balancing policy compliance, equity considerations, and bureaucratic accountability. Additionally, external pressures—such as community expectations and pre-existing infrastructure limitations—further complicate implementation (Randolph-Pollard, 2025).

Overall, the complexity of program coordination varies significantly across industries. These structural differences underscore how the nature of work fundamentally shapes the feasibility and governance of remote and hybrid models.

Leadership and Oversight Approaches

Leadership and oversight approaches vary significantly across industries, particularly when organizations adopt remote or hybrid work models. In the software industry, leadership has increasingly shifted toward outcome-based management and agile governance. Instead of closely supervising employees' daily activities, leaders focus on supporting teams, removing obstacles, and ensuring that project goals are achieved. Agile frameworks emphasize collaboration, transparency, and self-organizing teams, which makes it easier for organizations to operate effectively in remote environments. Because software development work is primarily digital, managers can track progress through sprint review, shared dashboards, and collaboration platforms rather than

physical supervision. Research shows that successful remote software teams rely on trust, communication, and measurable deliverables instead of traditional oversight methods. (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022).

In contrast, the construction industry relies heavily on direct supervision and milestone-based oversight. Construction projects follow strict schedules and require coordination of labor, equipment, and materials on job sites. Leaders must monitor safety regulations, construction quality, and progress towards project milestones. Although some planning and design tasks can be done remotely, the majority of the work requires a physical presence. As a result, leadership in construction remains more directive, with managers conducting site inspections and tracking project performance against deadlines and budgets. This approach reflects the operational demands of construction projects, which depend on real-time coordination and physical task completion.

The public sector also takes a different leadership approach because government organizations must operate within strict regulatory and policy frameworks. Public sector leaders are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws, regulations, and administrative procedures. Oversight is often carried out through formal reporting systems, hierarchical approval processes, and audits. While remote work has increased in government agencies, the shift toward trust-based leadership has occurred more gradually due to accountability requirements and bureaucratic structures. According to research on governance in public organizations, leadership in government emphasizes transparency, documentation, and policy adherence to maintain public trust (McMenamin and Ponton, 2022).

Overall, remote and hybrid work environments have encouraged leaders across industries to move away from constant supervision and toward clearer communication and trust-based

management. However, the speed and extent of this shift vary depending on the nature of the work. The software industry adapted the fastest because its work is digital and outcome-driven.

Technological Adoption

The adoption of technology also greatly varies between the three industries. The software industry exists within a digitally mature infrastructure, providing them with the skill set and technology to rapidly implement hybrid work styles in a feasible manner. The acceptance of DevOps practices (a combination of software development and IT operations) to eliminate silo gaps between development and operations in the software industry shows a willingness and capability to utilize technology to streamline efficiency and productivity of business activities (Mahdi 2023). An industry capable of utilizing technology to this extent is capable of higher performance in a hybrid work environment and easier integration from a program management perspective.

The construction industry produces physical deliverables, limiting the digital integration available to the industry, but the implementation of newer technologies like remote monitoring demonstrates a push towards newer technologies being adopted. Remote monitoring has been a recent technological adoption of the construction industry and in Makhathini et al.'s (2022) study, they found that its implementation benefited the project management performance of the sites using it compared to the sites using traditional on-site monitoring in productivity, collaboration, and communication. With remotely monitored sites experiencing an improved level of efficiency, the adoption of hybrid work styles in the construction industry is more feasible than previously thought.

In comparison, the public sector, due to its bureaucratic nature, has been much slower in the adoption of technology to supplement the business activities of the industry. Pathirana et al. (2025) state that five key organizational and technological factors, primarily digital capacity and

managerial support, create a positive correlation between effective practices for work-from-home policies in the public sector. Continued research and understanding of these key organizational and technological factors may lead to a growing acceptance and implementation of hybrid work policies.

Patterns, tensions, and consensus

Across software development, construction, and the public sector, hybrid and remote work models have revealed consistent patterns that are reshaping the future of program management. One major shared trend is the increased reliance on digital collaboration tools. Whether through Agile boards and code repositories in software, cloud-based document systems in construction, or secure workflow platforms in public agencies, organizations now depend on integrated digital ecosystems to coordinate work. This shift has accelerated the use of digital dashboards, centralized reporting tools, and real-time performance tracking systems. As a result, program management is moving toward virtual portfolio oversight, where leaders monitor multiple initiatives remotely through data-driven platforms rather than physical presence (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Another cross-industry pattern is the shift toward outcome-based performance evaluation (Lau 2008). In hybrid settings, managers can no longer rely on observing activity in person. Instead, performance is measured by deliverables, milestones, compliance indicators, and measurable outputs. This transition aligns with broader program management trends emphasizing distributed governance, where accountability is tied to results rather than supervision. Alongside this shift, there is greater emphasis on employee autonomy. Hybrid work requires professionals to manage their time, prioritize tasks, and operate independently. In software environments, this autonomy often improves productivity and innovation. In construction and public sectors,

autonomy exists but is moderated by safety regulations, compliance requirements, and physical task constraints.

Communication has also become more formalized across the above three industries (Software, Construction, and Public Sector). Without spontaneous in-person discussions, organizations have implemented structured meeting schedules, standardized reporting templates, and defined escalation channels. This formalization strengthens governance and transparency but requires stronger cross-functional alignment to prevent silos. Integrated communication platforms now serve as the backbone of coordination, connecting departments, stakeholders, and leadership in real time.

Despite these shared patterns, hybrid work introduces important tensions. One central tension is autonomy versus control. In software development, autonomy generally enhances performance because work is knowledge-based and easily measured through output. In construction, autonomy is limited by physical constraints and safety oversight requirements. In the public sector, accountability and regulatory compliance create friction when too much flexibility is introduced. Program managers must therefore balance empowering teams by maintaining sufficient oversight to manage risk.

To navigate these tensions, program managers must adopt balanced hybrid governance models. This includes using digital dashboards for transparency without micromanagement, reinforcing communication structures while encouraging innovation, and fostering team cohesion despite physical distance. The future of program management will depend not only on technology adoption but on leaders' ability to manage competing demands in distributed, digitally enabled environments.

Limitations

Many limitations exist in understanding the effects that the implementation of hybrid work in the software, construction, and public sector, especially in a cross-industry comparative context, has on program management. A primary limitation stems from the structural differences between industries, including varying organizational size, regulatory constraints, and technological maturity, limiting the generalization of findings across the three industries. The construction and public sectors are often constrained by site-dependent and project-based operations that limit employment style flexibility, unlike the software industry that functions in scalable digital infrastructures. These industry-specific adoptions for hybrid work may show results on industry impacts on program management rather than hybrid work models when addressing their development.

Hybrid work models also remain in transition across all three sections, so the findings in these articles reflect insights for a post-COVID 19 era rather than a stabilized process. Organizations are still creating and updating hybrid policies related to coordination, leadership, performance, and governance restricting documentation on its evolutionary development to a brief period of time. The limited time frame reduces the ability to accurately assess impacts on program outcomes, deliverables, and requirements.

While Carrasco-Garrido et al. (2023) focus on the occupational health field, they identified time as a significant driving factor for hybrid implementation. The technological maturity of the software industry enables it to rapidly develop organizational processes pertaining to these employment styles and has also provided more extensive documentation on hybrid work compared to the construction industry and the public sector. This imbalance in the available material to analyze between the industries creates difficulty in isolating the effect that hybrid work styles have on program management.

Finally, program performance is difficult to compare across these three industries in regard to hybrid work because of the variables addressed in the previously referenced sources. With the studies being industry focused instead of covering cross industry findings, variables that may have contributed to easier implementation of hybrid work in one industry may be counteractive in other industries. This prevents in-depth shared factors from being studied over a long period of time to accurately assess the positive and negative benefits of many approaches to hybrid work through a program management lens.

Theoretical Integration

As the comparative analysis explored patterns, tensions, and limitations across industries, it became essential to integrate these findings into a broader theoretical understanding of how program management is evolving under remote and hybrid conditions. Across the software, construction, and public sectors, four interrelated shifts emerge: the organizational utilization of digital governance systems, the gradual move toward outcome-based oversight, the conditional expansion of structured autonomy, and the structural adoption of hybrid leadership models. Although these shifts exhibit differences under industry-specific constraints, they collectively signal a governance transformation at the program management level.

First, digital governance systems have become foundational to program oversight across all three industries, though with varying degrees of application. In the software industry, digital governance was already embedded within Agile infrastructures, making remote coordination a natural extension of existing practices. In construction, digital systems function primarily as supplements to physical oversight and risk mitigation rather than replacing on-site control. In the public sector, digital governance exposes modernization gaps and operates within compliance-heavy institutional frameworks. Despite these structural differences, digital infrastructure

increasingly becomes the backbone of program coordination, suggesting that technological enablement will be essential to future program governance.

Second, the shift toward outcome-based oversight illustrates uneven but converging evolution (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022; Cucolaş & Russo, 2022). Software demonstrates the most complete transition, given its existing deliverable- and outcome-focused practices. Construction remains constrained by contractual, safety, and sequential dependencies, limiting full implementation of outcome-based models. The public sector faces the greatest institutional resistance due to bureaucratic accountability structures that prioritize procedural compliance closely tied to performance metrics. However, traceability is increasingly valued over visibility, indicating a growing emphasis on performance-based evaluation in future program management.

Third, structured autonomy emerges as conditional and context-specific rather than a universal model applicable across industries. In software environments, autonomy excels due to modular task design and embedded Agile approaches. In construction and public sector contexts, autonomy must be structured more carefully through formal controls because of physical interdependencies and regulatory requirements. Similar to outcome-based oversight, traceability mechanisms play a crucial role. How traceability is integrated to balance autonomy and accountability is key to sustaining structured autonomy institution-wide.

Finally, hybrid leadership models reflect behavioral adaptation as the environment evolves. Leadership in software environments has shifted toward a more facilitative and empowerment-focused style. In construction, leadership remains closely controlled but increasingly mediated through digital governance systems. Public sector leadership evolves through institutional negotiation, balancing flexibility with public accountability. These differences suggest that

governance rigidity and structural tolerance are key factors influencing the institutional adoption of hybrid leadership.

In summary, these integrated findings indicate that future program management is shifting toward a more trust-based governance model enabled by technology, while remaining contingent on industry-specific contexts.

Discussion

The results of this study show that remote and hybrid work are reshaping program management practices. This can be shown across the three industries we chose to study: software, construction, and the public sector. The literature identifies operational changes in coordination, leadership, governance, and performance measurement in these industries. The broader implication allows us to see that program management is transitioning from traditional supervision-based oversight toward digitally-enabled and outcome-oriented governance structures. Program managers are no longer responsible solely for coordinating projects but must also manage distributed teams, digital collaboration platforms, and evolving organizational policies.

Across the three industries studied, remote and hybrid work models demonstrate both advantages and limitations. Software organizations appear to adapt most easily due to their digital maturity and established Agile frameworks. Construction organizations, however, require physical site coordination and safety oversight, limiting the feasibility of fully remote work. The public sector faces additional constraints related to structures, policy compliance, and public accountability. These differences suggest that the future of program management will likely involve industry-specific hybrid models rather than a universal employment structure.

Despite these variations, several consistent themes emerge. First, program management increasingly depends on digital collaboration tools and centralized reporting systems to maintain visibility across multiple projects. Second, leadership styles are shifting toward trust-based management and outcome-based performance measurement rather than monitoring employee presence. Third, communication structures are becoming more formalized in distributed work environments, requiring scheduled coordination mechanisms and standardized documentation processes.

However, the transition toward remote and hybrid program management also introduces risks that may affect program performance if not properly managed. Risks such as communication breakdowns, weakened workplace relationships, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities can reduce coordination effectiveness across programs. These risks are particularly relevant for program managers because their responsibilities require cross-project alignment and consistent stakeholder engagement. As a result, risk management frameworks become essential for evaluating how employment style trends may influence future program outcomes.

Risk Response Matrix and Qualitative Risk Matrix

The Qualitative Risk Matrix provides a framework for assessing the probability and potential impact of risks that may arise from remote and hybrid work environments. Based on the risk analysis the team developed in the Excel matrix, three major risks were identified as having high probability and high potential impact on program management: cybersecurity vulnerabilities, weakened workplace relationships, and communication breakdowns. These risks fall within the high-risk category of the qualitative matrix, meaning they require mitigation strategies rather than passive monitoring. See figures 1 and 2.

Threat Score = <i>Probability * Impact</i>	
Threat Score (Verbal Score)	
1-3	Very Low
4-8	Low
9-14	Moderate
15-19	High
20-25	Very High

		Impact					
		1 - Insignificant		2- Minor	3 - Significant	4 - Major	5 - Extensive
Probability	0-20%	1- Rare	1	2	3	4	5
	21-40%	2 - Unlikely	2	4	6	8	10
	41-60%	3 - Possible	3	6	9	12	15
	61-80%	4 - Likely	4	8	12	16	20
	81-100%	5 - Almost Certain	5	10	15	20	25

Figure 1. Qualitative Risk Matrix

Risk	Probability /Impact	Risk Response	Risk Response Plan
Cybersecurity	High	Mitigate	Train employees about common cybersecurity risks, such as phishing, malware, and APT attacks and policies of using computers remotely
Workplace bonds weakening	High	Mitigate	Program managers plan virtual team building activities and find opportunities to facilitate team bonding throughout the project lifecycle
Communication breakdowns and collaboration delays	High	Mitigate	Establish clear communication protocols and set clear expectations and agendas across teams

Figure 2. Risk Response Matrix

Cybersecurity risk represents one of the most significant concerns in remote program management environments (Riskconnect, 2024). As organizations rely more heavily on virtual collaboration tools and distributed networks, the exposure to cyber threats increases. If security protocols are weak, program data and organizational systems could be compromised. According to the risk response matrix, this risk should be addressed through a mitigation strategy, including employee cybersecurity training, secure network protocols, and multi-factor authentication

systems (National Credit Union Administration, 2020). These preventative actions reduce the probability of security breaches while maintaining the flexibility benefits of remote work.

Another high-impact risk involves the weakening of workplace bonds and organizational culture. In traditional work environments, informal interactions contribute to collaboration and team cohesion. Remote environments reduce these interactions, which can lead to lower engagement and weaker collaboration. For program managers, this risk is particularly important because program success often depends on strong collaboration between project teams. The risk response matrix suggests mitigation strategies such as virtual team-building initiatives, structured collaboration opportunities, and regular check-in meetings that reinforce team relationships and maintain organizational culture (Penn LPS Online, 2025).

The third major risk identified is communication breakdowns and collaboration delays, which can occur when teams rely entirely on digital communication platforms. Without clear protocols, information may be misinterpreted or lost between distributed teams. In program management environments where projects must remain aligned, these communication failures can affect schedules and other key program parts. The risk response matrix indicates that this risk should be mitigated by implementing standardized communication protocols, defined reporting structures, and scheduled coordination meetings across program teams.

When considered together, the qualitative risk matrix and the risk response matrix demonstrate that the challenges associated with remote and hybrid work do not prevent successful program management. Instead, they highlight areas where program managers must implement governance structures and risk mitigation strategies. By identifying potential risks early and applying structured responses, organizations can maintain effective program oversight while still benefiting from the flexibility and efficiency offered by hybrid work models.

Overall, the analysis suggests that the future success of program management will depend not only on technological adoption. It will also depend on the ability of program managers to manage distributed risks, strengthen their digital governance systems, and maintain effective communication across increasingly hybrid teams.

Conclusion and Future Research

Conclusion

This study examined how emerging employment styles, particularly remote and hybrid work models, are reshaping the future of program management across multiple industries. Through a detailed literature review and cross-industry comparison of the software industry, construction industry, and public sector, several key patterns emerged that illustrate how organizations are adapting to distributed work environments. While each industry faces different structural constraints, the findings demonstrate that program management is increasingly shifting toward digitally enabled governance systems, outcome-based performance measurement, and trust-based leadership approaches. These shifts show that program managers must adapt both their technical skills and leadership strategies in order to effectively coordinate programs in hybrid work environments (Allen et al., 2015).

One of the most significant conclusions drawn from this research is that technology has become the main structure supporting modern program management practices. Digital collaboration platforms, cloud-based project management tools, and integrated communication systems now serve as the primary methods for coordinating projects and maintaining oversight across distributed teams. These technologies allow program managers to monitor progress, track performance metrics, and communicate with stakeholders in real time, regardless of location. In

industries such as software development, where digital collaboration tools were already widely used before the pandemic, organizations were able to transition smoothly to remote and hybrid work environments. This digital growth allowed program managers to maintain oversight and governance across multiple projects using dashboards, shared repositories, and automated reporting systems (Project Management Institute, 2023).

However, the research also demonstrates that the ability to implement hybrid or remote program management models varies significantly across industries. For example, the construction industry relies heavily on physical work environments where project execution, inspections, and safety oversight must occur in person. Although administrative functions such as planning, documentation, and design coordination can be completed remotely, many construction activities require direct supervision and in-person collaboration. Similarly, the public sector operates with regulatory frameworks that may slow the adoption of new technologies or flexible work arrangements. These institutional constraints highlight that the future of program management will not follow a single universal model. Instead, organizations will likely adopt industry-specific hybrid approaches that combine digital coordination with necessary in-person collaboration (Choudhury et al., 2021).

Another important takeaway from this study is the growing shift toward outcome-based oversight within program management. Traditional management approaches often focus on monitoring employee activity and physical presence in the workplace. In remote and hybrid environments, program managers must rely more heavily on measurable outputs, deliverables, and milestones to evaluate performance. This shift places greater emphasis on clearly defined expectations, transparent reporting systems, and structured communication processes. Program managers must ensure that project teams understand program objectives and performance metrics so that progress can be evaluated effectively without relying on direct supervision. As

organizations adopt digital dashboards and reporting tools, data driven decision making will become increasingly important for maintaining alignment between projects and overall program goals.

Leadership approaches are also evolving as organizations adapt to distributed work environments. Effective program managers must now rely on trust-based leadership models that emphasize collaboration, autonomy, and accountability. Rather than supervising employees through direct observation, program managers must maintain strong relationships, encourage open communication, and support team members in managing their responsibilities independently. Research suggests that hybrid teams perform most effectively when leaders provide clear direction while allowing flexibility in how tasks are completed (Allen et al., 2015). This balance between autonomy and oversight requires program managers to develop strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to maintain engagement within geographically teams.

Communication has also become a main component of successful program management in hybrid work environments. In traditional office settings, informal interactions often help resolve issues quickly and maintain team alignment. In distributed environments, however, these informal interactions are significantly reduced. As a result, program managers must intentionally design communication structures that facilitate collaboration and information sharing. This may include implementing standardized meeting schedules, structured reporting procedures, and centralized digital communication platforms. By establishing clear communication channels, program managers can reduce misunderstandings, maintain transparency, and ensure that stakeholders remain informed about any program's progress.

Looking ahead, program managers will need to develop several new skills and methods to remain effective within digital and distributed-work environments. One of the most important methods will be digital literacy. Program managers must be comfortable using advanced collaboration tools, project management software, and data visualization platforms in order to oversee multiple projects at the same time. As organizations continue to integrate new technologies into their operations, program managers will also need to understand how these tools can support program governance, performance tracking, and strategic decision making.

In addition to digital literacy, program managers will need stronger analytical and data-interpretation skills. As organizations rely more heavily on digital reporting systems, program managers will be expected to analyze large amounts of performance data and translate these insights into strategic decisions. This includes identifying trends, evaluating program risks, and adjusting project priorities based on data-driven insights. The ability to interpret performance metrics and communicate findings to stakeholders will become a valuable method in the future of program management (Project Management Institute, 2023).

Another critical skill for future program managers is advanced communication and stakeholder management. Hybrid work environments require program managers to coordinate teams across different locations, time zones, and organizational departments. This complexity increases the importance of clear communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Program managers must ensure that stakeholders remain aligned with program objectives while also addressing concerns related to performance expectations, resource allocation, and organizational priorities. Strong communication skills will help program managers maintain collaboration and trust within distributed teams.

Risk management will also play a major role in future program management practices. As organizations rely more heavily on digital systems and distributed teams, new types of risks may emerge that could affect program outcomes. For example, cybersecurity risks have become a major concern for organizations that rely on remote access systems and cloud-based collaboration tools. If these systems are not properly secured, sensitive data and organizational information may be exposed to cyber threats. Program managers must work closely with information technology teams to implement security protocols such as encryption, secure networks, and multi-factor authentication for all systems.

Despite the many advantages associated with remote and hybrid work models, several factors may limit the extent to which these models transform program management in the future. One important factor is the continued preference for in-person collaboration among some professionals and organizations. Many individuals believe that face-to-face communication fosters stronger relationships, improves creativity, and enhances problem solving. As a result, some organizations may choose to maintain traditional office environments or implement hybrid models that emphasize regular in-person interactions.

Another emerging factor that will significantly influence the future of program management is the rapid development of artificial intelligence. AI-driven tools are beginning to assist organizations in managing complex projects by automating repetitive tasks, analyzing performance data, and identifying potential risks before escalating into larger issues. For example, predictive analytics platforms may allow program managers to forecast project delays, identify resource conflicts, and detect early warning signs of budget overruns. These capabilities could significantly improve decision making accuracy and allow program managers to focus more on strategic leadership responsibilities rather than administrative tasks (Davenport and Ronanki, 2018).

In addition to predictive analytics, artificial intelligence may also support program governance through automated reporting systems and intelligent dashboards. These tools can compile large volumes of project data and present insights in real time, helping program managers quickly identify performance trends and respond to emerging issues. However, while AI technologies may improve efficiency and provide valuable insights, they also introduce new challenges related to workforce adaptation, ethical considerations, and accountability. Organizations will need to ensure that human oversight remains a primary component of program governance so that automated systems do not replace critical leadership judgment.

Future Research

Future research should therefore examine how artificial intelligence will influence the structure and responsibilities of program management roles. Scholars could explore how AI-driven analytics tools affect decision-making processes, risk management strategies, and overall program performance. Researchers may also investigate how organizations can integrate AI tools into program frameworks while maintaining transparency, accountability, and ethical standards. Understanding how human leadership and intelligent automation can complement each other will be critical for organizations seeking to adopt these technologies effectively (Lakshminarasimham, 2024).

Another important direction for future research involves conducting long-term studies that examine the impact of hybrid work models on program performance over extended periods of time. Much of the existing research on remote work was conducted during or immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, when organizations were rapidly adapting to new work environments. As hybrid work models become more stable and standardized, research could provide deeper

insights into how these employment styles affect productivity, employee satisfaction, innovation, and program outcomes (Barrero et al., 2023).

Future research could also expand cross-industry comparisons to include additional sectors such as healthcare, education, and financial services. Each of these industries faces unique operational challenges that may influence how hybrid work models are implemented. By analyzing a wider range of industries, researchers could develop more comprehensive program management frameworks that account for different organizational structures, technological capabilities, and regulatory requirements.

In conclusion, the future of program management will be shaped by the interaction between technological innovation, evolving employment styles, and the leadership capabilities of program managers. Remote and hybrid work models are likely to remain important components of modern organizations because they offer flexibility, access to global talent, and potential improvements in efficiency. However, these models also introduce new challenges related to coordination, communication, and risk management. Program managers who develop strong digital understandings, data analysis skills, communication strategies, and risk management capabilities will be better positioned to lead complex programs successfully in distributed environments.

These findings also directly address the research questions outlined earlier in our research. First, the study shows that program management practices have evolved significantly across the software, construction, and public sectors as organizations adapt to remote and hybrid work environments. While the software industry transitioned relatively smoothly due to existing digital structures, the construction and public sectors demonstrate that industry-specific constraints influence how employment styles can be implemented. Second, the findings suggest that these

workplace changes will continue to shape the future of program management by increasing reliance on digital software systems, outcome-based performance measurement, and flexible leadership models. Finally, the research indicates that no single employment style, whether that be fully remote, hybrid, or fully in-person, will overall define the future of program management. Instead, organizations will likely adopt hybrid models shaped to their operational needs, technological capabilities, and workforce preferences. Understanding how to effectively manage these evolving employment structures will be a key responsibility for future program managers.

Ultimately, the future of program management will depend on the ability of leaders to adapt to rapidly changing organizational environments. As technology continues to advance and workplace structures evolve, program managers must balance digital innovation with strong human interaction leadership. Organizations that successfully integrate hybrid work models, invest in technological infrastructures, and develop program managers with strong communication, analytical, and strategic leadership skills will be better positioned to manage complex initiatives in the coming decade. By embracing these changes while maintaining strong governance and collaboration practices, program managers can ensure that programs remain aligned with organizational goals and continue delivering long-term value.

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