

Hybrid work and relational dynamics: leadership, favoritism and employee outcomes

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines how hybrid work reshapes relational dynamics within organizations by investigating how management style and perceived favoritism influence employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal. Drawing on stewardship theory and leader–member exchange theory, complemented by insights from social identity theory and social role theory, the study explores how hybrid work conditions the relationships among managerial behavior, fairness perceptions, employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal.

Design/methodology/approach – Using survey data collected from 432 employees working under varying degrees of hybrid work arrangements, the study tests a moderated model linking management style, favoritism, employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal. The relationships are analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), which allows the estimation of interaction effects within the proposed model.

Findings – The findings show that hybrid work moderates key relational processes rather than exerting uniform effects. In particular, hybrid work weakens the negative association between favoritism and employee wellbeing, while strengthening the positive association between participative management style and wellbeing. In addition, hybrid work conditions the relationship between wellbeing and workplace withdrawal, with differing effects depending on employees' level of wellbeing.

Practical implications – By demonstrating that hybrid work reshapes, rather than eliminates, the effects of management style and favoritism, the study highlights the continuing importance of relational fairness and leadership quality for sustaining positive employee outcomes under hybrid work arrangements.

Originality/value – This study extends research on hybrid work and leadership by positioning favoritism as a key relational mechanism linking management style to employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal in hybrid work contexts.

Keywords Hybrid work, Management style, Favoritism, Employee wellbeing, Workplace withdrawal, Relational dynamics

Paper type Research article



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Introduction

Hybrid work, defined as the combination of remote and on-site work arrangements, has become a central and enduring feature of contemporary organizations rather than a temporary

response to crisis (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2026a; Keeler *et al.*, 2023; Kidron and Vinarski Peretz, 2026). As organizations institutionalize hybrid work models, questions about how work is coordinated, how leadership is exercised, and how employees experience fairness, wellbeing, and attachment under hybrid and technology-enabled work conditions have become central concerns.

Research on hybrid and remote work has highlighted a range of potential benefits for organizational effectiveness, including enhanced autonomy, flexibility, and access to job resources that support performance and wellbeing (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025; Keeler *et al.*, 2023; Palumbo *et al.*, 2022). Scholars have also emphasized that employee wellbeing is a multidimensional construct shaped by both enabling and constraining aspects of work, including job design, relational dynamics, and organizational context (Grant *et al.*, 2007). Related work on work-from-home arrangements has further examined the feasibility and people-related challenges of flexible work, with particular attention to employee experiences and wellbeing (Mousa *et al.*, 2025). Research on telework and hybrid work arrangements similarly highlights that leadership practices and HR systems play a critical role in shaping employee wellbeing and engagement in technology-mediated work environments (Castellano *et al.*, 2021; Gubernator *et al.*, 2025).

Building on these foundations, emerging scholarship conceptualizes organizational effectiveness under hybrid work as deeply relational, emphasizing trust and the quality of ongoing employee-organization relationships (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025), while related work highlights how proximity and leadership-related dynamics are reconfigured under hybrid arrangements (Kidron and Vinarski Peretz, 2026). In parallel, leadership research has begun to recognize that managerial behaviors are increasingly interpreted through processes of sensemaking, signaling, and discretionary judgment, particularly in contexts characterized by organizational complexity and changing work arrangements (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024; Miraglia *et al.*, 2025). Early leadership research on technology-mediated work emphasized that when interaction is less direct, leadership becomes a process of social influence grounded in sensemaking and relational signaling rather than formal authority alone (Avolio *et al.*, 2001). More recent reviews further suggest that hybrid and remote work arrangements require leaders to adapt their communication, trust-building, and support practices to sustain employee wellbeing and engagement (Contreras *et al.*, 2020; Moore *et al.*, 2024).

Despite these advances, existing research tends to emphasize the enabling and resource-enhancing aspects of hybrid work, while paying comparatively less attention to its relational vulnerabilities. Hybrid work alters patterns of interaction and coordination by reducing routine face-to-face contact and informal exchange, which may change how employees observe and interpret managerial behavior (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024; Kidron and Vinarski Peretz, 2026). Under such conditions, employees increasingly rely on leadership signals as indicators of support, fairness, and inclusion, making leadership behaviors more salient and potentially more consequential than in fully co-located settings (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024). However, limited empirical research has examined how these altered relational dynamics may undermine organizational effectiveness when employees perceive unequal treatment or favoritism.

Favoritism, commonly understood as preferential treatment based on personal relationships rather than objective criteria, has been shown to erode fairness perceptions, employee attitudes, and retention-related outcomes (Goswami, 2022). Leader favoritism refers to the particularistic allocation of opportunities, resources, or support based on personal relationships rather than formal performance criteria and has been widely associated with reduced perceptions of fairness and trust in organizational settings (Chang and Cheng, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2021). However, most favoritism research implicitly assumes traditional, co-located work environments in which preferential treatment is expressed through direct interaction and readily observable behaviors. Hybrid work challenges these assumptions: by increasing managerial discretion over access to information, opportunities, and support while simultaneously reducing transparency and shared visibility (Kidron and Vinarski Peretz,

2026), hybrid arrangements may shift the expression of favoritism away from overt interpersonal behaviors toward more subtle channels, such as differential access to communication, responsiveness, or developmental opportunities.

This gap is consequential for organizations seeking to sustain positive employee outcomes under hybrid work arrangements as such work depends not only on flexibility and digital capability but also on employee wellbeing, commitment, and retention over time (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025; Keeler *et al.*, 2023). When favoritism is perceived under conditions of reduced visibility and heightened managerial discretion, it may undermine these foundations by increasing strain, diminishing wellbeing, and triggering withdrawal intentions, thereby threatening effectiveness rather than supporting it (Goswami, 2022). Relational leadership research further suggests that employees interpret managerial behaviors as signals that shape their attitudes and behavioral responses, particularly in contexts where interactions are mediated by technology and informal cues are limited (Hsiung and Bolino, 2018; Shamsudin *et al.*, 2023). However, empirical evidence remains limited on how management style and favoritism influence these outcomes in hybrid work settings.

While prior work has examined work-from-home and remote work arrangements with a focus on inclusion, ethics, and employee experiences (Mousa *et al.*, 2025), less attention has been paid to how hybrid work specifically reshapes relational dynamics such as favoritism and management style, and how these dynamics influence wellbeing and withdrawal as pathways to organizational effectiveness.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining how management style and perceived favoritism influence employee wellbeing and withdrawal intentions under hybrid work arrangements, thereby clarifying how relational leadership dynamics influence organizational effectiveness in technology-enabled work contexts. Accordingly, we test a moderated model in which management style is associated with favoritism and wellbeing, wellbeing is associated with workplace withdrawal, and hybrid work conditions the strength of these relationships. By conceptualizing hybrid work as a technology-enabled organizing condition that reshapes relational dynamics rather than merely a logistical arrangement, this study extends existing research on hybrid work. More specifically, we examine favoritism as a relational signal that becomes more salient in hybrid work environments and investigate its implications for wellbeing and withdrawal as key pathways through which organizational effectiveness is sustained or eroded.

Accordingly, we ask the following research question:

How do management style and perceived favoritism shape employee wellbeing and withdrawal intentions under hybrid work arrangements?

By answering this question, this study makes three contributions to existing research. First, it extends hybrid work scholarship by identifying favoritism as a relational risk under conditions of reduced visibility and increased managerial discretion in hybrid work environments. Second, it contributes to leadership and management research by demonstrating how management style operates as a signal in hybrid work contexts, shaping employee perceptions and reactions beyond traditional co-located settings. Third, by linking wellbeing and withdrawal intentions to broader organizational outcomes, the study highlights how relational fairness and inclusion are central rather than peripheral to sustaining effectiveness in hybrid work arrangements, and demonstrates that demographic factors such as gender, age, and tenure shape how these relational dynamics are experienced under hybrid conditions.

The remainder of the paper develops the theoretical framework and hypotheses, followed by the methodology and results. The discussion positions the findings in relation to existing literature and outlines theoretical and practical implications, before concluding with limitations and directions for future research.

Literature review

Theoretical foundations

The present study adopts an integrative theoretical approach, drawing on four complementary lenses to explain how leadership behavior, relational differentiation, and social categorization interact to shape perceptions of favoritism and employee outcomes. In particular, stewardship theory (Davis *et al.*, 1997) and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Liden *et al.*, 1997) provide the primary leadership framework, while social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and social role theory (SRT) (Eagly, 1987) offer complementary perspectives for understanding how favoritism emerges and is interpreted within organizations. These perspectives conceptualize leadership as a relational process in which managerial behavior shapes social categorization, perceived fairness, and employee reactions (Hsiung and Bolino, 2018; Mumtaz and Rowley, 2020). This integrated approach reflects recent calls to examine leadership, fairness, and employee outcomes as relationally embedded processes rather than isolated managerial practices (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024; Miraglia *et al.*, 2025).

From a leadership perspective, stewardship theory conceptualizes leaders as organizational stewards whose behaviors are oriented toward collective rather than self-serving interests (Davis *et al.*, 1997). Martinez-Campillo and Fernandez-Gago (2011, p. 4) define stewardship theory as “a psycho-sociological approach that depicts CEOs as stewards of organizations; their management style is such that pro-organizational and collectivist conducts have a higher utility than individualistic and self-serving ones”. Within this study, stewardship theory provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how leadership orientations are reflected in management style, which represents the observable expression of leadership priorities and values. Consistent with this view, we conceptualize leadership through management style as the recurring behavioral pattern employees experience in their direct manager, that is, employees’ perceptions of their immediate manager’s behavior as reflected in day-to-day interactions rather than senior executive conduct (Hsiung and Bolino, 2018; Mumtaz and Rowley, 2020). Such management styles shape organizational outcomes by signaling priorities, values, and norms to employees, which becomes more influential when employees have fewer informal cues for interpreting managerial intent (Avolio *et al.*, 2001; Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024). Recent leadership research emphasizes that such signals are significant under conditions of reduced interaction and increased ambiguity, making leadership behavior a key interpretive cue for employees (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024).

Complementing stewardship theory, LMX theory focuses on the quality of dyadic relationships between leaders and individual employees (Liden *et al.*, 1997). LMX theory posits that leaders develop differentiated relationships with followers, resulting in in-groups and out-groups characterized by unequal access to resources, support, and opportunities. Such differentiation is not inherently negative but becomes problematic when it is perceived as unjust or arbitrary (Chang and Cheng, 2018). In this study, LMX theory helps explain how management styles may facilitate or constrain relational differentiation that employees interpret as favoritism. Leader-follower differentiation can be interpreted as favoritism when employees attribute unequal access to resources or opportunities to personal ties rather than transparent performance criteria (Yang *et al.*, 2021). Davis (1959) argued that favoritism drives stratification, leaving non-beneficiaries with perceptions of deprivation, a view later reinforced by empirical work on workplace inequality (Lasisi *et al.*, 2022). This dynamic has meaningful consequences for employee outcomes more broadly, as the quality of leader-member relationships shapes how employees experience their work. High-quality leader-member exchanges have consistently been associated with greater job satisfaction, commitment, and performance, whereas low-quality exchanges are linked to negative attitudes, reduced wellbeing and withdrawal behaviors (Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004; Mumtaz and Rowley, 2020; Van Breukelen *et al.*, 2006).

These relational dynamics take on particular significance when work is mediated by distance. Leadership scholars have long argued that under conditions of reduced physical proximity, leadership becomes less dependent on formal supervision and more reliant on social

influence, sensemaking, and relational signaling (Avolio *et al.*, 2001). In such contexts, leaders must actively shape meaning, maintain trust, and communicate support through fewer and less informal interaction channels. Reviews of teleworking research further indicate that reduced physical proximity heightens the importance of leadership behaviors related to communication, fairness, and relational support, as ineffective leadership can increase employee strain, isolation, and disengagement (Contreras *et al.*, 2020).

To explain why favoritism emerges and how it affects employees, the study draws on SIT, which proposes that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group memberships and tend to favor in-group members over out-group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 2004). Within organizational settings, shared characteristics such as tenure, age, gender, or perceived similarity may form the basis for in-group identification, leading to preferential treatment (Aydogan, 2012). Favoritism thus reinforces social categorization and perpetuates inequalities by systematically advantaging certain employees while marginalizing others. Recent empirical research shows that such relational exclusion undermines trust and psychological safety, contributing to diminished wellbeing and disengagement (Abalkhail, 2022). Consistent with SIT, prior studies have further shown that demographic characteristics such as age and tenure can reinforce in-group boundaries by shaping perceived closeness to leadership, making certain employees more vulnerable to favoritistic dynamics than others (Hassell and Perrewe, 1995; Kleissner and Jahn, 2020; McNamara *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, SRT is used to contextualize gender differences in reactions to favoritism and leadership practices. SRT posits that gendered expectations shape behavioral norms and evaluations within organizations (Eagly, 1987). Empirical research suggests that men and women may experience and interpret leadership behaviors and favoritistic practices differently due to socially constructed role expectations (Eagly and Karau, 1991). In this study, social role theory therefore informs the inclusion of gender as a relevant contextual factor influencing how favoritism and leadership behavior are perceived.

These perspectives suggest that leadership orientations shape management style, which in turn influences relational differentiation between leaders and employees. Social identity processes help explain how such differentiation may be interpreted as favoritism, while SRT highlights how role expectations shape employees' evaluations of leadership behavior and preferential treatment.

Definition and hypothesis development

Management style. Following Dutot (2017, p. 353), management style is defined as “the way a company’s management controls and manages its employees based on attitude and leadership and the employee’s perception of the corporate identity, image, and culture”. In practice, this encompasses the manner in which leaders direct, coordinate, and interact with employees, shaping how work is performed and how employees perceive organizational values and priorities. Prior research indicates that management style influences organizational vision (Lepnurm and Bergh, 1995), conflict resolution (Xiao *et al.*, 2007), and employee behavior.

Consistent with Gupta *et al.* (2014), this study conceptualizes management style along a continuum ranging from participative to directive approaches (Lewis *et al.*, 2002). Participative management emphasizes joint decision-making, employee involvement, and consensus-building (Somech, 2006). Such approaches are associated with openness, trust, and shared responsibility. Conversely, directive management relies on top-down decision-making, control, and compliance, with limited employee input (Snively and McNeill, 2008; Somech, 2006).

Although directive styles may enhance short-term efficiency (Iakovleva and Kickul, 2007), recent research cautions that they may also heighten relational strain and disengagement by reducing perceived autonomy, limiting voice, and weakening psychological safety, particularly in contexts characterized by reduced interaction and increased ambiguity (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024; Miraglia *et al.*, 2025). Empirical research conducted during crisis-

induced remote work further confirms that leadership style remains central to employee autonomy, team cohesion, and wellbeing when face-to-face interaction is limited (Bartsch *et al.*, 2021), suggesting that directive approaches may intensify withdrawal tendencies under such conditions (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991; Shamsudin *et al.*, 2023).

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1. The more directive the management style is, the greater workplace withdrawal will be.

Management style may also shape the likelihood of favoritism. Directive leadership concentrates decision-making authority and discretion in the hands of managers, potentially increasing opportunities for preferential treatment (Redlawsk and McCann, 2005). By contrast, participative styles emphasize transparency and shared input, which may constrain favoritistic behaviors. From an LMX perspective, differentiated relationships between leaders and followers may be interpreted as favoritism when access to resources or opportunities appears contingent on personal closeness rather than transparent criteria (Chang and Cheng, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2021). Directive leadership may reinforce such differentiation by centralizing discretion in managerial decision-making. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H2. The more directive the management style is, the greater the development of favoritism.

Directive management styles have further been associated with negative employee outcomes, including reduced trust and wellbeing (Abubakar *et al.*, 2017). When leadership behavior is perceived as controlling or biased, employees may interpret managerial actions as unfair, leading to diminished psychological wellbeing. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H3. The more directive the management style is, the lower employee wellbeing will be.

Favoritism. Building on the relational dynamics outlined above, favoritism reflects a systematic deviation from meritocracy and procedural fairness, whereby personal relationships rather than objective criteria determine access to opportunities, resources, and support within organizations (Chang and Cheng, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2021). Favoritism can also be understood as a form of moral decoupling, whereby leaders justify biased decisions by separating moral standards from their actions (Orth *et al.*, 2019).

Empirical research has consistently shown that favoritism undermines perceptions of fairness, erodes trust in leadership, and negatively influences employee attitudes and organizational functioning (Chang and Cheng, 2018; Daskin *et al.*, 2013; Ozler and Buyukarslan, 2011). Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that favoritism constitutes a form of dysfunctional leadership that erodes relational trust and employee wellbeing, often leading to alienation and disengagement (Abalkhail, 2022). In line with this literature, we propose:

- H4. Favoritism negatively influences employee wellbeing.

Employee wellbeing. Employee wellbeing refers to employees' overall quality of functioning at work and encompasses psychological, social, and physical dimensions of work-related experience (Guest, 2017; Guest and Conway, 2004; Jain *et al.*, 2009). Psychological wellbeing relates to employees' emotional and cognitive evaluations of their work, social wellbeing concerns the quality of workplace relationships and social support, and physical wellbeing reflects employees' perceptions of their health and capacity to perform work-related tasks (Guest and Conway, 2004; Jain *et al.*, 2009). These dimensions contribute to employees' ability to function effectively and maintain positive work experiences.

Prior research has consistently identified employee wellbeing as a key determinant of individual and organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and retention (Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Guest and Conway, 2004; Jain *et al.*,

2009). In particular, wellbeing is strongly influenced by workplace conditions such as leadership behavior, job design, social relationships, and perceptions of fairness (Grant *et al.*, 2007).

While these dimensions together constitute a comprehensive picture of employees' work-related functioning, the present study conceptualizes wellbeing as an overall construct reflecting employees' general evaluation of their work-related experience across these dimensions. This approach is consistent with prior organizational research that examines employee wellbeing as an overall indicator of employees' work-related functioning and experiences (Jain *et al.*, 2009). Given the focus of this study on how relational dynamics including management style, favoritism, and hybrid work arrangements shape employee outcomes, a global measure of wellbeing is appropriate for capturing the cumulative effects of these relational conditions on employees' overall work-related functioning.

Low levels of wellbeing have been associated with job dissatisfaction, stress, anxiety, absenteeism, and reduced performance (Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Jex, 1998). Grant *et al.* (2007) further argue that workplace relationships and job design play a central role in shaping employee wellbeing. As wellbeing deteriorates, employees may seek to psychologically or behaviorally distance themselves from work, making reduced wellbeing a proximal antecedent of workplace withdrawal. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. Employee wellbeing is negatively related to workplace withdrawal.

Workplace withdrawal. Workplace withdrawal refers to behaviors through which employees avoid work roles or reduce work effort while remaining formally employed (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991). It represents a common response to adverse organizational conditions. Favoritism and perceived injustice can create climates of mistrust and disengagement, prompting employees to withdraw as a coping mechanism (Aydogan, 2012).

Recent research shows that favoritism and dysfunctional leadership behaviors increase withdrawal intentions by undermining relational safety and employee wellbeing (Abalkhail, 2022; Shamsudin *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6. Favoritism positively influences workplace withdrawal.

The moderating role of hybrid work. Hybrid work, which combines remote and on-site work arrangements, has existed for decades but has become widespread only recently. While some organizations have adapted to hybrid work with relative ease (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025), others continue to face challenges in managing coordination, communication, and employee relationships (Miglioretti *et al.*, 2022). While hybrid work is commonly understood as a combination of remote and on-site work arrangements, scholars have also emphasized broader work characteristics associated with digitally mediated and geographically distributed work contexts (Paruzel *et al.*, 2022; Xie *et al.*, 2019).

Following Xie *et al.* (2019), hybrid work characteristics represent contemporary work features that extend traditional work design domains by combining task, social, and contextual elements. Four dimensions comprise the construct: boundarylessness, multitasking, demand for constant learning, and non-work-related interruptions. Boundarylessness refers to the extent to which temporal and geographical boundaries between work and non-work domains have dissolved. Multitasking reflects the need to accomplish multiple task goals within the same period while prioritizing competing demands. Demand for constant learning refers to the continuous acquisition of new knowledge, technologies, and skills required to remain effective at work. Non-work-related interruptions refer to incidents unrelated to work that impede or delay progress on work tasks (Paruzel *et al.*, 2022; Xie *et al.*, 2019).

In this study, hybrid work is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct capturing contemporary work characteristics associated with work conducted across physical and digital environments. Drawing on Xie *et al.* (2019) and the validated operationalization developed by Paruzel *et al.* (2022), hybrid work is treated as a higher-order construct reflected by boundarylessness, multitasking, demand for constant learning, and non-work-related

interruptions. This conceptualization is relevant to the present study because boundarylessness and non-work-related interruptions directly affect the visibility and regularity of leader-employee interaction, while constant learning demands and multitasking shape employees' dependence on managerial guidance and support, all of which condition how leadership behavior and fairness are interpreted in hybrid work contexts.

Prior research indicates that hybrid work can influence performance, professional isolation, and wellbeing (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2026b; Martínez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2007; Miglioretti *et al.*, 2022). Importantly, hybrid arrangements alter relational dynamics by reducing physical proximity and increasing reliance on mediated interaction, thereby shaping how leadership behaviors are interpreted (Kidron and Vinarski Peretz, 2026). As leaders play a central role in guiding employees through these changes (Kozlowski *et al.*, 2021), hybrid work is likely to condition the relationships among management style, favoritism, wellbeing, and withdrawal. In technology-mediated work settings, leadership and HR practices have been shown to shape employee wellbeing particularly strongly, suggesting that hybrid work can intensify how employees respond to perceived fairness and support (Gubernator *et al.*, 2025).

Accordingly, we propose that hybrid work moderates the hypotheses outlined above.

- H7. Hybrid work moderates the relationships between management style, favoritism, employee wellbeing, and workplace withdrawal, such that the strength of these relationships between (a) management style and favoritism, (b) management style and employee wellbeing, (c) management style and workplace withdrawal, (d) favoritism and employee wellbeing, (e) favoritism and workplace withdrawal, and (f) employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal differs depending on the degree of hybrid work.

Conceptual model. The conceptual model and related hypotheses of this research are presented in the figure below.

Methodology

Survey design

This study adopts a quantitative research design based on an online survey. In line with best practice for survey-based research, a pretest was conducted to minimize potential issues related to “vagueness or fuzziness, which could ultimately affect both reliability and validity” (Chen and Chang, 2013, p. 616).

The study's respondents were employed in organizations based in France and the survey was administered in French. The original measurement scales were developed in English and were professionally translated into French prior to data collection. Two bilingual members of the research team reviewed the translated questionnaire to ensure conceptual equivalence between the English and French versions.

The questionnaire was then pretested with a group of 10 employees working in hybrid work contexts to assess the clarity, wording, and comprehensibility of the survey items. All pretest participants had been working in hybrid work arrangements for at least three years, ensuring familiarity with the work arrangements examined in this study. No difficulties were reported in understanding or responding to the survey items, and no substantive changes were required prior to full-scale data collection.

Data collection

Online surveys are widely recognized as an effective research tool in organizational and management research (Vehovar and Manfreda, 2008) and offer several advantages compared to in-person data collection. They provide a cost-effective and time-efficient means of gathering data from geographically dispersed respondents (Bethlehem and Biffignandi, 2012).

Data were collected over a one-month period (March 2023) using a convenience sampling strategy. Participants were recruited through alumni networks of business schools, professional LinkedIn groups focused on hybrid work (e.g. Remote Work, Hybrid Work, Work from Home – Virtual Teams and Collaboration Support Forum), as well as the researchers’ professional networks. As the survey link was circulated through these professional networks, it was not possible to determine the total number of individuals who received the invitation. The survey was closed after three consecutive days without new responses.

All survey questions were mandatory, which ensured that no incomplete questionnaires were recorded. Participation was limited to employees currently working in organizations based in France and engaged in on-site, remote, or hybrid work arrangements.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before they began the survey. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the anonymous nature of their responses, and the confidential treatment of the data. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the data were used solely for academic research.

In total, 432 usable responses were collected, satisfying minimum sample size requirements for the analyses conducted (Soper, 2022). All respondents were employed in organizations based in France. France provides a relevant context for examining leadership and relational dynamics under hybrid work arrangements, as hybrid work has become increasingly institutionalized across sectors (Vassallo *et al.*, 2024). Since the 2017 reforms to the French Labor Code, telework arrangements have increasingly been formalized through collective agreements and company-level policies. In addition, the introduction of the “right to disconnect” has reinforced expectations regarding boundaries between work and personal life. Consequently, hybrid work in France often operates within negotiated organizational frameworks rather than relying solely on managerial discretion, which may influence how employees interpret leadership behavior and perceptions of fairness in hybrid settings. At the same time, French organizations are often characterized by relatively formal managerial structures and clearly defined hierarchical relationships, which makes leadership style and relational dynamics particularly significant in organizational life (Bloom *et al.*, 2012; Hofstede, 2001). This context therefore allows for the examination of how hybrid work reshapes, rather than replaces, leadership behaviors and relational processes such as favoritism. Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics of the final sample.

Measures

All constructs were measured using established scales drawn from prior research. The original items were retained with only minor linguistic adjustments to ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness in the French survey version, without altering the substantive meaning of the items. Management style was measured using six items adapted from Dutot (2017) (e.g. “My manager involves employees in tactical or operational decision-making”); favoritism using fourteen items from Abubakar *et al.* (2017) (e.g. “As an employee in this company, I always feel that I need someone I know or a friend in a high-level position”); employee wellbeing using twelve items adapted from Jain *et al.* (2009) (e.g. “I was able to concentrate easily on my tasks”); workplace withdrawal using six items from Abubakar *et al.* (2017) (e.g. “Completed work assignments late”) and hybrid work was operationalized as a second-order construct using items adapted from Paruzel *et al.* (2022) and Xie *et al.* (2019) (18 items) (e.g. “My job requires me to work in a variety of environments, such as the office or home”), capturing variation across the full continuum of remote and on-site work arrangements. Consistent with this approach, hybrid work was treated as a continuous construct, allowing us to capture variation in the degree of hybrid work exposure across respondents and to test its moderating effects more precisely within the structural model.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of respondents

Item	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	272	62.9%
	Female	160	37.1%
Age	18–25	128	29.6%
	26–35	112	25.9%
	36–45	112	25.9%
	46–55	64	14.1%
	Over 55	16	3.7%
Type of firm	Family business	16	3.7%
	Private	304	70.4%
	Public	96	22.2%
	Association	0	0%
	Start-up	16	3.7%
Organizational tenure (years)	Less than a year	112	25.9%
	Between 1 and 5 years	80	18.5%
	Between 5 and 10 years	112	25.9%
	Over 10 years	128	29.6%
Remote work intensity	Remote is not allowed	80	18.5%
	1 day	48	11.1%
	2 days	160	37.1%
	3 days	48	11.1%
	4 days	16	3.7%
	Job is fully remote	16	3.7%
	I can manage my time how I want	64	14.1%

Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Some items measuring employee wellbeing were reverse coded to reduce response bias. Higher scores indicate higher levels of the underlying construct for all variables after recoding. Full measurement items are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Choice of the statistical model

The analyses were conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM), specifically the partial least squares approach (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for estimating complex models involving multiple constructs and indicators and when the research objective is predictive in nature ([Hair et al., 2019](#); [Chin, 2010](#); [Ringle et al., 2013](#)). It is also appropriate when models include interaction effects and higher-order constructs, as is the case in the present study.

In addition, PLS-SEM does not impose strict distributional assumptions and can be effectively applied in situations where data may deviate from normality ([Chin, 2015](#)). The method estimates relationships between constructs while minimizing the residual variance of endogenous variables, making it well suited for examining predictive relationships among variables ([Hair et al., 2019](#); [Sarstedt et al., 2017](#)). The analysis produces path coefficients (β), associated significance levels obtained through bootstrapping, and explained variance values (R^2), which are used to evaluate the proposed relationships in the model.

Assessment of reliability and validity. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS4. Following the two-step procedure recommended by [Anderson and Gerbing \(1988\)](#), we first assessed and refined the measurement model by examining construct reliability and validity, before estimating the structural model and conducting moderation analyses to test the proposed hypotheses. More precisely, we evaluated construct reliability and validity ([Hair et al., 2019](#)) using three commonly accepted criteria: Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding 0.70,

composite reliability values above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2019), and average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

As represented in Figure 1, hybrid work is conceptualized and analyzed as a reflective construct (following works from Paruzel *et al.*, 2022; Xie *et al.*, 2019) constituted with four first-order dimensions. The model follows a Type I configuration, in which both the higher-order construct and its first-order dimensions are modelled as reflective, consistent with the theoretical assumption that the four dimensions are manifestations of an underlying hybrid work construct rather than independent formative components (Crocetta *et al.*, 2021; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019; Wetzels *et al.*, 2009). Following established guidelines for higher-order construct assessment in PLS-SEM (Crocetta *et al.*, 2021; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019; Wetzels *et al.*, 2009), we first assessed the four first-order dimensions separately using confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) within a CB-SEM framework to confirm their reliability and convergent validity before proceeding to estimate the higher-order construct. The results of these first-order analyses are reported in Appendix 2. The second-order hybrid work construct was then assessed within the main PLS-SEM model, with the psychometric properties of all constructs reported in Table 2.

The same assessment criteria were then applied to the remaining latent constructs in the model. Based on these criteria, items with insufficient loadings were removed. Specifically, one item was removed from the management style scale (MS1), six items from the favoritism scale (FAV1, FAV3, FAV6, FAV7, FAV8, and FAV9), one item from the employee wellbeing scale (WB7), and two items from the workplace withdrawal scale (WW1 and WW4). These items were removed because their loadings fell below the recommended threshold for convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2019). No issues related to item clarity or comprehension were identified during the pilot phase, and therefore no items were modified prior to the main data collection. The final retained items and associated psychometric properties are reported in Table 2.

Assessment of the measurement model. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which requires that the shared variance between a construct and other constructs be lower than the construct's AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This condition was satisfied for all constructs, as shown in Table 3.

In addition, discriminant validity was examined using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Consistent with the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Hair *et al.*, 2019), all HTMT values were below the recommended cut-off, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. Bootstrapping procedures were further used to assess HTMT inference, and all upper confidence interval values were below 1 (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

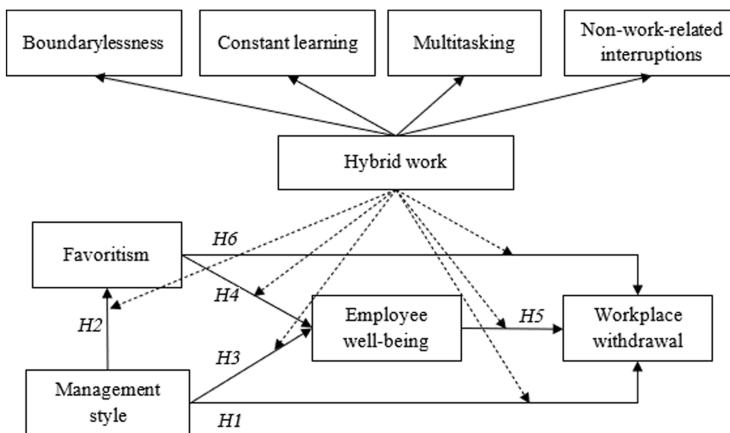


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Table 2. Assessment of construct validity (*n* = 432)

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Work withdrawal	WW2	2.70	1.08	0.314	0.785	0.838	0.592
	WW3	2.04	0.92	0.927			
	WW5	2.15	1.08	0.727			
	WW6	2.11	1.40	0.938			
Employee wellbeing	WB1	3.63	1.13	0.664	0.811	0.891	0.554
	WB2	3.56	1.32	0.709			
	WB3	3.67	1.19	0.614			
	WB4	3.81	0.95	0.712			
	WB5	3.19	1.16	0.597			
	WB6	3.85	1.11	0.724			
	WB8	3.81	0.82	0.760			
	WB9	3.67	1.36	0.864			
	WB10	2.11	1.13	0.892			
	WB11	4.15	1.08	0.754			
	WB12	3.30	1.08	0.837			
Management style	MS2	3.93	0.72	0.541	0.782	0.842	0.523
	MS3	3.89	0.96	0.655			
	MS4	4.07	0.98	0.698			
	MS5	4.11	0.96	0.904			
	MS6	4.41	0.83	0.767			
Favoritism	FAV2	2.44	1.10	0.514	0.844	0.882	0.490
	FAV4	2.78	1.17	0.568			
	FAV5	2.78	1.20	0.780			
	FAV10	2.04	0.88	0.698			
	FAV11	2.07	0.90	0.767			
	FAV12	2.56	1.03	0.786			
	FAV13	2.67	1.16	0.832			
Hybrid work	FAV14	3.70	0.76	0.581	0.796	0.866	0.621
	Boundarylessness			0.800			
	Constant learning			0.896			
	Multitasking			0.820			
	Non-work-related interruptions			0.607			

Table 3. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity	1	2	3	4	5
1. Management style	0.722				
2. Employee wellbeing	0.657	0.745			
3. Favoritism	−0.143	−0.315	0.670		
4. Hybrid work	0.416	0.277	0.465	0.762	
5. Workplace withdrawal	−0.423	−0.605	0.345	−0.219	0.775
Note(s): Diagonal: (average variance extracted) ^{1/2} = (Σλ ² /n) ^{1/2} ; Sub-diagonals: correlation = (shared variance) ^{1/2}					

Multicollinearity and common method bias were assessed using variance inflation factors (VIFs). All VIF values were below the threshold of 3, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern (Hair *et al.*, 2019) and that the model was unlikely to be affected by common method bias (Kock, 2015).

Results

Assessment of the structural model

The final stage of the analysis consisted of testing the structural model and the proposed hypotheses. Bootstrapping procedures were applied using 5,000 resamples with bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals and a fixed seed (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2024). Using the direction, strength, and level of significance of the path coefficient (β), the results showed that all 6 direct hypotheses were supported, as summarized in Figure 2 and Table 4. Overall, the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in employee wellbeing ($R^2 = 55.4\%$) and workplace withdrawal ($R^2 = 57.3\%$).

To further evaluate the predictive performance of the model, we conducted the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT). The results indicate that the PLS model outperforms the naïve benchmark for employee wellbeing ($\Delta\text{loss} = -0.270$, $p < 0.001$) and workplace withdrawal ($\Delta\text{loss} = -0.218$, $p < 0.001$), confirming predictive relevance for these outcome variables. However, no significant predictive ability was observed for favoritism ($\Delta\text{loss} = -0.002$, $p = 0.773$). Overall, these results confirm satisfactory predictive performance for the key endogenous constructs of employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal (Table 5).

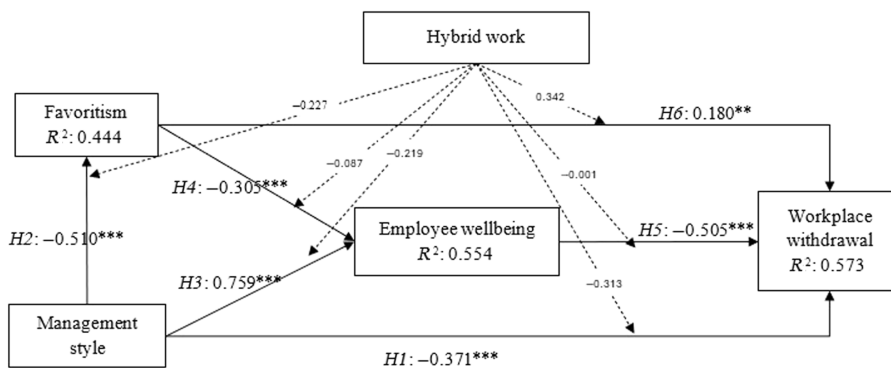


Figure 2. Results (PLS-SEM) numbers on the arrows are the path coefficients

Table 4. Summary of the hypothesis testing

Hypothesized relationship	β	BCa	2.5%	97.5%	t-value	Result
H1: Management style $\rightarrow$ Workplace withdrawal	-0.371***	0.004	-0.489	-0.256	6.236	Supported
H2: Management style $\rightarrow$ Favoritism	-0.510***	-0.003	-0.610	-0.401	9.605	Supported
H3: Management style $\rightarrow$ Employee wellbeing	0.759***	0.003	0.671	0.844	17.317	Supported
H4: Favoritism $\rightarrow$ Employee wellbeing	-0.305***	0.003	-0.390	-0.210	6.559	Supported
H5: Employee wellbeing $\rightarrow$ Workplace withdrawal	-0.505***	-0.002	-0.587	-0.418	11.763	Supported
H6: Favoritism $\rightarrow$ Workplace withdrawal	0.180**	0.001	0.080	0.292	3.319	Supported

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; BCa - Bias-corrected and accelerated

Table 5. Cross-valid

Construct	PLS loss	IA loss	Average loss difference	t-value	p-value
Favoritism	1.073	1.075	−0.002	0.288	0.773
Employee wellbeing	1.010	1.280	−0.270	8.979	0.000***
Workplace withdrawal	1.072	1.290	−0.218	7.279	0.000***
Overall	1.043	1.210	−0.168	9.664	0.000***

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Introduction of control variables. Gender and age were included as control variables, as prior research suggests that favoritism and leadership effects may vary across demographic groups (Eagly, 1987; Kleissner and Jahn, 2020; McNamara *et al.*, 2016). To examine potential group differences, multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted using SmartPLS 4 (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

The results indicate that several relationships vary across gender and age groups, as reported in Tables 6 and 7. These findings suggest that the strength and significance of certain paths differ depending on respondents’ demographic characteristics, warranting further interpretation in the discussion section.

In addition, tenure was included as a control variable. The results indicate one notable difference between groups. Among respondents with less than five years of tenure, all hypotheses were supported, whereas among respondents with more than five years of tenure, all hypotheses except H4 (β :0.050; t -value: 0.327; $p > 0.1$) were supported. These demographic differences are interpreted further in the discussion section.

Moderating effect of hybrid work. A key objective of this study was to examine the moderating role of hybrid work across the relationships specified in H7. As reported in Table 8, hybrid work significantly moderates all but one of the hypothesized paths (Hybrid work x Employee wellbeing → Workplace withdrawal, β : −0.004; t -value: 0.056, $p > 0.1$). In particular, hybrid work significantly moderates the relationships between management style and workplace withdrawal, management style and favoritism, management style and employee wellbeing, favoritism and workplace withdrawal, and favoritism and employee wellbeing. In contrast, the interaction between hybrid work and employee wellbeing on workplace withdrawal was not significant. To further illustrate these interaction effects, simple slope analyses are presented in Figures 3–5.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing – variation regarding gender

Hypothesized relationship	β (Female)	t-value	Result	β (Male)	t-value	Result
H1: Management style → Workplace withdrawal	−0.726	0.667	Rejected	−0.544***	9.999	Accepted
H2: Management style → Favoritism	−0.636	1.054	Rejected	0.420	0.975	Rejected
H3: Management style → Employee wellbeing	0.952	1.080	Rejected	0.711***	32.228	Accepted
H4: Favoritism → Employee wellbeing	−0.211	0.955	Rejected	−0.287	1.139	Rejected
H5: Employee wellbeing → Workplace withdrawal	−0.572	0.754	Rejected	−0.183	1.475	Rejected
H6: Favoritism → Workplace withdrawal	0.048	0.050	Rejected	−0.458	1.004	Rejected

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 7. Hypothesis testing – variation regarding age

Hypothesized relationship	β (Under 35)	t-value	Result	β (Over 35)	t-value	Result
H1: Management style → Workplace withdrawal	-0.495	3.887***	Accepted	-1.347*	2.331	Accepted
H2: Management style → Favoritism	-0.175	3.002**	Accepted	-0.148	0.891	Rejected
H3: Management style → Employee wellbeing	0.435	4.074***	Accepted	1.032***	11.792	Accepted
H4: Favoritism → Employee wellbeing	-0.545	5.310***	Accepted	0.129	1.307	Rejected
H5: Employee wellbeing → Workplace withdrawal	-0.384	4.563***	Accepted	0.835	1.374	Rejected
H6: Favoritism → Workplace withdrawal	-0.145	1.001	Rejected	0.646*	2.224	Accepted

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 8. Hypothesis testing – moderation effect

Hybrid work × hypothesized relationship	β	BCa	2.5%	97.5%	t-value	Result
Hybrid work × Management style → Workplace withdrawal	-0.310***	0.003	-0.399	-0.217	6.619	Significant
Hybrid work × Management style → Favoritism	-0.221***	-0.002	-0.305	-0.134	5.037	Significant
Hybrid work × Management style → Employee wellbeing	0.219***	0.002	0.165	0.267	8.468	Significant
Hybrid work × Favoritism → Workplace withdrawal	0.336***	-0.002	0.258	0.412	8.531	Significant
Hybrid work × Favoritism → Employee wellbeing	0.087**	-0.002	0.032	0.144	3.035	Significant
Hybrid work × Employee wellbeing → Workplace withdrawal	-0.004	0.001	-0.136	0.140	0.056	Not significant

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; BCa - Bias-corrected and accelerated

Overall, the results indicate that hybrid work conditions the strength of most relationships in the model, although the direction and magnitude of these effects vary across paths. A more detailed interpretation of these moderation effects is provided in the discussion section.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how management style and perceived favoritism shape employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal under hybrid work arrangements. The findings demonstrate that hybrid work reshapes rather than replaces relational dynamics within organizations, with effects that are contingent on leadership behavior and existing relational conditions rather than uniformly beneficial or detrimental. Interpreted through the study's theoretical framework, the results show how leadership orientations expressed through management style interact with the relational differentiation processes central to LMX theory, while employees' interpretations of favoritism reflect the social identity and role-based expectations that SIT and SRT highlight as organizationally consequential.

The findings first confirm the importance of management style and perceived favoritism as key determinants of employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal, consistent with the

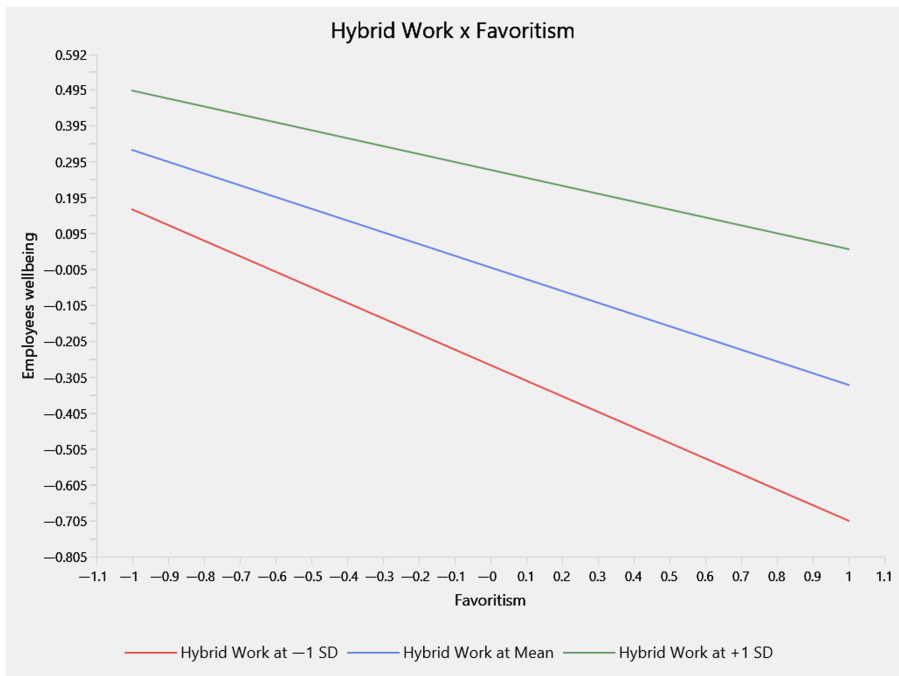


Figure 3. Simple slope analysis 1

proposed model. Building on the direct relationships identified in the model, the findings further highlight the moderating role of hybrid work in the relationship between favoritism and employee wellbeing. As illustrated in Figure 3, the negative association between favoritism and wellbeing weakens as the degree of hybrid work adoption increases. This result complements prior research linking telework and wellbeing (Miglioretti *et al.*, 2022) by introducing favoritism as a relational mechanism through which hybrid work conditions employee experiences, which has received limited attention in earlier work. In line with relational leadership perspectives, favoritism reflects differentiated leader-follower relationships that employees may interpret as preferential treatment when access to resources or support appears contingent on personal ties rather than transparent criteria (Chang and Cheng, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2021).

These findings do not suggest that hybrid work eliminates the detrimental effects of favoritism. Rather, reduced physical proximity and fewer day-to-day interactions may limit direct exposure to favoritism-related behaviors, partially attenuating their immediate impact on wellbeing. Nevertheless, the persistence of a negative association across all levels of hybrid work confirms that favoritism remains a meaningful relational risk even in flexible work arrangements, supporting recent evidence that it constitutes a form of dysfunctional leadership with enduring consequences for employee wellbeing (Abalkhail, 2022). From a social identity perspective, employees may continue to interpret relational signals from leaders through in-group and out-group categorizations even when interactions occur through digital channels, meaning that perceptions of favoritism persist despite reduced physical proximity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Yang *et al.*, 2021).

The second moderation effect further clarifies how hybrid work interacts with leadership processes. As shown in Figure 4, hybrid work strengthens the positive association between participative management style and employee wellbeing, while the corresponding effect under

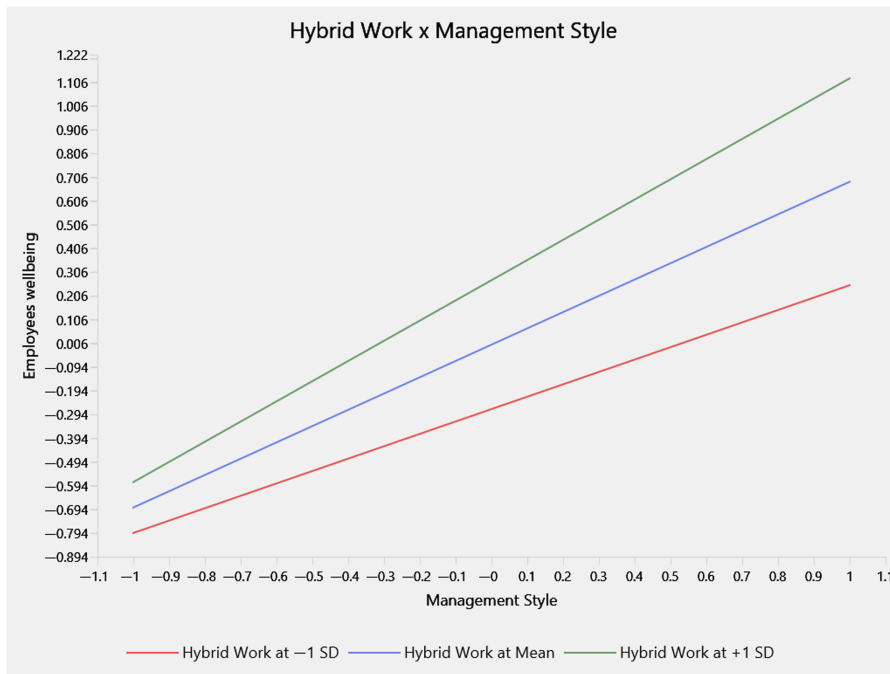


Figure 4. Simple slope analysis 2

authoritarian management is notably weaker. This finding aligns with established distinctions between participative and authoritarian leadership styles (Somech, 2006; Snively and McNeill, 2008) and confirms that management style continues to shape employee experiences under hybrid conditions.

This pattern is consistent with stewardship theory, which suggests that leadership orientations oriented toward collective interests and employee development are expressed through participative management practices that reinforce trust and relational commitment within organizations (Davis *et al.*, 1997). In particular, the findings extend recent leadership research by showing that participative leadership becomes especially consequential when work is conducted under hybrid arrangements and informal cues are reduced, thereby amplifying employees' reliance on managerial communication and support (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2024; Miraglia *et al.*, 2025).

The finding is also consistent with earlier conceptual work on e-leadership, which argued that leadership in technology-mediated or distant work contexts relies more heavily on sensemaking, signaling, and relational influence than on direct supervision (Avolio *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, research on relational leadership and LMX suggests that employees interpret leadership behaviors as signals about fairness, support, and inclusion, particularly when interaction is mediated through digital communication channels (Hsiung and Bolino, 2018; Mumtaz and Rowley, 2020). It also aligns with empirical evidence showing that supportive and participative leadership behaviors are critical for sustaining employee wellbeing and cohesion in virtual work environments (Bartsch *et al.*, 2021). Conversely, under more authoritarian styles, hybrid work appears less capable of enhancing wellbeing, indicating that flexibility alone does not compensate for restrictive or control-oriented leadership approaches. This challenges assumptions that hybrid work can neutralize poor leadership by design,

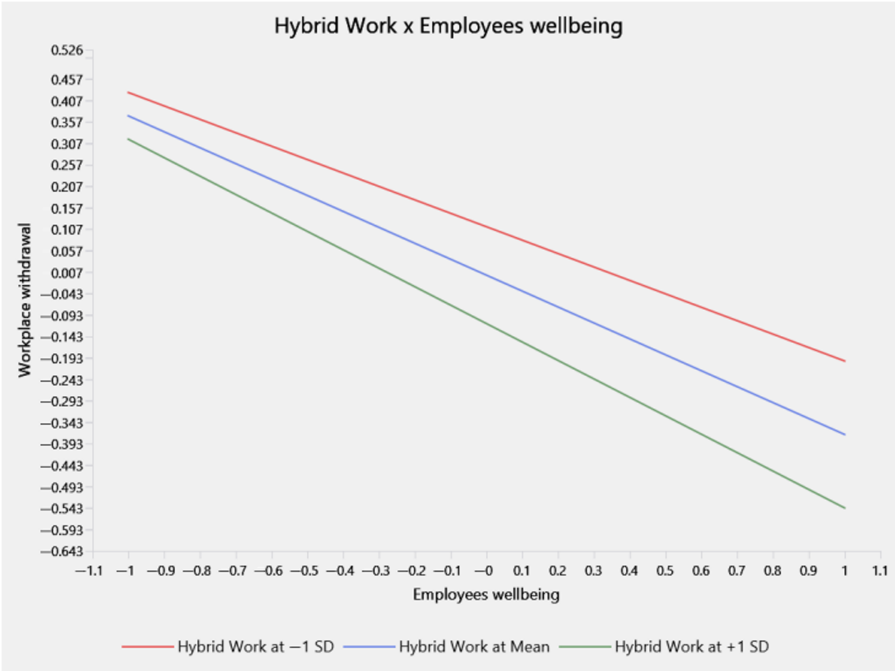


Figure 5. Simple slope analysis 3

instead highlighting the relationally contingent nature of leadership effectiveness under hybrid arrangements.

Although the interaction between hybrid work and employee wellbeing on workplace withdrawal was not statistically significant, this finding is itself theoretically informative. It suggests that the wellbeing-withdrawal relationship operates as a relatively stable psychological pathway that is not easily disrupted by changes in work location or hybrid work characteristics. Figure 5 provides a descriptive illustration of this relationship across different levels of hybrid work, confirming its consistency across hybrid work conditions. Nevertheless, the direct negative association between employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal remains important, supporting earlier research linking wellbeing to withdrawal-related outcomes (Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Jex, 1998). Consistent with conceptualizations of wellbeing as a multidimensional outcome shaped by job design and relational workplace conditions (Grant *et al.*, 2007), the findings suggest that employee wellbeing remains a central pathway through which workplace conditions are associated with withdrawal behavior.

These moderation analyses illustrate that hybrid work does not exert uniform effects across relational processes. Instead, hybrid arrangements reshape how favoritism, management style, and wellbeing interact, producing context-dependent outcomes. While hybrid work may weaken certain negative associations, such as the impact of favoritism on wellbeing, it simultaneously amplifies the importance of leadership style and alters the conditions under which wellbeing translates into withdrawal. In doing so, the findings refine dominant narratives in hybrid work scholarship that emphasize work-location flexibility and autonomy as primary drivers of effectiveness, by demonstrating that relational dynamics remain central to employee experiences under flexible work arrangements (Keeler *et al.*, 2023; Palumbo *et al.*, 2022).

The findings also qualify assumptions within leadership and hybrid work scholarship that reduced physical proximity necessarily limits opportunities for preferential treatment. The present results suggest that favoritism remains perceptible under hybrid arrangements, albeit potentially through less visible channels related to access, responsiveness, or informal support. Rather than eliminating favoritism, hybrid work may shift its expression away from overt interpersonal behaviors toward more subtle relational cues that become salient in digitally mediated work environments, where proximity and trust are reconfigured (Kidron and Vinarski Peretz, 2026). This extends relational perspectives on hybrid work by showing that favoritism adapts to, rather than disappears under, new work configurations.

Moreover, the findings offer insight into how hybrid work influences perceptions of fairness and access. Reduced physical co-presence may change how employees observe and interpret managerial decisions, making favoritism less visible but not less consequential. Consistent with recent research on dysfunctional leadership, the present findings suggest that favoritism continues to undermine relational trust and wellbeing even when expressed through less observable mechanisms (Abalkhail, 2022). Importantly, these interpretations remain consistent with the correlational nature of the study and do not imply that hybrid work causes favoritism or withdrawal, but rather that it conditions their relationships with wellbeing.

Finally, the analyses of control variables point to meaningful differences across gender and age. In line with prior research, male employees appear more susceptible to the effects of favoritism and management style, with wellbeing outcomes more strongly affected than among female employees (Eagly, 1987). Age-related differences further suggest that younger employees are more sensitive to management style, whereas hybrid work primarily affects the wellbeing of employees over the age of 35 (Kleissner and Jahn, 2020). These findings align with arguments linking favoritism to accumulated relational capital and tenure, suggesting that demographic factors shape how relational dynamics are experienced under hybrid work arrangements. While these findings are exploratory, they highlight the importance of considering demographic differences when interpreting relational processes under hybrid work arrangements.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that hybrid work functions as a contextual moderator that reshapes the relationships among favoritism, management style, wellbeing, and withdrawal, rather than acting as a uniformly beneficial or detrimental practice. By explicitly engaging with the simple slope analyses and associated figures, the findings extend existing hybrid work and leadership research by highlighting favoritism as a critical relational mechanism shaping employee outcomes in hybrid contexts.

Theoretical implications

This study makes several contributions to theory by advancing understanding of how hybrid work reshapes relational dynamics within organizations. First, the findings extend leadership and management research by demonstrating that management style remains a central determinant of employee wellbeing and withdrawal under hybrid work arrangements. While stewardship and LMX perspectives emphasize relational quality in leader-employee relationships, the present findings indicate that these relational dynamics become more consequential when work is digitally mediated. In doing so, the findings challenge assumptions that physical distance reduces the influence of leadership behavior by revealing that hybrid work amplifies employees' reliance on managerial signals in contexts characterized by reduced visibility and informal interaction.

Second, this study contributes to the favoritism literature by positioning favoritism as a relational mechanism that persists under hybrid work rather than being eliminated by reduced physical proximity. Existing research on favoritism has largely examined co-located organizational contexts in which preferential treatment is manifested through observable interpersonal behaviors (Chang and Cheng, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2021). The present findings refine this view by demonstrating that favoritism continues to shape employee wellbeing and

withdrawal under hybrid arrangements, albeit in more subtle and less visible forms. By showing that hybrid work moderates, but does not neutralize, the negative effects of favoritism, the study extends social identity and relational inequality perspectives to digitally mediated work contexts. Beyond social identity processes, the findings also speak to social role perspectives by suggesting that gendered expectations and relational role norms shape how leadership behavior and preferential treatment are interpreted within hybrid work environments, consistent with SRT's emphasis on socially constructed behavioral standards.

Third, the study advances hybrid work research by conceptualizing hybrid work as an organizing condition that conditions relational processes rather than as a uniformly beneficial or detrimental practice. Much of the existing literature has focused on the autonomy and resource-enhancing aspects of hybrid and remote work. The present findings qualify this dominant narrative by demonstrating that the effects of hybrid work depend on leadership style and existing relational conditions. In particular, the results show that hybrid work can both buffer and intensify relational outcomes, depending on baseline levels of wellbeing and the nature of managerial behavior. This conditional perspective contributes to a more refined understanding of hybrid work as a relational context embedded within broader leadership and organizational dynamics.

Practical implications

The findings also offer important practical insights for organizations and leaders navigating hybrid work arrangements. First, the results suggest that hybrid work should not be viewed as a substitute for effective leadership. While hybrid work arrangements may reduce direct exposure to certain negative behaviors, they do not eliminate the effects of favoritism or poor management practices. Organizations implementing hybrid work should therefore pay close attention to how leadership behaviors are expressed and perceived in digitally mediated environments, where employees rely more heavily on managerial communication and responsiveness as signals of fairness and support.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of participative management styles in hybrid work contexts. Leaders who engage employees through open communication, involvement in decision-making, and transparent processes appear better positioned to support employee wellbeing when direct supervision is reduced. Conversely, directive or control-oriented management styles may limit the potential benefits of hybrid work by intensifying disengagement and withdrawal. Organizations should therefore ensure that leadership development initiatives explicitly address how management styles translate into employee experiences under hybrid arrangements.

Third, the results reveal the need for organizations to monitor relational risks, such as favoritism, that may become less visible but no less consequential in hybrid work settings. Reduced physical co-presence can obscure unequal access to information, opportunities, and managerial attention, making favoritism harder to detect. Hence, organizations should implement mechanisms that promote transparency and equitable access, particularly in hybrid environments where informal cues and shared visibility are diminished.

In addition, the findings suggest that hybrid work initiatives should be introduced with careful consideration of existing employee wellbeing. In contexts where wellbeing is already low, hybrid work may intensify withdrawal tendencies rather than mitigate them. Organizations should therefore assess baseline relational and wellbeing conditions before expanding hybrid work arrangements and provide targeted support where relational strains are already present. Consistent with research on telework and wellbeing-oriented HR systems, leadership and HR practices play a critical role in shaping employee wellbeing under technology-mediated work arrangements (Contreras *et al.*, 2020; Gubernator *et al.*, 2025).

Finally, the findings should be interpreted in light of the French institutional context in which this study is situated. In the French context, hybrid work is often governed by formalized agreements, collective bargaining, and regulatory frameworks such as the "right to disconnect", which shape expectations regarding managerial behavior, communication, and

work-life boundaries. In such environments, the persistence of favoritism and the importance of management style observed in this study suggest that formal structures alone are insufficient to ensure perceptions of fairness and employee wellbeing. Instead, organizations operating within similar institutional contexts should complement formal hybrid work policies with leadership practices that emphasize transparency, equitable access to opportunities, and consistent communication across remote and on-site employees. This highlights the importance of aligning organizational policies with day-to-day managerial behaviors to sustain positive employee outcomes under hybrid work arrangements.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that also point to avenues for future research. First, the study relies on cross-sectional survey data, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships among management style, favoritism, employee wellbeing, and workplace withdrawal. Although the hypothesized directions are grounded in established theory and prior research, it is possible that these relationships are reciprocal. Longitudinal or experimental research designs could help clarify the temporal ordering of these relational processes and examine how they evolve as hybrid work arrangements become more established over time.

Second, the study is based on self-reported measures, which may raise concerns about common method variance and perceptual bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). However, perceptions are central to the constructs examined in this research. Favoritism, leadership behavior, wellbeing, and withdrawal intentions are inherently subjective experiences, and employees' perceptions are therefore theoretically meaningful rather than merely a methodological constraint. Future studies could nonetheless benefit from incorporating multi-source data, such as supervisor assessments or objective indicators of work behavior, to triangulate these findings. In addition, future research could examine how specific dimensions of employee wellbeing may be differentially affected by management style, favoritism, and hybrid work arrangements.

Third, the findings are situated within a specific organizational and institutional context. Hybrid work practices, leadership norms, and tolerance for favoritism may vary across cultural, sectoral, and institutional settings. While this context provides a relevant setting for examining relational dynamics under hybrid work, future research could explore whether similar patterns emerge in other contexts, including different national settings, industries, or organizational forms, to assess the broader generalizability of the results.

Fourth, hybrid work was operationalized in terms of the degree to which employees engaged in remote and on-site work, rather than the qualitative design of hybrid arrangements. Hybrid work policies can differ substantially in structure, autonomy, and managerial control. Prior research has shown that telework and hybrid work arrangements vary considerably across organizational contexts and HR systems, which may influence how employees experience leadership and relational dynamics (Miglioretti *et al.*, 2022; Gubernator *et al.*, 2025). Future research could examine how specific features of hybrid work design such as scheduling autonomy, communication norms, or performance monitoring practices interact with leadership style and favoritism to shape employee wellbeing and withdrawal. More broadly, future research could also explore alternative conceptualizations of hybrid work by incorporating additional dimensions to better capture the complexity of hybrid work arrangements across organizational contexts.

Finally, the present findings should also be interpreted in light of ongoing organizational debates regarding the long-term viability of hybrid work. While hybrid arrangements expanded rapidly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, some organizations are currently reconsidering these practices and encouraging employees to return to fully on-site work models (Decker *et al.*, 2025; Rosgaard *et al.*, 2025). These shifts suggest that hybrid work remains an evolving organizational practice rather than a stable institutionalized model. Future research could therefore examine how changes in organizational work arrangements,

Conclusion

This study examined how management style and perceived favoritism shape employee wellbeing and workplace withdrawal under hybrid work arrangements. By conceptualizing hybrid work as an organizing condition that reshapes relational dynamics rather than as a uniformly beneficial or detrimental practice, the findings show that hybrid work conditions how leadership behaviors and favoritistic practices are experienced by employees. In particular, the results demonstrate that favoritism remains a salient relational risk under hybrid work, even as its negative association with wellbeing may be partially attenuated by reduced physical proximity. At the same time, participative management styles become consequential in hybrid contexts, where employees rely more heavily on managerial communication and relational cues in the absence of routine face-to-face interaction. The findings further indicate that hybrid work alters how employee wellbeing translates into withdrawal behavior, highlighting the importance of baseline relational conditions when hybrid work arrangements are introduced. These findings contribute to a better understanding of hybrid work by showing that hybrid work design and digital capability alone are insufficient to ensure positive employee outcomes. Leadership quality and relational fairness continue to play a central role in shaping employee experiences under hybrid work arrangements, revealing the need to examine how new ways of working interact with longstanding organizational dynamics rather than assuming that structural change alone resolves relational challenges.

Appendix 1

Items measurement

Management style (Dutot, 2017)

- (1) Would you say that your manager encourages employee participation in the formulation and implementation of competitive strategy?
- (2) Would you say that your manager involves employees in tactical or operational decision-making?
- (3) Would you say that your manager shares his/her ideas with other colleagues or employees?
- (4) Are the employees personally responsible for the quality of their work?
- (5) Would you say that your manager takes appropriate actions to satisfy the customers (meet their needs and expectations)?
- (6) Would you say that your manager has a real commitment to the company?

Favoritism (Abubakar et al., 2017)

- (1) As an employee in this company, I always feel that I need a relative in a high-level position
- (2) As an employee in this company, I always feel that I need someone I know or a friend in a high-level position
- (3) Managers in my company are uncomfortable with the presence of those employees with close personal ties to high-level executives
- (4) Employees who were appointed only because of family ties have negative influence in the company

- (5) Employees who were appointed only because of friends or connections have negative influence in the company.
- (6) I am always careful when speaking to my colleagues about firm's top managers.
- (7) I am always careful when speaking to friends or acquaintances of firm's top managers
- (8) Top managers' relatives are frustrated by never really knowing whether they were appointed because of their talent or family ties
- (9) Friends and acquaintances of the firm's top managers are frustrated by the fact that they never really know if they were appointed based on merit or personal reasons
- (10) If a relative of a top manager in the firm is employed, he/she can ever live up to the expectations of the other employees
- (11) A friend or acquaintance of top managers at the firm can ever meet the expectation of other employees if he/she appointed in the firm
- (12) Firms allowing employment of top managers' relatives have a hard time attracting and retaining quality employees who are not relatives
- (13) Firms allowing employment of top managers' acquaintances have a hard time employing and retaining high quality employees who are not acquaintances
- (14) Firms allowing employment of top managers' relatives, friends and acquaintance have a difficult time firing or demoting them if they prove inadequate

Wellbeing (Jain et al., 2009)

Please position yourself regarding the following statements. In the last month, I

- (1) Was able to concentrate easily on my tasks
- (2) Encountered loss of sleep over worry (Reversed)
- (3) Felt I was playing a useful part in the firm
- (4) Could make decisions
- (5) Felt constantly under strain (Reversed)
- (6) Could not overcome difficulties (Reversed)
- (7) Was able to enjoy day-to-day activities
- (8) Was able to face problems
- (9) Felt unhappy and depressed (Reversed)
- (10) Lost confidence in myself (Reversed)
- (11) Thought of myself as worthless (Reversed)
- (12) Felt reasonably happy

Work withdrawal (Abubakar et al., 2017)

Please position yourself regarding the following statements. In the last month, I

- (1) Completed work assignments late
- (2) Took frequent/long coffee/lunch breaks
- (3) Made excuses to get out of the office
- (4) Been late for work
- (5) Neglected tasks that wouldn't affect your evaluation/pay rise
- (6) Thought about quitting because of work related issues

Boundarylessness

- (1) My job requires me to stay in touch with my workplace outside of normal working hours.
- (2) My job requires me to be available outside of normal working hours. This means that I am expected to respond to work-related emails, calls or messages when I am not at work.
- (3) I regularly take unfinished work home with me.
- (4) My job requires me to work in a variety of environments, such as the office, home, airplanes, etc.
- (5) My job is not limited to my work location. I tend to be on call no matter where I am, as I stay in touch via cell phone or the Internet.

Multitasking

- (6) My work requires me to regularly choose between a wide variety of demands.
- (7) My work involves a variety of tasks that require my attention at the same time.
- (8) My work often requires me to attend to multiple tasks or decisions at the same time.
- (9) My work requires me to perform several tasks at the same time.

Demand for constant learning

- (10) My work requires me to continuously learn new technologies, methods and concepts.
- (11) My work requires me to regularly attend seminars, take courses or obtain new information myself.
- (12) My work requires me to keep up to date with the latest developments (e.g. information, technical changes) in my field of work.
- (13) The level of knowledge required for my work changes constantly.
- (14) My work provides me with the opportunity to learn and develop my competencies and skills.

Non-work-related interruptions

- (15) When I am at work, I often interrupt tasks I am working on to respond to NON-work-related questions from other colleagues.
- (16) When I am at work, spontaneous conversations with others on NON-work-related topics often distract me from my actual tasks.
- (17) When I am at work, I am frequently interrupted by phone calls, emails, or colleagues seeking information or help with NON-work-related problems.
- (18) During my workday, I rarely have longer periods of time in which I can devote to my work without being interrupted by others for NON-work-related things.

General questions

Are you?

- Male
- Female
- I prefer not to answer

How old are you?

- 18–25 y.o
- 26–35 y.o
- 36–45 y.o
- 46–55 y.o
- Older than 55

- I prefer not to answer

In what type of organization are you working?

- Family business
- Private
- Public
- Association
- Start-up
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

How long have you been working in this organization?

- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 and 5 years
- Between 5 and 10 years
- More than 10 years
- I prefer not to answer

How many days per week are you working remotely?

- Remote working is not allowed
- 1 day
- 2 days
- 3 days
- 4 days
- Job is fully remote
- I can manage my time how I want
- I prefer not to answer

Assessment of first-order dimensions of the hybrid work higher-order construct

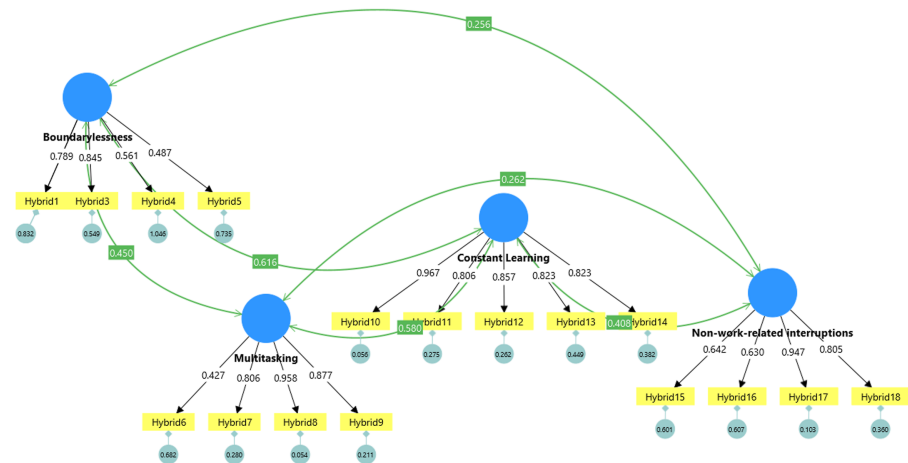


Figure A1. Graphic representation of CB-SEM Algorithm for Hybrid work (extract from SmartPLS 4)

Table A1. Construct reliability and validity of second-order construct

Construct reliability and validity				
	Cronbach's alpha (standardized)	Cronbach's alpha (unstandardized)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Boundarylessness	0.831	0.833	0.857	0.522
Constant Learning	0.929	0.925	0.930	0.735
Multitasking	0.844	0.841	0.859	0.630
Non-work-related interruptions	0.836	0.836	0.847	0.589

Table A2. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker Critreion) for the model

Discriminant validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion				
Discriminant validity is established				
	Boundarylessness	Constant learning	Multitasking	Non-work- related interruptions
Boundarylessness	0.722			
Constant Learning	0.616	0.857		
Multitasking	0.450	0.580	0.794	
Non-work-related interruptions	0.256	0.408	0.262	0.767

Table A3. HTMT results for the constructs

Discriminant validity – HTMT				
	Boundarylessness	Constant learning	Multitasking	Non-work-related interruptions
Boundarylessness				
Constant Learning	0.673			
Multitasking	0.575	0.746		
Non-work-related interruptions	0.323	0.535	0.542	

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