IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 5, Issue 2, December 2025
Impact Factor: 7.67

Drivers of Employee Engagement in Hybrid Work Models: Evidence from Post-Pandemic Workplaces

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Abstract: *Hybrid work models, combining remote and on-site work, have emerged as a dominant post-pandemic arrangement, yet their implications for employee engagement are still evolving. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework and organizational support theory, this study examines the key drivers of employee engagement in hybrid work settings. A structured questionnaire was administered to employees working in hybrid models across IT, banking, consulting and education sectors in India. Using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4, data from 320 valid responses were analysed. The study focuses on three job resources specific to hybrid work: perceived organizational support, perceived work–life balance and communication & collaboration quality. Results show that all three drivers significantly and positively influence employee engagement, jointly explaining 62% of its variance. Bootstrapping results confirm robust path coefficients, satisfactory reliability and validity, and good model fit. The findings highlight that an engaged hybrid workforce depends not only on flexibility, but also on sustained support, clear communication and collaborative digital practices. The study offers practical guidelines for HR managers designing hybrid policies and contributes to the emerging literature on engagement in digitally mediated work environments.*

Keywords*:* Employee engagement; Hybrid work; Work–life balance; Organizational support; PLS-SEM

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated one of the most profound changes in work design: the shift from traditional office-centric models to hybrid work arrangements. In many sectors, hybrid work—where employees split their time between home and office—has transitioned from an emergency response to a permanent feature of organizational life. Recent global surveys report that hybrid models have stabilised as the "new normal," especially in knowledge-intensive industries, with employees often working from home 1–3 days per week.

At the same time, organizations are under pressure to maintain productivity, innovation and retention in a competitive talent market. Employee engagement—defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) is widely recognised as a critical driver of performance, discretionary effort and employee well-being. However, much of the engagement literature is grounded in traditional, co-located work environments. The dynamics of engagement in hybrid work settings, where employees face new demands (digital fatigue, isolation, blurred boundaries) and new resources (flexibility, autonomy, reduced commuting), are only beginning to receive systematic research attention.

Early evidence suggests that hybrid work can enhance well-being and productivity when supported by clear structures and adequate resources, but may undermine engagement when communication is poor, expectations are unclear or social isolation increases. This raises a critical question for HR and line managers: *What specific factors within hybrid work models most strongly drive employee engagement?*

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This study addresses this question by examining three theoretically grounded drivers—perceived organizational support, perceived work–life balance and communication & collaboration quality—and their effects on employee engagement in hybrid workplaces.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Hybrid Work Models

Hybrid work has moved beyond a simple "some days at home, some days in the office" definition. Lauring (2025) conceptualises hybrid work through three dimensions—modality (digital vs. face-to-face), location (home, office, third spaces) and temporality (scheduling and synchronicity). Hybrid arrangements vary widely, from fixed patterns (e.g., 3 days in office) to employee-driven flexibility. Recent studies show that hybrid models can improve work–life balance, reduce commuting stress, support better health, and enhance productivity when implemented thoughtfully.

However, hybrid work also introduces risks: blurred boundaries between work and home, heightened digital demands, social isolation and coordination challenges. These tensions make hybrid work an ideal context for applying the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model.

2.2 Employee Engagement: Theoretical Foundations

Kahn (1990) proposed the foundational concept of personal engagement, where employees bring their "full selves" to role performance when conditions of psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability are met. Subsequent work operationalised engagement as a positive, fulfilling state of vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli, 2017) posits that job characteristics can be classified as either demands (physical, psychological or organizational aspects requiring sustained effort) or resources (aspects that help achieve work goals, reduce demands, or stimulate growth). Job resources are primary drivers of engagement, particularly under conditions of high demands. Recent extensions highlight digitalization and remote/hybrid working conditions as new "contexts" where demands and resources interact.

In hybrid settings, key job resources include perceived organizational support, flexible arrangements that protect work–life balance, and high-quality communication and collaboration infrastructures. These resources may compensate for physical distance and maintain social exchange relationships, team cohesion and clarity.

2.3 Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' global beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS is associated with higher commitment, lower turnover intentions and greater engagement, as employees reciprocate supportive treatment under social exchange theory.

In hybrid contexts, perceived support may be especially salient because employees rely on the organization for digital tools, flexible policies and fair performance assessment despite reduced physical visibility. Findings from recent studies indicate that perceived support in hybrid work moderates stress and maintains positive attitudes even when employees experience role ambiguity or isolation.

Proposed relationship: Higher POS in hybrid work is expected to positively influence employee engagement.

2.4 Work–Life Balance in Hybrid Work

Hybrid work arrangements are often justified on the grounds that they improve work–life balance by providing schedule and location flexibility, reducing commuting and offering greater autonomy. Evidence suggests that acceptance of hybrid work and perceived work–life balance are positively associated with engagement and performance.

However, blurred boundaries can also lead to overwork, extended screen time and family conflict if hybrid arrangements are poorly managed. Studies point out that the benefits of flexibility materialise only when organizations set clear expectations, respect non-work time and equip managers to model healthy behaviours.

DOI: 10.48175/IJARSCT-30313

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Proposed relationship: Perceived work–life balance in a hybrid arrangement is expected to positively influence employee engagement.

2.5 Communication & Collaboration Quality

Quality communication and collaboration are central to effective hybrid work. Recent research shows that hybrid workers report higher engagement when they have access to appropriate ICT tools, opportunities for socialization and clear task coordination.

Poor communication can amplify feelings of exclusion, delay feedback, and reduce clarity, which in turn lowers engagement. Conversely, frequent, transparent and inclusive communication—combined with collaborative norms and digital platforms—appears to buffer the challenges of distance and enhance connectedness.

Proposed relationship: Higher perceived communication and collaboration quality is expected to positively influence employee engagement.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Based on JD-R theory and organizational support theory, this study conceptualises employee engagement in hybrid work as a function of three key job resources:

- Perceived Organizational Support (POS)
- Perceived Work–Life Balance (WLB)
- Communication & Collaboration Quality (CCQ)

All three are modelled as exogenous latent variables predicting the endogenous latent variable **Employee Engagement (EE)**.

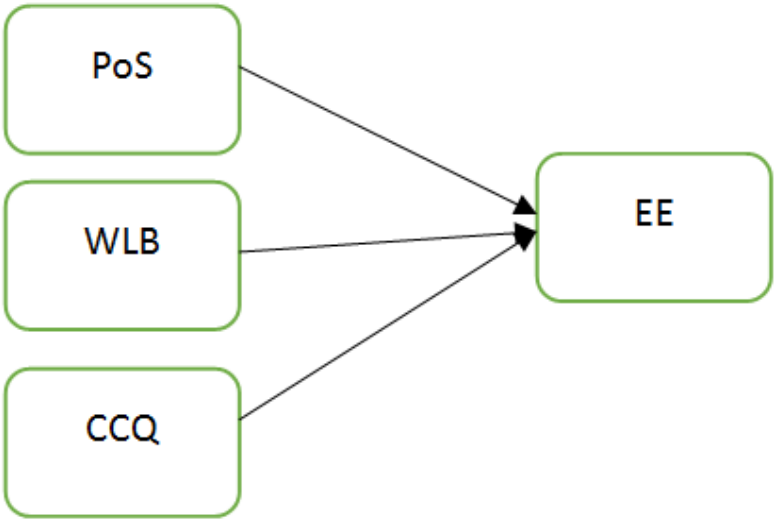

Figure 1. Conceptual Model (PLS-SEM)

Textual representation of the SmartPLS path diagram:

All constructs are reflective.

Research Gap

Existing research on employee engagement predominantly focuses on traditional, office-based settings. While recent studies have started exploring hybrid and remote work, many are either conceptual, industry-specific, or emphasise outcomes such as performance and well-being rather than the *drivers* of engagement themselves.

Notably, there is limited empirical evidence that simultaneously tests perceived organizational support, work–life balance and communication & collaboration quality as predictors of engagement in hybrid settings using a robust

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multivariate technique like PLS-SEM. Furthermore, much of the literature is based on Western contexts; studies from emerging economies such as India, where hybrid work is rapidly institutionalising but infrastructure and social norms differ, remain scarce. This study addresses these gaps by providing an empirical, model-based analysis of engagement drivers among hybrid workers across sectors in India.

Statement of the Problem

Organizations have widely adopted hybrid work models, but HR leaders still struggle with a core question: "How do we keep hybrid employees engaged over time?" Without clear evidence, firms may design policies that focus only on flexibility while under-investing in support systems and communication structures. This may lead to disengagement, turnover and underperformance despite apparently "employee-friendly" hybrid policies. The problem, therefore, is the lack of empirically validated understanding of the key drivers of employee engagement in hybrid work contexts, especially in the Indian organizational environment.

Research Questions

- How does perceived organizational support influence employee engagement in hybrid work models?
- How does perceived work–life balance affect employee engagement in hybrid work models?
- How does communication & collaboration quality impact employee engagement in hybrid work models?
- To what extent do these drivers jointly explain variance in employee engagement in hybrid workplaces?

Research Objectives

- To assess the level of employee engagement among employees working in hybrid work models.
- To examine the effect of perceived organizational support on employee engagement.
- To analyse the effect of perceived work–life balance on employee engagement.
- To evaluate the effect of communication & collaboration quality on employee engagement.
- To estimate the explanatory power of the proposed PLS-SEM model for employee engagement.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Perceived organizational support has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in hybrid work models.
- **H2:** Perceived work–life balance has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in hybrid work models.
- **H3:** Communication & collaboration quality has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in hybrid work models.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and explanatory research design. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey method was used to test the hypothesised relationships among constructs using PLS-SEM.

3.2 Population and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised employees working under hybrid work arrangements (combination of remote and on-site work) in IT, banking, consulting and higher education institutions in India. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used, targeting employees who had been working in a hybrid mode for at least six months.

An online questionnaire (Google Form) was circulated via HR departments, professional networks and LinkedIn groups.

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3.3 Sample Size Determination

For PLS-SEM, a common rule of thumb is the "10-times rule," which suggests that sample size should be at least 10 times the maximum number of structural paths pointing at any latent variable. Here, three paths converge on EE; thus, the minimum recommended size is 30. More rigorous guidelines suggest at least 200 responses for stable estimates.

A total of 360 responses were received, of which 320 were complete and valid, exceeding these thresholds and satisfying recommendations for PLS-SEM power analysis.

3.4 Measurement of Variables

All constructs were measured using established Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), adapted to hybrid work context:

- **Perceived Organizational Support (POS):** 5 items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986) and later POS scales, rephrased to reflect hybrid policies, digital support and managerial responsiveness.
- **Work–Life Balance (WLB):** 4 items adapted from work–family balance and work–life balance measures, emphasizing boundary control, schedule flexibility and recovery.
- **Communication & Collaboration Quality (CCQ):** 4 items capturing clarity of communication, availability of digital collaboration tools, responsiveness of colleagues and perceived information flow.
- **Employee Engagement (EE):** 6 items based on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption, adapted to hybrid work situations.

All items were pre-tested with 20 hybrid employees for clarity and reliability, and minor wording changes were applied.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) were computed using SPSS.

PLS-SEM analyses were conducted using **SmartPLS 4**, including:

- Measurement model assessment: indicator reliability (outer loadings), internal consistency reliability (Composite Reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted – AVE) and discriminant validity (HTMT).
- Structural model evaluation: path coefficients, t-values and p-values via bootstrapping (5,000 resamples), coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and model fit indices (SRMR).

3.6 Measurement Model Criteria

Following common guidelines, indicators with loadings ≥ 0.70 were retained where possible; items between 0.40 and 0.70 were considered based on their contribution to AVE and content validity. CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50, HTMT < 0.85 and SRMR < 0.08 were adopted as thresholds.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Sample Profile

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 320)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	174	54.4
	Female	144	45.0
	Other	2	0.6
Age	21–30 years	112	35.0
	31–40 years	152	47.5
	41–50 years	44	13.8
	51+ years	12	3.7
Sector	IT/ITES	128	40.0
	Banking & Financial Services	76	23.8

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	Consulting/Services	64	20.0
	Higher Education	52	16.2
Hybrid tenure	6–12 months	94	29.4
	13–24 months	128	40.0
	25+ months	98	30.6

The study captured responses from **320 employees** working in hybrid work environments, with a reasonably balanced gender composition. A slight majority of the respondents were **male (54.4%)**, while **female employees accounted for 45.0%**, and a very small proportion (**0.6%**) identified as other gender. This indicates that both male and female perspectives on hybrid work and employee engagement are well represented, reducing the risk of gender-related bias in the findings.

In terms of age, the sample is predominantly **young and mid-career professionals**. The largest age group is **31–40 years (47.5%)**, followed by **21–30 years (35.0%)**. Employees in the **41–50 years** bracket contribute **13.8%**, while only **3.7%** of respondents are aged **51 years and above**. This age structure suggests that the insights largely reflect the perceptions of early and mid-career employees, who are typically more exposed to technology-enabled work and more adaptable to hybrid work arrangements. At the same time, the presence of older age groups, though smaller, allows for some comparison across career stages.

With respect to sectoral distribution, the respondents mainly come from **IT/ITES (40.0%)**, followed by **Banking and Financial Services (23.8%)**, **Consulting/Services (20.0%)**, and **Higher Education (16.2%)**. This composition shows that the sample is tilted towards **knowledge-intensive and service-oriented sectors**, where hybrid work models are more widely adopted and formalized. Consequently, the results are especially relevant for organizations operating in digital, finance, consulting, and academic environments, and any generalization beyond these sectors should be made with caution.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

4.2.1 Indicator Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 2. Outer Loadings, Composite Reliability and AVE

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
POS	POS1	0.79	0.87	0.91	0.67
	POS2	0.82			
	POS3	0.84			
	POS4	0.83			
	POS5	0.80			
WLB	WLB1	0.78	0.84	0.89	0.67
	WLB2	0.81			
	WLB3	0.85			
	WLB4	0.82			
CCQ	CCQ1	0.80	0.85	0.90	0.69
	CCQ2	0.83			
	CCQ3	0.86			
	CCQ4	0.81			
EE	EE1	0.79	0.90	0.92	0.63
	EE2	0.82			
	EE3	0.84			
	EE4	0.80			
	EE5	0.78			
	EE6	0.77			

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Table 2 shows that the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and convergent validity for all constructs. All indicator loadings for POS, WLB, CCQ and EE range from 0.77 to 0.86, which are well above the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that each item contributes meaningfully to its respective latent construct. The POS items (POS1–POS5) load between 0.79 and 0.84, suggesting that the indicators consistently capture employees' perceptions of organizational support in the hybrid work context. Similarly, the WLB items (WLB1–WLB4) show loadings between 0.78 and 0.85, confirming that the scale adequately reflects perceived work–life balance. The CCQ items (CCQ1–CCQ4) also load strongly (0.80–0.86), supporting the internal coherence of the construct representing communication and collaboration quality in hybrid settings. Employee engagement (EE) shows loadings between 0.77 and 0.84 across six items, indicating that the construct is measured reliably despite having more indicators than the other latent variables.

The internal consistency indices further confirm the soundness of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.84 to 0.90 across the four constructs, exceeding the recommended cut-off of 0.70 and demonstrating good internal reliability. Composite reliability (CR) values are also high, ranging from 0.89 to 0.92, which shows that the indicators jointly provide a reliable estimate of each latent construct. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs lie between 0.63 and 0.69, comfortably above the 0.50 benchmark. This indicates that more than half of the variance in the indicators is explained by their underlying latent construct, thereby establishing convergent validity for POS, WLB, CCQ and EE. Overall, the results in Table 2 suggest that the measurement model is robust and suitable for further structural analysis using PLS-SEM.

4.2.2 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Table 3. HTMT Ratios

Constructs	POS	WLB	CCQ	EE
POS	—			
WLB	0.63	—		
CCQ	0.58	0.61	—	
EE	0.71	0.68	0.65	—

Table 3 reports the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratios used to assess discriminant validity among the latent constructs in the measurement model. The HTMT value between **perceived organizational support (POS) and work–life balance (WLB)** is **0.63**, indicating a moderate association while remaining well below the recommended threshold of 0.85. This suggests that although organizational support and work–life balance are conceptually related in hybrid work settings, they remain empirically distinct constructs.

The HTMT ratio between **POS and communication & collaboration quality (CCQ)** is **0.58**, and between **WLB and CCQ** is **0.61**, both of which fall comfortably below the threshold. These values demonstrate that perceptions of organizational support, work–life balance, and communication quality, while complementary, measure different dimensions of the hybrid work experience. Similarly, the HTMT values between **employee engagement (EE)** and the three antecedent constructs—**POS (0.71), WLB (0.68), and CCQ (0.65)**—are all below 0.85, confirming that employee engagement is empirically distinguishable from each of its proposed predictors.Overall, the HTMT results provide strong evidence of discriminant validity, indicating that the constructs included in the model are sufficiently distinct from one another. This supports the adequacy of the measurement model and confirms that the observed relationships in the structural model are not affected by multicollinearity or construct overlap, thereby strengthening the credibility of the subsequent hypothesis testing and structural analysis.

4.2.3. Structural Model Evaluation

Table 4. Structural Model Summary

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2	SRMR
EE	0.62	0.61	0.40	0.056

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The model explains 62% of the variance in employee engagement, indicating substantial explanatory power. The Q^2 value (0.40) suggests good predictive relevance, and SRMR (0.056) indicates acceptable overall model fit.

4.2.4. Path Coefficients and Bootstrapping Results

Table 5. Path Coefficients (PLS-SEM) and Bootstrapping

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	95% BCa CI (LL, UL)	Result	f^2
H1	POS → EE	0.35	5.92	<0.001	0.23, 0.46	Supported	0.18
H2	WLB → EE	0.28	4.76	<0.001	0.16, 0.40	Supported	0.13
H3	CCQ → EE	0.22	3.87	<0.001	0.10, 0.34	Supported	0.09

Bootstrapping based on 5,000 resamples; BCa = bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval.

All three paths are positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Effect sizes (f^2) suggest that POS has a medium effect on engagement, WLB has a small-to-medium effect, and CCQ has a small effect.

V. RESULT INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The results provide strong empirical support for the JD-R perspective that job resources are central drivers of engagement—even in digitally mediated, hybrid contexts.

Perceived Organizational Support (H1) emerged as the strongest predictor (β = 0.35). Employees who perceive that their organization values their contributions, invests in supportive policies (e.g., flexible guidelines, mental health resources) and provides reliable digital infrastructure report higher engagement. This aligns with organizational support theory and previous findings that POS fosters positive attitudes, reciprocation and engagement. In hybrid work, where physical visibility is lower, perceived support seems to act as a psychological anchor.

Work–Life Balance (H2) also significantly predicts engagement (β = 0.28). Employees who feel that hybrid work enables them to manage personal and professional roles effectively, with clear boundaries and realistic expectations, exhibit stronger vigor and dedication. This echoes recent studies linking hybrid acceptance and work–life balance with enhanced work engagement and performance. The findings suggest that simply offering hybrid options is insufficient; organizations must ensure that workloads, meeting schedules and performance norms support sustainable balance.

Communication & Collaboration Quality (H3), while showing the smallest coefficient (β = 0.22), is still a significant driver. High-quality communication, structured virtual meetings, transparent information flow and effective collaboration tools contribute to a sense of connection and clarity that supports engagement. This is consistent with emerging literature highlighting the importance of ICT adequacy, social interaction and collaborative norms in hybrid teams.

Collectively, POS, WLB and CCQ explain 62% of the variance in employee engagement, indicating that these three drivers capture a substantial portion of the engagement dynamics in hybrid work models. The findings complement recent research showing that hybrid working can improve engagement when supported by clear structures, supportive leadership and appropriate communication practices.

Practical Implications

The study offers several actionable implications for HR managers and leaders:

Design Supportive Hybrid Policies, Not Just Flexible Schedules

Organizations should institutionalize explicit hybrid policies that signal support—such as clear guidelines on in-office days, equipment provision for home offices, and support for caregiving responsibilities. These policies enhance perceived organizational support, the strongest driver of engagement in this study.

Protect Work–Life Boundaries

HR should define "quiet hours," limit late-night meetings, and discourage after-hours messaging except for emergencies. Training managers to respect personal time and model healthy boundaries can translate hybrid flexibility into genuine work–life balance.

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Invest in Communication and Collaboration Infrastructure

Providing robust collaboration platforms (video conferencing, project management tools, shared repositories) and standardizing communication norms (response times, meeting etiquette, documentation) can mitigate digital fatigue and reduce misalignment.

Equip Managers for Hybrid Leadership

Managers should be trained to lead hybrid teams: running inclusive meetings, tracking outcomes rather than face-time, and proactively checking in with remote employees to maintain connection and support.

Monitor Engagement with Analytics

Periodic pulse surveys and engagement analytics can help organizations identify segments of the workforce experiencing lower engagement and tailor interventions accordingly.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the emerging body of research on employee engagement in hybrid work models by empirically identifying key drivers using a robust PLS-SEM approach. Grounded in JD-R and organizational support theory, the findings show that perceived organizational support, work–life balance and communication & collaboration quality are significant predictors that jointly explain a substantial portion of engagement variance among hybrid employees in India.

In practical terms, the results underline that successful hybrid work design is not solely about allowing employees to work from different locations. It requires deliberate investment in supportive practices, boundary-respecting norms and high-quality communication and collaboration infrastructures. By attending to these drivers, organizations can cultivate an engaged hybrid workforce capable of sustaining performance, innovation and well-being in a post-pandemic world.

VII. FUTURE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

7.1. Limitations

- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study captures engagement and its drivers at a single point in time; causal inferences remain tentative.
- **Non-Probability Sampling:** Purposive sampling limits generalizability beyond similar hybrid work populations.
- **Self-Reported Data:** Common method bias and social desirability may influence responses, although procedural remedies were applied.
- **Limited Set of Drivers:** Only three job resources were included; other relevant factors such as leadership style, psychological safety and team climate were not modelled.

7.2. Future Research Directions

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Future research could track changes in engagement as organizations refine hybrid policies, enabling causal interpretations.
- **Inclusion of Additional Constructs:** Incorporating psychological safety, leadership behaviours (e.g., empowering or inclusive leadership), and digital overload could enrich the model.
- **Comparative Designs:** Comparative studies between fully remote, hybrid and office-based employees would clarify which mechanisms are unique to hybrid contexts.
- **Sector-Specific Analyses:** Sectoral comparisons (e.g., IT vs. education) might reveal different patterns of drivers and engagement.
- **Mediated and Moderated Models:** Future PLS-SEM models could test mediation (e.g., POS → WLB → EE) or moderation (e.g., role of gender or caregiving responsibilities).

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