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Understanding employee trade-offs in remote work: toward more sustainable workplace design[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Remote and hybrid work have become enduring features of digitally mediated organizations, yet questions remain about the conditions under which such arrangements can be sustained over time. Prior research on remote work sustainability emphasizes structural and technological enablers, often assuming that flexibility, compensation, or organizational support translates directly into employee acceptance. This study extends that literature by adopting a preference-based perspective. We conceptualize sustainability as grounded in how employees evaluate and trade off multiple, interdependent job attributes. Drawing on a choice-based conjoint experiment with 627 full-time U.S. workers, we examine how employees assess bundled features related to work location, salary, monitoring, scheduling, expense reimbursement, and organizational support. The findings indicate that employee acceptance is shaped less by isolated job attributes than by how these features are configured in relation to employees' prioritized needs, with the degree of remote work and salary serving as central reference dimensions. By foregrounding employee evaluative logic and compensatory trade-offs, this study clarifies the micro-level conditions under which remote and hybrid work arrangements are likely to be accepted and sustained.

Introduction

Digitally mediated work arrangements have become a central feature of contemporary organizations. Advances in digital

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communication, collaboration platforms, and workflow systems have enabled work to be decoupled from physical co-location, fundamentally reconfiguring how supervision, coordination, and control are enacted (Hansen et al., 2023; Allen et al., 2024). Remote and hybrid work are no longer peripheral practices but institutionalized forms of technology-enabled organizations across industries (Aksoy et al., 2025; Cullen et al., 2025). As digital infrastructures increasingly mediate everyday work, a central question for Information Systems (IS) research concerns not only how such arrangements are implemented but under what conditions they persist.

Existing research has largely examined the sustainability of the remote workplace⁵ through a design-centered lens. This stream emphasizes structural and contextual enablers—such as autonomy, leadership practices, task interdependence, and digital support systems—as key determinants of productivity, well-being, and performance (Parker et al., 2017; Bellmann & Hübler, 2021; Richards, 2022; Asatiani & Norström, 2023). From this perspective, sustainability is primarily understood as an outcome of organizational design choices and technological infrastructures that support effective remote work.

However, emerging organizational evidence reveals limits to this assumption. Despite substantial investments in digital infrastructures and hybrid models, many organizations encounter resistance to return-to-office mandates, declining job satisfaction, and increased employee outflows (Van Dijcke et al., 2024; Ding & Ma, 2023). Acceptance of hybrid arrangements varies significantly across employee groups and hierarchical levels (Barnes et al., 2025), and adherence to prescribed configurations often erodes over time (Bloom et al., 2024; Haines et al., 2024). Financial incentives or additional resources do not reliably offset stricter office requirements (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Cullen et al., 2025), and identical remote-work policies can trigger divergent reactions within the same organization (Bloom et al., 2024). These patterns suggest that the persistence of digitally mediated work arrangements cannot be inferred solely from design features.

We argue that sustainability in remote and hybrid contexts is fundamentally evaluative and configuration-dependent. In digitally mediated work, technological features (e.g., monitoring systems, collaboration tools) are tightly intertwined with organizational policies (e.g., flexibility rules, office requirements) and compensation structures. Employees, therefore, do not assess individual attributes in isolation. Instead, they evaluate bundles of interdependent job features and engage in compensatory trade-offs—for example, accepting increased monitoring in exchange for greater flexibility, or lower pay in return for enhanced location-based autonomy (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Wiswall & Zafar, 2018; Non et al., 2022). Because remote and hybrid arrangements blur boundaries between professional and personal domains, misalignment across these attributes directly affects daily routines, caregiving responsibilities, and recovery opportunities. Under such conditions, sustainability depends less on identifying an objectively optimal design and more on whether particular configurations fall within employees' acceptable trade-off thresholds.

While prior research broadly acknowledges the importance of alignment, it offers limited insight into how employees make these trade-offs across core digital and organizational attributes of remote and hybrid workplaces, or how such evaluations shape their willingness to accept specific arrangements. To address this gap, we conceptualize the sustainability of remote and hybrid workplaces not as a fixed property of work arrangements but as a preference-based phenomenon rooted in employees' evaluations of work configurations. Because sustainability cannot be directly observed within a single decision context, we treat employee acceptance and preference alignment as necessary behavioral preconditions for persistence. Drawing on the needs–supplies dimension of person–organization (P–O) fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, 2023), we define a sustainable remote configuration as one that endures because it aligns with employees' prioritized needs across multiple, interdependent job attributes. From this perspective, sustainability depends not on the presence of specific features in isolation, but on how these features are jointly configured and evaluated through compensatory trade-offs.

Guided by this framework, we ask: (RQ1) Which job attributes most influence the decisions of employees who prefer working remotely? And (RQ2) to what extent can variations in these attributes induce such employees to accept hybrid work arrangements? To answer these questions, we employ a conjoint experiment that simulates realistic job choice scenarios by presenting full-time employees with systematically varied job offers across key attributes. This design captures revealed preferences and allows us to estimate the trade-offs employees make when evaluating digitally mediated work configurations.

This study contributes to the information systems literature in three ways. First, it reframes the remote workplace sustainability as a behaviorally grounded outcome shaped by employee evaluations, rather than as a direct consequence of organizational design or technological provision. Second, it extends P–O fit theory by operationalizing fit as a preference-based, conditional evaluation, showing how employees tolerate misfit on some attributes in exchange for fit on others. Third, it contributes to IS research on digital work design by demonstrating that the effects of digital features on sustainability are contingent on how they are bundled with other job attributes and interpreted by employees, helping to explain why similar digital arrangements endure in some contexts but fail in others.

Theoretical development and hypotheses

Embedding employees' perspectives in a sustainable remote workplace

Prior conceptual frameworks, most notably Asatiani and Norström (2023), identify two interrelated categories of factors shaping

⁵ Although *remote work*, *remote work arrangements*, and *remote workplace* can denote distinct aspects of spatially flexible work—respectively referring to work practices, formal organizational policies, and broader socio-technical environments—we use these terms interchangeably in this paper to describe digitally mediated configurations of spatially flexible work. Our focus is on how employees evaluate these configurations as bundled job attributes.

remote workplace sustainability: relatively rigid base characteristics and more malleable contextual workplace variables. Base characteristics—including personal, environmental, and job-specific factors—shape three critical capacities: autonomy, self-efficacy, and access to resources. These capacities, in turn, influence dynamic sustainability variables, such as work–life balance (WLB), health behaviors, social interactions, and leader–member exchange (LMX). When these capacities are strong, workers are better able to schedule flexibly, negotiate constructively with supervisors, and sustain social ties, creating virtuous cycles of productivity and well-being (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2008, 2010; Parker et al., 2017). When they are weak, remote work is more likely to generate unsustainable dynamics, including overwork, role blurring, or social isolation (Richards, 2022).

Information systems (IS) play a central role within this framework by translating structural constraints into configurable work arrangements. Through IS, work–life boundaries can be personalized via scheduling and communication tools (Korucu et al., 2023), health and well-being can be supported through ergonomic resources or preferred work environments (Straus et al., 2022), and social interaction can be shaped through different communication modes that accommodate varying preferences for sociability and formality (Koch & Denner, 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Begemann et al., 2024). In this sense, IS does not merely enable remote work but actively shapes the set of options that employees encounter and must evaluate.

Despite these advances, existing frameworks pay limited attention to how employees interpret and evaluate these configurations. Workers are often portrayed as passive recipients of organizational design choices, rather than as active decision-makers weighing trade-offs among competing job attributes. Similarly, much IS research on remote work emphasizes technological enablement—such as collaboration platforms, monitoring systems, or boundary management tools (Stray & Moe, 2020; Schubert & Williams, 2022; Raj et al., 2023)—without sufficiently accounting for how employee preferences condition the acceptance and effectiveness of these systems. As a result, current models struggle to explain why ostensibly well-designed remote work arrangements prove sustainable for some employees but not for others.

Our study addresses this gap by reframing remote workplace sustainability as an employee-centered decision space in which individuals evaluate bundled job attributes and make compensatory trade-offs between them. We treat autonomy, self-efficacy, and access to resources not as direct determinants of sustainability outcomes, but as contextual capacities that shape how employees assess and compare alternative work arrangements. This perspective builds on evidence that individuals differ substantially in how they experience remote work under similar structural conditions (Raguram et al., 2001; Workman et al., 2003; Zarate et al., 2024), and it enables us to conceptualize sustainability as the outcome of employees' evaluative logic rather than as an inherent property of work design. By doing so, we move beyond static descriptions of remote work systems and provide a preference-based explanation of why some digitally mediated work arrangements endure while others do not.

The role of trade-offs in shaping person-organization fit in a remote workplace

A large body of evidence shows that employees evaluate job offers on the basis of both monetary and non-monetary attributes, including compensation, career progression, culture, flexibility, and well-being (Montgomery & Ramus, 2011; Doiron et al., 2014; Eriksson & Kristensen, 2014; Scott et al., 2015; Mas & Pallais, 2017; Fields et al., 2018; Wiswall & Zafar, 2018; Soekhai et al., 2019; Johnston, 2020; Non et al., 2022; Maestas et al., 2023). These features are evaluated holistically; employees weigh attributes against one another and make compensatory trade-offs based on their individual needs and values. Individuals do not always accept job offers with higher compensation if other aspects of the job do not fulfill their needs, such as autonomy, flexibility, or perceived fairness in monitoring and support.

Building on this foundation, we situate remote work within the broader literature on person-organization (P–O) fit, a core dimension of person–environment (P–E) fit theory. P–O fit theory emphasizes the alignment between individual needs and organizational offerings, providing a foundational logic for understanding how employees evaluate job attractiveness (Edwards, 1991; Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Judge & Kristof-Brown, 2004; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Fit is not a binary state, but the outcome of comparative evaluations; employees assess bundled job attributes and form judgments based on how features combine, rather than on isolated characteristics. This perspective helps explain why structurally similar remote arrangements can generate divergent responses, and why digital tools—such as monitoring, scheduling, or support systems—must be understood as constitutive of multi-attribute configurations.

Prior research distinguishes between supplementary similarities (e.g., shared values) or complementary characteristics (e.g., organizational offerings that fill gaps in employee needs) (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). P–O fit can also depend on factors such as shared goals (Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991), ethics (Ambrose et al., 2008), skills (Resick et al., 2007), personality (Tom, 1971), political alignment (Roth et al., 2022), or perceived support (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2019). Other work highlights cognitive style (Chan, 1996), growth opportunities (Cao & Hamori, 2020), and symbolic signaling through recruitment practices (Dineen et al., 2002; Phillips et al., 2014).

Fit is inherently conditional. Employees often make context-sensitive trade-offs, particularly in remote settings where flexibility, autonomy, and connection are experienced differently across individuals. For example, some may accept reduced pay in exchange for greater remote work, or trade career advancement opportunities for greater schedule flexibility or well-being protections (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Wiswall & Zafar, 2018; Non et al., 2022). These patterns reinforce the view of fit as an outcome of preference-based evaluation rather than a static match (Patsfall & Feimer, 1985). From a practical standpoint, this means that how organizations frame symbolic and instrumental attributes in job offers directly shapes perceived fit and attraction (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Despite a rich theoretical foundation, empirical approaches to fit have struggled to capture such trade-offs. Most studies rely on self-reported perceptions of fit (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005), but definitional ambiguities and inconsistent measurement strategies complicate comparisons (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). Interaction models that treat organizational attributes as moderators of outcomes (Cable &

Judge, 1994) offer an alternative approach, but they do not fully account for how individuals evaluate bundles of attributes, which more closely reflects the reality workers face when making these choices.

Our study addresses this gap by adopting a preference-based, choice-centered lens grounded in the needs–supplies dimension of fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) to the remote work arrangements. By examining how employees reveal their evaluations of job bundles in remote and hybrid work contexts, we aim to provide a stronger operationalization of fit that reflects the compensatory logic in digitally mediated work arrangements.

Hypotheses

Building on the literature on remote workplace sustainability and preference-based evaluations of job attributes, we develop three hypotheses. First, because autonomy over work location directly affects employees' ability to manage work–life boundaries, self-regulation, and access to resources, we expect employees to systematically prefer job bundles that offer greater remote work.

H1: All else equal, job bundles offering more remote workdays will be preferred, with work location serving as a primary reference dimension in employees' evaluations.

Second, prior research suggests that location-based autonomy is difficult to substitute with monetary incentives alone (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Maestas et al., 2023; Moens et al., 2024). As office requirements increase, employees are likely to experience a misalignment between their preferences and organizational offerings, which financial incentives may mitigate but not fully offset.

H2: All else equal, job bundles that require a higher degree of on-site presence will be less likely to be chosen, and associated salary premiums will mitigate but not fully compensate for this misalignment with employees' prioritized preferences.

Third, consistent with needs–supplies fit theory and configurational perspectives on work design, we expect that employees' evaluations will exhibit cross-attribute conditionality rather than additive independence. In digitally mediated settings, attributes such as monitoring, scheduling, and cost-sharing are interpreted relative to core reference dimensions, particularly location-based autonomy and salary. We therefore expect non-additive evaluation patterns in which the acceptability of secondary attributes depends on their configuration with primary ones.

H3: All else equal, employees' choice patterns will exhibit cross-attribute conditionality, such that the acceptability of secondary attributes (e.g., monitoring, support, cost-sharing) depends on their configuration with primary attributes (e.g., work location and salary), consistent with a needs–supplies fit evaluation of bundled work arrangements.⁶

Research design

Methodology: The choice-based conjoint approach

To investigate how employees evaluate and trade off features of remote and hybrid job arrangements, we employed a choice-based conjoint (CBC) design. Conjoint analysis is well-suited to studying complex workplace preferences because it asks respondents to choose between profiles that vary across multiple attributes, thereby simulating real-world decision-making (Green & Rao, 1971; Hainmueller et al., 2014). Unlike traditional surveys that evaluate one feature at a time, CBCs capture the relative importance of a set of attributes, willingness to accept trade-offs, and heterogeneity across respondents. This methodology originated in marketing research (Green & Rao, 1971) but has evolved through adaptive and choice-based methods, extending into fields such as economics, psychology, and increasingly information systems (Bajaj, 1999; Green et al., 2001; Schaupp & Bélanger, 2005; Keil & Tiwana, 2006; Bouwman et al., 2008; Giessmann & Stanoevska, 2012; Naous & Legner, 2021; for an interdisciplinary overview, see Agarwal et al., 2015).

The conjoint approach offers several advantages for studying remote work. First, it provides greater external validity than traditional survey questions. Employees rarely evaluate job characteristics in isolation; they assess bundled attributes, such as work location, salary, and monitoring, together. Conjoint analysis explicitly models these multi-attribute evaluations, which single-item surveys cannot achieve. Second, the forced-choice format mitigates social desirability bias, revealing implicit preferences that respondents might hesitate to state directly (Auspurg & Hinz, 2015; Bansak et al., 2019; Horiuchi et al., 2022). Third, the method provides ecologically valid insights into how employees resolve competing demands when forming judgments about job attractiveness.

At the same time, we acknowledge that conjoint analysis has limitations. It captures stated preferences in hypothetical scenarios that may differ from actual revealed choices in labor markets. For this reason, our design prioritizes interpretability and behavioral realism rather than prediction of specific market outcomes.

Attribute selection process

To examine how employees evaluate remote and hybrid job offers, we selected six core job attributes for inclusion in our conjoint experiment (see Table 1). Attribute selection was guided primarily by the needs–supplies dimension of person–organization (P–O) fit theory, which conceptualizes job attractiveness as a function of how organizational offerings align with employees' prioritized needs

⁶ Our hypotheses and design were preregistered and can be found in Appendix G. For clarity, in the main text we introduce three broader, composite hypotheses, while the preregistration lists six more specific ones. Appendix G explains the rationale for any deviations from the preregistration.

(Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, 2023). From this perspective, remote work arrangements constitute multi-attribute configurations in which employees assess whether bundles of features collectively satisfy needs related to autonomy, control, resources, fairness, and social connection.

Remote work is inherently multidimensional, combining structural, psychological, and technological elements. Digital infrastructures modularize job attributes—such as location, scheduling, monitoring, and support—into recombinable components. This modularity expands the feasible configuration space of work design and requires employees to evaluate trade-offs across interdependent features. Accordingly, we selected attributes that represent core need-relevant dimensions repeatedly identified in research on motivation, work design, and boundary management, while retaining a unified evaluative fit perspective.

First, work location and schedule flexibility capture autonomy over temporal and spatial boundaries. Autonomy is central to needs–supplies fit and is consistently linked to motivation and well-being in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci et al., 2017), the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000). In digitally mediated settings, control over where and when work is performed directly shapes employees' ability to manage work–life integration and self-regulation. These attributes, therefore, represent foundational signals of normative alignment between employee preferences and organizational expectations.

Second, supervision (monitoring practices) reflects the balance between autonomy and control enabled by digital systems. Surveillance research and IS studies on digital monitoring highlight how technology-mediated oversight can simultaneously support accountability and generate perceptions of intrusion (Kayas, 2023; Siegel et al., 2022). Within a needs–supplies framework, monitoring signals organizational norms regarding discretion, trust, and performance evaluation. Its acceptability is therefore likely to depend on how it is configured relative to other autonomy-enhancing attributes.

Third, salary and expense reimbursement capture material resource provision and fairness. These attributes reflect the economic dimension of needs–supplies alignment and are informed by JD–R theory and Equity Theory, which emphasize the role of resources and perceived fairness in shaping motivation and retention (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Prior labor market research demonstrates that employees evaluate salary jointly with non-monetary attributes, often accepting wage adjustments in exchange for valued flexibility (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Wiswall & Zafar, 2018). Including both salary and cost-sharing mechanisms allows us to model how monetary and non-monetary features interact within broader job bundles.

Finally, support resources (e.g., upskilling, mentoring, retreats, social events) represent relational and developmental investments. These features signal organizational values and cultural priorities, influencing perceptions of long-term growth and belonging. Research on remote work suggests that professional development opportunities and structured social interaction can partially compensate for reduced in-person contact (Yarberry & Sims, 2021; Adekoya et al., 2022). Within a fit framework, such attributes function as value-based signals that may reinforce or qualify perceptions of alignment under different work configurations.

Rather than treating these theoretical traditions as competing explanations, we use them to inform the substantive content of attributes within a unified evaluative model. Each selected attribute corresponds to a core need-relevant dimension—autonomy, control, resources, fairness, and relational connection—that employees must weigh when assessing digitally mediated work arrangements. By embedding these dimensions within a conjoint design, we can observe how employees reveal compensatory trade-offs across bundled job features, thereby operationalizing needs–supplies fit as a configuration-dependent evaluation.

Methodologically, the selected attributes meet key criteria for conjoint analysis: they are mutually exclusive, clearly distinguishable, realistic, and comprehensible to respondents. While remote work encompasses additional features (e.g., team structure or office layout), we prioritized parsimony and generalizability. The chosen attributes reflect salient and actionable dimensions of remote work design that organizations actively configure through digital systems and policy decisions.

Survey design and methodological approach

The survey consisted of two components: a choice-based conjoint (CBC) experiment and a follow-up questionnaire that collected demographic and background information. In the conjoint task, respondents evaluated pairs of hypothetical job offers defined by six attributes and selected their preferred option. Remote work is an arrangement in which tasks typically performed on-site are carried out from home using digital technologies.

The conjoint experiment was designed to strike a balance between statistical rigor and manageable respondent effort. Six attributes were included (Table 2), with two having five levels and four having three levels. Job profiles were constructed by randomly assigning one level per attribute. Each respondent evaluated ten choice sets, each consisting of two profiles. This design minimized cognitive burden while providing sufficient variation to estimate trade-offs across attributes.

Conjoint tasks were generated using a fractional factorial design that ensured near-orthogonality and level balance while reducing respondent burden. Following established best practices in discrete choice experiments (Molin, 2011; Hainmueller et al., 2014), attribute levels were rotated so that each appeared approximately equally as often, and randomization ensured uncorrelated estimation of attribute effects. With a sample of 627 respondents, the design enabled the detection of part-worth utility effects as small as 0.06 while maintaining a survey completion time of under 15 min. The full design matrix and task-generation codes are reported in Appendix B and are available in the replication materials.

Sample and recruitment

Participants were recruited through Fortright Access by Bovitz Inc., a professional, opt-in online panel provider, using a quota-based sampling strategy to approximate key demographic distributions within the U.S. full-time workforce. Inclusion criteria

Table 1
Overview of Job Attributes Used in the Conjoint Survey.

Job Attributes	Levels	Rationale	Theoretical framework or empirical rationale
Work location (Number of days worked from home/number of days worked onsite)	<i>Fully remote (5/0)</i> <i>Mostly remote (4/1)</i> <i>Remote-leaning (3/2)</i> <i>Office-leaning (2/3)</i> <i>Mostly office (1/4)</i>	Central axis of remote work design (P-O Fit Theory)	Remote work research typically tests three categories: fully remote, fully onsite, and hybrid (WFH Research, 2025; SWAA, 2025). Our design expands on this by capturing the full spectrum of modern remote arrangements, enabling analysis of whether marginal preferences for remote work vary across the distribution of office days. Prior studies show that employees often prefer a remote-leaning arrangement (three days working remotely and two days onsite) which offers an optimal balance of flexibility and workplace connection, reduces stress, and improves work–family balance (Barrero et al., 2021b; SWAA, 2025), and lowered employee quit rates by 35% among engineers, marketing, and finance professionals (Bloom et al., 2024). In contrast, both extremes – fully remote or fully onsite – can involve trade-offs such as isolation or rigidity (Ribeiro et al., 2024; Araki & Rappleye, 2024). To keep options intuitive and comparable, our survey frames remote work choices within a five-day workweek, allowing us to assess whether preferences peak at the midpoint and decline toward either extreme.
Salary (Net wage)	<i>Unchanged salary</i> <i>15% salary reduction (reflecting reduced commuting costs)</i> <i>15% salary increase (reflecting employer savings on office costs)</i>	Models trade-offs between monetary/non-monetary job characteristics (Job Demands-Resources Theory; Equity Theory)	Salary is a critical dimension for understanding trade-offs between monetary and non-monetary job features. Previous research shows that workers are often willing to accept reduced pay for remote work flexibility (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Barrero et al., 2021a; Moens et al., 2024). Average willingness-to-pay estimates range from 7 to 8% (Barrero et al., 2021a) to as high as 20% among parents with young children (ZipRecruiter, 2022). Moens et al. (2024) using nine levels ranging from 20% less to 20% more net wage found a 2.3 percentage-point trade-off in favor of remote work. Using three salary levels enables us to capture job–resource trade-offs while reflecting clear, realistic options. In contrast to continuous wage sliders employed in some experiments (e.g., Moens et al., 2024), this approach also helps minimize cognitive fatigue in conjoint experiment.
Expense Reimbursement (Reimbursement for home office costs)	<i>Employer-funded</i> <i>Employee-funded</i> <i>Government tax credit</i>	Captures fairness and resource provision (Job Demands-Resources Theory; Equity theory)	Providing financial support to remote workers is an essential element of sustainable work design. Expense reimbursement can range from no support to full cost coverage and may take several forms: a one-time equipment stipend (for desk, chair, and computer peripherals); a monthly allowance for utilities and internet (covering running costs but not equipment); comprehensive employer coverage (reimbursing both equipment and ongoing broadband/energy bills); or a government tax credit (offsetting costs through individual deductions or credits). While legal requirements vary, many jurisdictions now mandate partial reimbursement (Lebel & McDermott, 2023), and employee expectations are rising (Battisti et al., 2022). High-profile cases, such as the Amazon class-action lawsuit in California, illustrate the legal and reputational risks of under-supporting remote staff (Wiessner, 2023). Our study incorporates the three primary actors in cost-sharing – employers, employees, and the state – and examines whether such financial support enhances the job attractiveness.
Work Schedule Flexibility	<i>Flexible schedules</i> <i>Employer-set standard hours (9–5)</i> <i>Self-set fixed hours</i>	Key for autonomy and work-life balance (Boundary Theory; Self-Determination Theory)	Work schedule is defined as the capacity of employees to frequently or occasionally adjust their work start and end times, as measured by self-reported responses in the Leave and Job Flexibilities

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Job Attributes	Levels	Rationale	Theoretical framework or empirical rationale
Supervision (Work monitoring)	<i>No monitoring control</i> <i>Time-tracking control</i> <i>Performance control</i>	Measures employee preference for autonomy vs. control (Surveillance Studies)	Module of the American Time Use Survey (2017–2018) (Lofton et al., 2021). The three variations selected reflect contemporary flexibility regimes in which employees either design their own schedules entirely or work within consistent but self-determined boundaries. Prior research identifies flexible scheduling as a valuable job resource that can enhance well-being (Lu & Zhuang, 2023; Wang et al., 2024), improve work–life balance, and reduce family conflict (ILO, 2022). However, autonomy is not universally beneficial – employees subject to “always-on” expectations often experience elevated stress and burnout (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Hoornweg et al., 2017). Our survey measures not only whether flexibility is available, but also how it is implemented, enabling us to assess its relative importance compared to other job attributes. Limited supervision boosts autonomy and engagement (Shuang & Yumei, 2024), while formal controls like keystroke tracking or screen capture tools can support accountability but may feel intrusive (Katsabian, 2020; Samek Lodovici, 2021; Vitak & Zimmer, 2021). Bloom et al. (2024) suggest that, in a hybrid work environment within a tech company, employee performance can be assessed through measures such as biannual performance reviews, promotion outcomes, detailed performance evaluations, the volume of code written by software engineers, and self-reported productivity. Our study moves beyond the simplistic “trust versus control” dichotomy and company-specific metrics by defining monitoring methods along a continuum – from no monitoring, through time-based monitoring, to performance-based monitoring. This approach allows us to test whether minimal oversight is acceptable to employees while also reducing cognitive fatigue in the conjoint experiment.
Support Resources (Professional Development and Connection)	<i>Structured upskilling</i> <i>Mentoring</i> <i>Workplace social events</i> <i>Annual retreats</i> <i>Performance reward trips</i>	Tests developmental and relational investments (Job Demands-Resources Theory)	Data from the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA, 2025) indicate that one of the main benefits of working on employer premises is access to stronger professional development, learning, and mentoring opportunities, as well as increased social interaction with colleagues. Structured upskilling remains, valuable in remote work contexts, where virtual collaboration often demands specialized skills (Cherbonnier et al., 2024). However, some remote workers prefer self-directed learning over formal programs or certifications, which may reduce their interest in structured skill-building initiatives (Yarberry & Sims, 2021). Mentoring programs can also play a critical role, especially for remote employees who have fewer opportunities for in-person networking and guidance (Adekoya et al., 2022; Yarberry & Sims, 2021). In our study, we hold the intensity of support constant while varying its form, enabling us to rank which types of investment, ranging from skill development to social bonding and extrinsic incentives, are most valued by remote workers.

Source: own elaboration.

¹The attribute levels presented deviate slightly from the original questionnaire. These changes and rationale are detailed in Appendix G.

required respondents to be adults employed full-time (35 + hours per week) and based in the United States. A total of 627 respondents completed the survey between March 25 and March 30, 2022 (Table 3).

Although the sample is not nationally representative, it closely aligns with national benchmarks across key dimensions, including age, race, gender, and educational attainment among full-time workers (Appendix A). We compared our sample to benchmarks from

Table 2
Example of a Conjoint Survey.

Job Attributes	Job 1	Job 2
Work location	Remote-leaning (3/2)	Mostly remote (4/1)
Salary	15% salary increase (<i>reflecting employer savings on office costs</i>)	Unchanged salary
Expense Reimbursement	Employee-funded	Employer-funded
Work Schedule Flexibility	Self-set fixed hours	Flexible schedules
Supervision	Performance control	Time-tracking control
Support Resources	Performance reward trips	Structured upskilling

Q: At which job would you prefer to work?

- o Job 1.
- o Job 2.

Source: own elaboration.

the U.S. Department of Labor’s Current Population Survey (CPS) and the 2020 American National Election Study (ANES) survey for full-time workers.⁷

The purpose of this study is not to generate nationally generalizable descriptive statistics but rather to estimate treatment effects: how variations in job attributes affect remote work preferences. In such contexts, quota-based samples are acceptable and often preferred, particularly when subgroup variation does not distort treatment effects (Druckman & Kam, 2011).

The demographic questionnaire captured age, gender, education, income, household composition, contract type, and perceived job security, enabling contextualization of preferences and heterogeneity analysis (see Table 3).

Demographically, our sample aligns well with patterns observed in remote-eligible populations. Seventy percent of respondents identified as White, consistent with national data on knowledge workers. Approximately one-third of respondents held a four-year college degree – a key predictor of remote work eligibility (Barrero et al., 2023). Nearly three-quarters were aged 25–54, the age range most likely to engage in full-time work. Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported annual earnings between \$65,000 and \$120,000, while 36% reported earnings between \$30,000 and \$65,000. These distributions mirror labor market patterns among remote-capable roles.

We also collected data on political affiliation to contextualize potential ideological influences on preferences for remote work. A prior study by Vox and Data for Progress (2021) found that while remote work enjoys broad bipartisan support, Democrats tend to be more favorable toward its productivity and legitimacy. Our sample reflects this political distribution, with nearly half of the respondents identifying as Democrats.

Estimation strategy and analytical approach

To estimate the influence of remote and hybrid job features on employee preferences, we used marginal means (MM) as our primary analytical method. Marginal means provide intuitive, interpretable estimates of favorability for each attribute level by calculating the average probability that a profile with a given feature level would be selected by respondents, while holding all other features constant. This approach is especially useful when there is no clear theoretical baseline for comparison, as is the case for some of our attributes, such as support resources or expense reimbursement.

To analyze the data, we transformed the dataset so that each row represented a hypothetical job profile within a task. Given two profiles per forced-choice task and ten tasks per respondent, our sample of 627 respondents produced a total of 12,540 observations. Because each participant contributed multiple responses, we clustered standard errors at the respondent level to account for within-subject correlation.

Our model specification follows the form:

$$MM_{k,l} = \mathbb{E}[Y_i | A_k = l] \tag{1}$$

Here, Y_i is the binary outcome indicating whether a profile was selected (1) or not (0), A_k is attribute k , and l is the level of that attribute. In this forced-choice setting, a value of 0.5 represents random selection. Preferences are inferred from statistically significant deviations above or below this threshold: values above 0.5 indicate a preference for the level, values below suggest rejection, and those near 0.5 suggest neutrality or ambivalence.

To assess heterogeneity in preferences, we interacted attribute levels with individual-level characteristics (e.g., gender, education, political affiliation). These models follow the extended form:

$$MM_{k,l|Z=z} = \mathbb{E}[Y_i | A_k = l, Z = z] \tag{2}$$

⁷ We supplemented CPS data with the ANES to incorporate income and political affiliation, which CPS does not fully capture.

Table 3
Sample Characteristics (N = 627).

Socio-economic characteristics		Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Race/Ethnicity	White	442	70.5	70.5
	Black/African American	88	14.0	84.5
	Hispanic/Latinx	42	6.7	91.2
	Asian/Pacific Islander	28	4.5	95.7
	American Indian/Alaska Native	2	0.3	96.0
	Two or more races	22	3.5	99.5
	Other	3	0.5	100.0
Age	18–24	27	4.4	4.4
	25–54	471	74.7	79.1
	55+	129	20.9	100.0
Gender	Male	336	53.5	53.5
	Female	286	45.7	99.2
Education	Non-binary	5	0.8	100.0
	< High school	3	0.5	0.5
	High school graduate	112	17.9	18.4
	Some college, no degree	108	17.2	35.6
	2-year degree	92	14.7	50.2
	4-year degree	207	33.0	83.2
	Postgraduate degree	105	16.7	100.0
Income	< \$30,000	60	9.6	9.6
	\$30,000–64,999	227	36.2	45.8
	\$65,000–119,999	240	38.3	84.1
	≥\$120,000	100	15.9	100.0
Employment contract ¹	Full-time (permanent)	604	96.3	96.3
	Full-time (temporary)	23	3.7	3.7
Perceived job security (How likely is it that you will lose your job in the next 12 months?)	Not at all likely	269	42.9	42.9
	Not very likely	296	47.2	90.1
	Quite likely	38	6.1	96.2
	Very likely	24	3.8	100
Partisanship	Democrat	308	49.1	49.1
	Independent	166	26.5	75.6
	Republican	153	24.4	100.0

Source: own elaboration.

¹Our sample was targeted toward full-time employees.

Where Z is a moderating variable set to the value z. These interaction models allow us to evaluate whether certain job features are more or less appealing to specific subgroups, thereby testing for conditional effects.

Robustness of analytical approach

Conjoint designs are generally recognized for their validity (Hainmueller et al., 2015; Auerbach & Thachil, 2018) and robustness in research (Bansak et al., 2019), but they require careful analysis. We made two key analytical adjustments to ensure that the results presented are robust and conservative. First, as recommended by Clayton et al. (2023), we excluded tied responses—instances in which attribute levels between any profiles were identical during a given forced choice task—as these violate core assumptions of CBC and introduce random noise into the estimation process. Removing the tied attribute levels from our models allows us to conduct analyses that adhere more strictly to the design assumptions. Second, to reduce the risk of false positives arising from multiple comparisons,⁸ we applied adaptive shrinkage (ASh) corrections to our estimates, following best practices suggested by Liu and Shiraito (2023). ASh adjusts p-values to minimize both Type I and Type II errors in high-dimensional hypothesis testing, making it especially suitable for conjoint analysis. This adjustment increases our standard errors, providing more conservative estimates of our results.

We present these more conservative results below. Figs. 1 and 2, as well as Tables 4 and 5, present results after both adjustment procedures have been applied. The unadjusted marginal means, along with corresponding confidence intervals and significance levels, are presented in Appendix D.⁹ All statistical tests are two-tailed. This methodological approach ensures that our findings are both statistically sound and interpretable, offering clear insights into how employees evaluate remote and hybrid work configurations through structured trade-offs.

⁸ Also referred to as Multiple Hypothesis Testing.

⁹ The overall results remain substantively similar. However, the unadjusted results including some statistically significant findings are not discussed in the main text, as they were rendered statistically insignificant after our robustness adjustment.

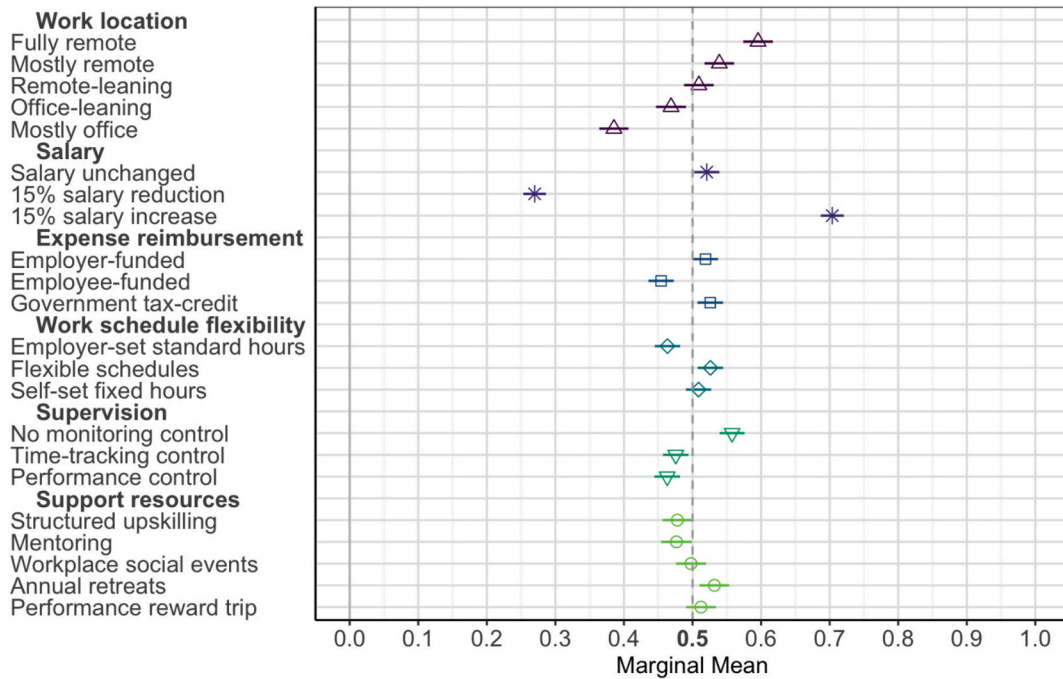


Fig. 1. Marginal Mean Preferences of Workplace Attributes in the Remote Work Conjoint Experiment (Forced Choice Outcome). Notes: Marginal mean probabilities of job acceptance (0–1) across attribute levels. Dots indicate estimated marginal means; horizontal bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Refer to Table 5 for detailed estimates, including confidence intervals and p-values, and Appendix F for figures with point estimate and confidence interval labels. Source: own elaboration.

Results

Main results

We analyzed employees’ evaluations of remote and hybrid job offers using marginal means derived from the conjoint experiment. Marginal means capture the average probability that a job profile containing a given attribute level is chosen across all possible attribute combinations, providing an intuitive representation of overall preference patterns. Table 4 reports the marginal means for each attribute level, and Fig. 1 visualizes these results.

Work location and salary as primary anchors (H1)

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, employees showed higher choice probabilities for job bundles that offered more remote work options. This pattern indicates that work location functions as a primary anchor or reference dimension in employees’ job evaluations. As shown in Table 4 and Fig. 1, fully remote work is evaluated most favorably (MM = 0.596, $p < 0.001$), followed by mostly remote work (MM = 0.539, $p < 0.001$). By contrast, preferences decline sharply as office requirements increase. Respondents are ambivalent toward remote-leaning roles with two in-office days (MM = 0.509, $p \geq 0.05$), while office-leaning (MM = 0.469, $p < 0.01$) and mostly office roles (MM = 0.385, $p < 0.001$) fall well below the choice threshold. This pattern reveals diminishing marginal tolerance for office presence: limited office requirements are tolerated, but office-heavy configurations consistently fall below the choice threshold across bundles.

Salary exerts a similarly strong effect on job choice. A 15% salary increase substantially raises job acceptability (MM = 0.704, $p < 0.001$), whereas a 15% decrease is strongly rejected (MM = 0.270, $p < 0.001$). Notably, unchanged salaries remained acceptable on average (MM = 0.521, $p < 0.05$), particularly when paired with a high degree of remote work. Together, these results show that work location and salary serve as primary anchors for employees’ evaluations of remote and hybrid work arrangements.

Limits of monetary substitution for office requirements (H2)

In line with Hypothesis 2, job bundles characterized by greater office requirements were less likely to be chosen, reflecting a misalignment with employees’ prioritized preferences, and salary premiums only partially offset this misfit. Conditional analyses reported in Table 5 and illustrated in Fig. 2 show that while a 15% salary increase modestly improved the attractiveness of hybrid jobs,

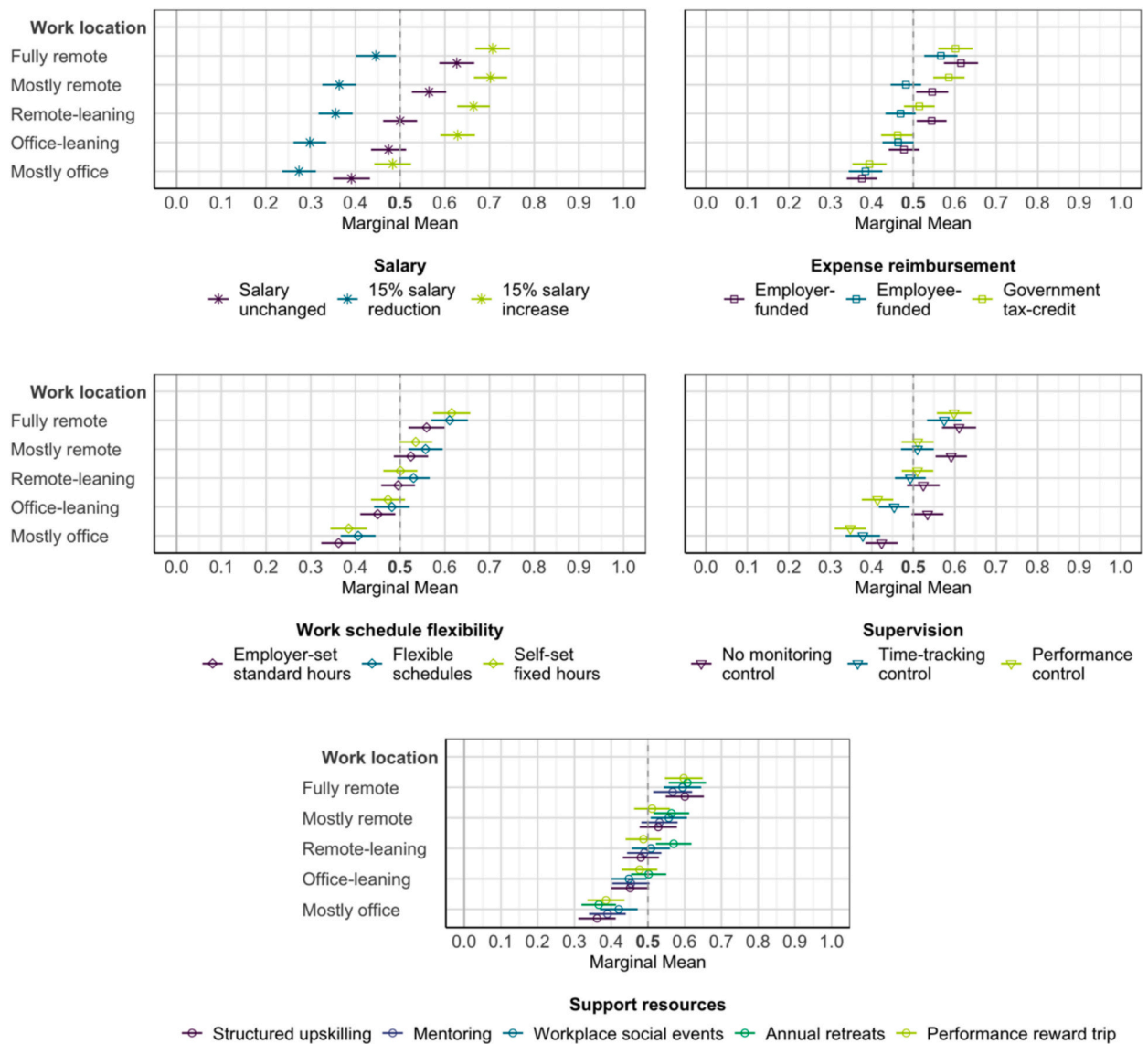


Fig. 2. Conditional Work Location Preferences. **Notes:** Each figure plots the marginal means of remote workdays (x-axis) conditional upon a given workplace attribute (color), with the y-axis indicating the number of remote workdays included in the profile. Conditional marginal mean probabilities of job acceptance (0–1) by work location, shown across attribute bundles. Colors represent different levels of the conditioning attribute. Error bars represent ± standard error. Refer to Table 6 for full results and Appendix F for figures with point estimate and confidence interval labels. Source: own elaboration.

it did not fundamentally alter their evaluation. Even with a 15% salary premium, roles requiring four or more days in the office per week remained below the 0.5 acceptable threshold (mostly office with salary increase: MM = 0.483). Conversely, salary reductions sharply reduced the attractiveness of otherwise desirable remote-heavy work. These asymmetric effects indicate that salary can mitigate—but not reverse—the perceived loss of location-based autonomy associated with increased office presence, providing partial support for Hypothesis 2.

Compensatory trade-offs across attribute bundles (H3)

Support for Hypothesis 3 emerges from the conditional preference patterns across secondary job attributes, which reveal compensatory decision-making rather than additive attribute effects. Employees’ evaluations depended on how features were bundled rather than on the isolated presence of any single attribute. For example, expense reimbursement modestly increased the attractiveness

Table 4
Marginal Mean Preferences for Workplace Attributes.

Attribute	Level	Marginal Mean (MM)	95% CI	p-value
Work location	Fully remote	0.596	[0.574, 0.617]	p < 0.001
	Mostly remote	0.539	[0.517, 0.561]	p < 0.001
	Remote-leaning	0.509	[0.488, 0.531]	n.s.
	Office-leaning	0.469	[0.447, 0.491]	p < 0.01
	Mostly office	0.385	[0.364, 0.407]	p < 0.001
Salary	Salary unchanged	0.521	[0.502, 0.539]	p < 0.05
	15% salary reduction	0.270	[0.253, 0.286]	p < 0.001
	15% salary increase	0.704	[0.687, 0.721]	p < 0.001
Expense reimbursement	Employer-funded	0.519	[0.501, 0.537]	p < 0.05
	Employee-funded	0.454	[0.436, 0.473]	p < 0.001
	Government tax-credit	0.526	[0.507, 0.544]	p < 0.01
Work schedule flexibility	Employer-set standard hours	0.463	[0.445, 0.482]	p < 0.001
	Flexible schedules	0.526	[0.508, 0.545]	p < 0.01
	Self-set fixed hours	0.509	[0.49, 0.527]	n.s.
Supervision	No monitoring control	0.558	[0.539, 0.576]	p < 0.001
	Time-tracking control	0.476	[0.457, 0.494]	p < 0.05
	Performance control	0.463	[0.444, 0.482]	p < 0.001
Support resources	Structured upskilling	0.478	[0.456, 0.5]	p < 0.05
	Mentoring	0.477	[0.454, 0.499]	p < 0.05
	Workplace social events	0.498	[0.476, 0.52]	n.s.
	Annual retreats	0.532	[0.51, 0.554]	p < 0.01
	Performance reward trip	0.512	[0.491, 0.534]	n.s.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 5
Conditional Preferences.

Attribute	Level	Fully remote	Mostly remote	Remote-leaning	Office-leaning	Mostly office
Salary	Salary unchanged	0.627 ± 0.039	0.565 ± 0.038	0.500 ± 0.038	0.474 ± 0.039	0.391 ± 0.041
	15% salary reduction	0.446 ± 0.045	0.364 ± 0.038	0.356 ± 0.038	0.298 ± 0.037	0.274 ± 0.038
	15% salary increase	0.707 ± 0.039	0.702 ± 0.037	0.664 ± 0.037	0.629 ± 0.039	0.483 ± 0.041
Expense reimbursement	Government tax-credit	0.602 ± 0.042	0.586 ± 0.038	0.515 ± 0.037	0.462 ± 0.040	0.394 ± 0.041
	Employee-funded	0.566 ± 0.040	0.482 ± 0.037	0.469 ± 0.036	0.463 ± 0.038	0.385 ± 0.041
	Employer-funded	0.615 ± 0.041	0.546 ± 0.039	0.544 ± 0.036	0.478 ± 0.037	0.376 ± 0.037
Work schedule flexibility	Self-set fixed hours	0.615 ± 0.042	0.535 ± 0.037	0.500 ± 0.038	0.473 ± 0.038	0.385 ± 0.041
	Flexible schedules	0.611 ± 0.041	0.557 ± 0.038	0.530 ± 0.036	0.481 ± 0.040	0.406 ± 0.039
	Employer-set standard hours	0.559 ± 0.040	0.524 ± 0.038	0.495 ± 0.038	0.450 ± 0.039	0.362 ± 0.039
Supervision	Performance control	0.598 ± 0.042	0.510 ± 0.039	0.510 ± 0.038	0.414 ± 0.038	0.348 ± 0.038
	Time-tracking control	0.575 ± 0.042	0.510 ± 0.039	0.493 ± 0.037	0.454 ± 0.037	0.378 ± 0.042
	No monitoring control	0.610 ± 0.041	0.591 ± 0.038	0.524 ± 0.039	0.534 ± 0.038	0.424 ± 0.039
Support resources	Performance reward trip	0.597 ± 0.051	0.511 ± 0.048	0.488 ± 0.048	0.477 ± 0.048	0.386 ± 0.051
	Annual retreats	0.607 ± 0.051	0.564 ± 0.048	0.570 ± 0.048	0.502 ± 0.048	0.366 ± 0.047
	Workplace social events	0.594 ± 0.051	0.557 ± 0.049	0.508 ± 0.052	0.448 ± 0.048	0.421 ± 0.051
	Mentoring	0.567 ± 0.053	0.531 ± 0.049	0.490 ± 0.047	0.454 ± 0.051	0.390 ± 0.050
	Structured upskilling	0.601 ± 0.052	0.528 ± 0.051	0.481 ± 0.049	0.452 ± 0.051	0.361 ± 0.051

Notes: Values represent marginal means (MMs) with ± standard error. Values that do not intersect with $\bar{x} = 0.5$ are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, two-tailed level.

Source: own elaboration.

of fully remote jobs when funded by employers (MM = 0.519, $p < 0.05$) or government tax credits (MM = 0.526, $p < 0.01$) but had negligible effects in hybrid or office-based configurations. Similarly, flexible schedules enhanced the attractiveness of remote-heavy jobs (MM = 0.526, $p < 0.01$) but did not compensate for extensive office requirements. In contrast, employer-set standard hours were consistently rejected (MM = 0.463, $p < 0.001$).

Monitoring practices further illustrate this compensatory logic. At the aggregate level, profiles without monitoring were favored (MM = 0.558, $p < 0.001$), while time-based (MM = 0.476, $p < 0.05$) and performance-based monitoring (MM = 0.463, $p < 0.001$) were generally disfavored (Table 4). However, conditional analyses show that performance-based monitoring became acceptable when paired with full remote work (MM = 0.598), crossing the choice threshold in fully remote bundles (Fig. 2). In contrast, monitoring was consistently rejected in office-heavy roles. These patterns demonstrate that employees evaluate monitoring as a negotiated exchange rather than a uniformly negative feature, consistent with a needs-supplies fit evaluation of bundled attributes enacted through compensatory trade-offs, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3.

Support resources played a more limited, yet still revealing, role in shaping job attractiveness. Although these features are commonly framed by employers as workplace benefits, their influence on employee choice was modest. Annual retreats slightly

increased job attractiveness ($MM = 0.532, p < 0.01$), especially in fully remote configurations, suggesting that occasional in-person interaction can complement high levels of autonomy. By contrast, mentoring and structured upskilling had largely neutral or marginally negative effects across job bundles, indicating that such supports do not universally enhance perceived job value. In office-heavy roles, support mechanisms failed to meaningfully shift evaluations altogether. Overall, these patterns suggest that job attractiveness is driven less by the accumulation of nominal benefits than by how core priorities—particularly location-based autonomy and salary—are balanced against the sacrifices employees are willing to accept within a given work arrangement.

Robustness checks

In addition to the conservative analytical adjustments described above, such as adjusting p-values to account for multiple comparisons (adjusted and unadjusted results presented in Appendix D), we conducted a series of additional checks to assess the stability of our substantive findings across alternative specifications and samples.

First, we test heterogeneity of the average treatment effects by sociodemographic characteristics. In Appendix C, we present these subgroup analyses by respondents' race, age group, gender, annual household income, perceived job security, and partisanship. The overall results are robust to these subgroup analyses.

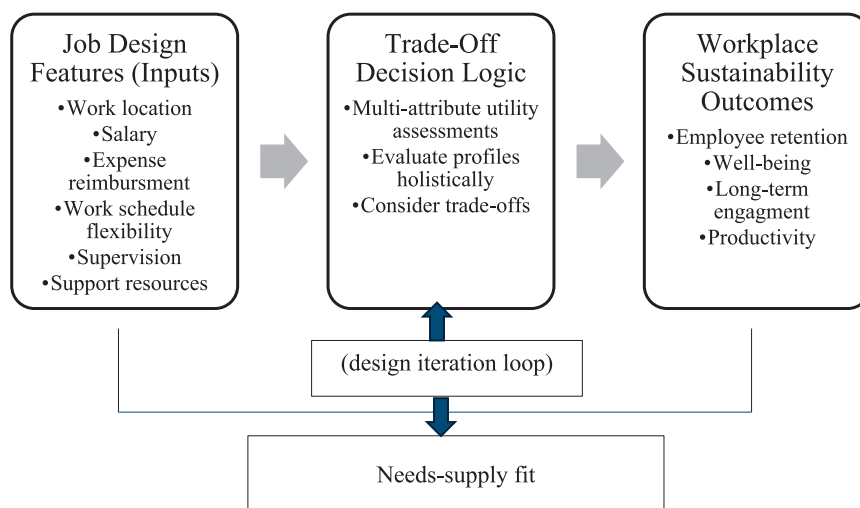
Second, we test the sensitivity of the results to design specifications, presented in Appendix E. First, we test whether respondents were biased to systematically select one profile over another (e.g., the profile on the right versus the profile on the left). Second, we test whether there was attrition in respondent participation as they progressed through the task iterations. In both cases, we see no statistically significant differences, indicating that the results were not biased by the conjoint design.

Discussion and conclusion

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to IS research on digital work by advancing a preference-based perspective on when employees accept remote and hybrid work arrangements, thereby increasing the likelihood that these configurations persist over time. Prior research has made substantial progress in identifying structural and technological factors that support productivity and well-being in remote work, emphasizing autonomy, job design, leadership practices, and digital infrastructures (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2008, 2010; Parker et al., 2017; Richards, 2022; Asatiani & Norström, 2023). While this work provides important guidance on how remote work can be organized, it offers more limited insight into why formally well-designed hybrid arrangements may still encounter resistance, or why financial and technological incentives often exhibit diminishing returns when work location autonomy is constrained. Our findings address this limitation by showing that employee acceptance depends less on individual design features in isolation than on how employees evaluate configurations of interdependent job attributes through compensatory trade-offs.

By integrating insights from discrete-choice research on work preferences (Mas & Pallais, 2017; Wiswall & Zafar, 2018; Non et al., 2022; Maestas et al., 2023; Lewandowski et al., 2023; Munnich et al., 2025) with IS research on monitoring, control, and digital work design (Jarvenpaa et al., 2004; Stray & Moe, 2020; Schubert & Williams, 2022; Siegel et al., 2022), this study demonstrates that employees' evaluations of remote and hybrid work arrangements are fundamentally conditional rather than additive. Attributes such as monitoring intensity, salary, or organizational support do not exert uniform effects across contexts; instead, their influence depends on how they are bundled relative to employees' prioritized needs. This configurational logic helps reconcile mixed findings in earlier



Scheme 1. Employee-Centered Trade-Offs in Sustainable Remote Work Design. Source: own elaboration.

research by explaining why similar design elements enhance acceptance in some arrangements but undermine it in others.

The study further advances person–organization (P–O) fit theory by clarifying how fit is constructed and evaluated in digitally mediated and spatially flexible work contexts. Traditional P–O fit research has emphasized alignment between employees’ values, beliefs, and preferences and organizational culture, values, and norms, but empirical work has often treated these dimensions in aggregate and measured fit retrospectively (Edwards, 1991; Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Judge & Kristof-Brown, 2004; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Erdogan & Bauer, 2005). As a result, less is known about how employees actively form fit judgments when evaluating alternative work arrangements that differ simultaneously across multiple job attributes.

As summarized in Scheme 1 and illustrated in Fig. 3, the job attributes examined in this study can be interpreted as signaling distinct dimensions of P–O fit. Attributes related to work location, scheduling, and supervision primarily signal organizational norms that shape expectations regarding autonomy, control, and discretion. Salary, expense reimbursement, and support resources signal organizational values, indicating what the organization prioritizes and materially rewards. At a deeper level, social and relational features, such as retreats or in-person events, are more closely associated with organizational culture and shared meaning. Importantly, our findings indicate that these dimensions do not contribute equally to employees’ evaluations: alignment with norms around autonomy and flexibility appears particularly salient, value-based signals play a conditional role, and cultural features become more influential primarily in fully remote configurations.

Employees’ fit judgments are guided by a hierarchy of signals that is sensitive to the structural context of work. Signals related to autonomy and flexibility consistently carry the greatest weight, likely because they define the basic conditions under which work is organized and constrain both short-term experiences and long-term opportunities. These normative cues reduce fundamental uncertainty about control, temporal boundaries, and discretion, making them particularly diagnostic of P–O fit across remote and hybrid arrangements.

Value-based signals, such as compensation structures and organizational support resources, exert a more conditional influence.

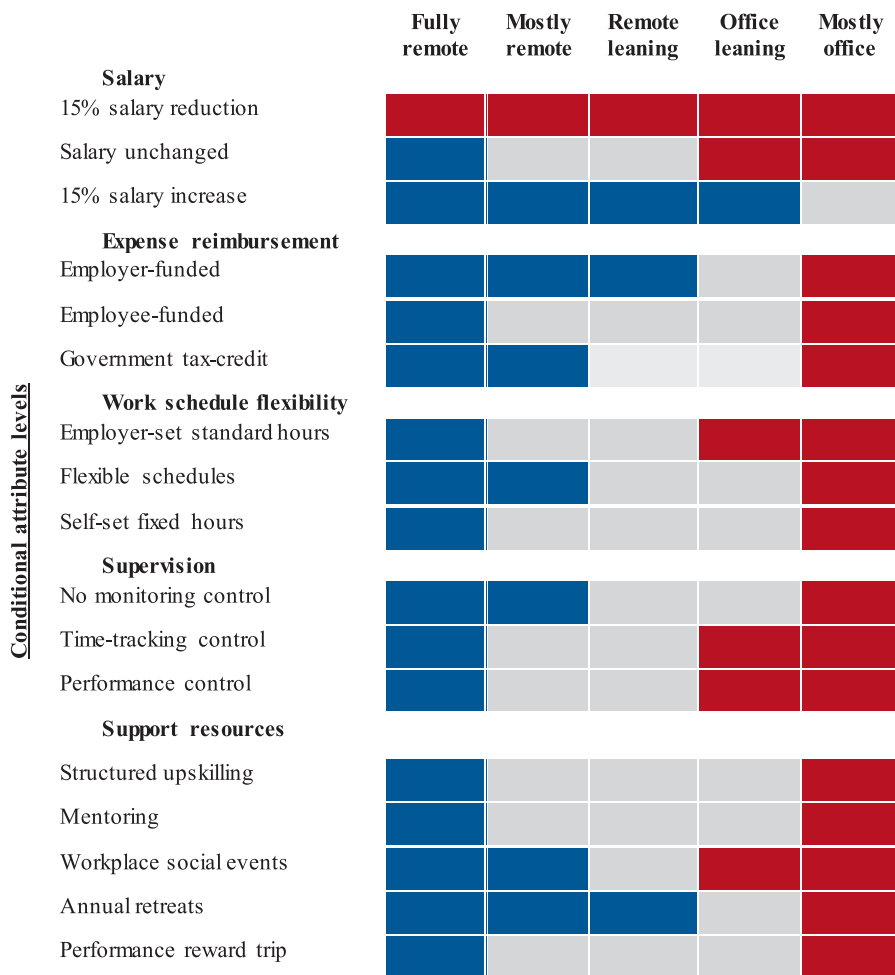


Fig. 3. Trade-Off Logic in Remote Work Settings. **Note:** Blue indicates preferred job attributes, red indicates non-preferred attributes, and grey reflects ambivalent or neutral evaluations. Source: own elaboration. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

Their importance increases when normative alignment is already established, suggesting that employees interpret material investments as meaningful indicators of organizational values primarily once baseline expectations regarding autonomy and flexibility are met. In this sense, value signals operate less as primary drivers of fit perceptions and more as reinforcing or qualifying cues within a given normative framework.

By contrast, cultural and relational signals gain salience primarily in fully remote configurations, where opportunities for informal interaction and everyday sensemaking are structurally limited. Under these conditions, signals of organizational culture become more consequential for evaluating anticipated social integration and belonging, compensating for the reduced visibility of interpersonal dynamics. This pattern highlights that cultural fit is not uniformly weighted but becomes particularly salient when physical co-presence is absent.

Overall, these findings suggest that P–O fit in digitally mediated work settings is not a static or holistic state of congruence, but a configuration-dependent evaluation shaped by how different organizational signals are interpreted under specific work arrangements. Rather than proposing a new typology of needs–supplies fit, this study advances a preference-based view in which fit emerges through compensatory judgments across partially misaligned attributes (Patsfall & Feimer, 1985; Saks & Ashforth, 1997), extending P–O fit theory to contexts characterized by flexibility, hybridity, and digital mediation.

Finally, the study contributes to IS research on digital affordances and control by showing that employees interpret digital systems relationally, in conjunction with broader configurations of autonomy, flexibility, and organizational expectations. Prior work has examined how digital tools support coordination, monitoring, boundary management, and social interaction in remote work settings (Koruca et al., 2023; Koch & Denner, 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Begemann et al., 2024; Raj et al., 2023). Our findings suggest that such tools contribute to acceptance—and by extension, to the sustainability of remote and hybrid arrangements—only insofar as they align with employees' preference structures and trade-off logic.

Managerial implications

Our findings suggest that digital systems and workplace policies should be understood as structuring the feasible design space within which employees evaluate work arrangements. Their effectiveness depends less on the presence of individual features than on how those features are bundled and perceived by employees. From this perspective, the durability of remote and hybrid work arrangements is not primarily a matter of technology adoption or policy enforcement, but of designing configurations that employees perceive as acceptable trade-offs.

A central implication is that hybrid work arrangements should be designed around employee preferences rather than imposed as uniform mandates. Consistent with recent evidence documenting strong and persistent demand for remote and hybrid work (Barrero et al., 2021b; SWAA, 2025), employees in our study consistently favored remote-heavy work, with job attractiveness declining sharply as mandated office presence increased. Even substantial salary premiums were insufficient to make office-heavy work broadly acceptable. This pattern indicates that location-based autonomy is not easily substitutable: employees may tolerate monitoring or modest cost-sharing when it preserves a higher degree of remote work, but they resist rigid scheduling when remote work is already constrained. Hybrid policies that allow meaningful differentiation—rather than standardized return-to-office rules—are therefore more likely to gain acceptance and persist over time.

A second implication concerns how organizations conceptualize wage policy. Echoing findings from labor market research and industry reports (Barrero et al., 2021b; ZipRecruiter, 2022; Colonnelli et al., 2023), our results indicate that remote work itself is a valued non-monetary benefit. Many employees preferred fully remote jobs at unchanged pay—or even with moderate expense-sharing—over hybrid jobs that offered salary increases. In digitally mediated work contexts, remote work operates as a valued non-monetary benefit alongside pay, support, and control mechanisms. Managers should therefore design salary packages holistically, combining both monetary and non-monetary elements, rather than relying solely on financial incentives to offset reduced location-based autonomy.

Finally, our findings have implications for the design and deployment of digital monitoring and control systems. Prior research on trust, leadership, and control in virtual environments has emphasized the risks associated with perceived surveillance (Jarvenpaa et al., 2004; Zakaria & Yusof, 2020; Antonacopoulou & Georgiadou, 2021; Kirchner et al., 2021; Khan, 2021). Our study adds nuance by showing that monitoring is not categorically rejected. Instead, its acceptance depends on how it is embedded within a broader configuration of work attributes. Performance-based monitoring is tolerated in fully remote jobs but rejected in hybrid or office-heavy arrangements. Managers should therefore frame monitoring tools as part of a negotiated balance between oversight and task autonomy, rather than as unilateral mechanisms of control.

Overall, these implications shift the IS strategy conversation from technology adoption to preference alignment. Fig. 3 provides a practical lens for understanding how employees evaluate bundled work arrangements, illustrating how work location, compensation (salary and expense reimbursement), monitoring, and support interact in shaping job acceptance. Organizations that design digital work systems as integrated configurations—aligned with employees' trade-off logic—are more likely to implement remote and hybrid arrangements that are not only technically feasible, but also behaviorally sustainable.

Limitations and directions for future research

As with any study, our approach has limitations that also open productive avenues for future information systems research. First, our sample consists of U.S.-based full-time employees, which limits direct generalizability to other institutional and cultural contexts. From an IS perspective, this is particularly relevant because digital work infrastructures are embedded within national labor

regulations, cultural norms, and organizational governance structures. The way digitally mediated work configurations are interpreted—and the trade-offs employees are willing to accept—may differ in institutional environments characterized by stronger employment protections, different cultural orientations toward flexibility and control, or distinct regulatory frameworks governing digital monitoring. Comparative cross-national research would therefore enrich IS scholarship by examining how digitally structured work configurations interact with institutional environments to shape preference alignment and sustainability.

Second, while conjoint analysis provides a behaviorally grounded method for modeling multi-attribute evaluations, it captures stated preferences in structured, hypothetical scenarios rather than observed behavior in live digital systems. This distinction is particularly important for IS research, where system use unfolds over time and is shaped by feedback loops, adaptation, and emergent practices. Although our design enables robust estimation of conditional trade-offs across attributes, it does not fully capture dynamic system interactions or higher-order dependencies that may arise in real organizational settings. Future research could integrate field experiments, system log data, or longitudinal administrative records to examine how digitally mediated work configurations are enacted, adjusted, and stabilized over time.

Third, our attribute set was necessarily limited to six core dimensions to balance conceptual breadth with respondents' cognitive load. While these attributes capture central features of remote and hybrid work arrangements—such as work location, monitoring, scheduling, compensation, and support—they do not exhaust the broader ecosystem of digitally mediated work. Information systems increasingly embed more granular, technology-specific features, including AI-assisted monitoring, algorithmic task allocation, platform-based coordination, collaborative analytics dashboards, and adaptive scheduling systems. These system-level affordances may introduce new forms of transparency, control, autonomy, or inequality that shape employees' evaluative logic in ways not fully captured in the present design.

At the same time, this limitation underscores the importance of our findings for IS scholarship. Digitally mediated work differs from traditional work design because information systems expand the feasible configuration space of job attributes. As digital infrastructures render work arrangements modular and recombinable, employees are increasingly confronted with complex bundles of system-enabled features. Our study provides an initial behavioral foundation for understanding how such configurations are evaluated. Future IS research can build on this foundation by examining more technologically fine-grained configurations and by investigating how specific digital affordances reshape employees' trade-off structures and perceptions of fit.

Finally, the temporal context of our data collection warrants consideration. Data were collected in March 2022, during a transitional period in which remote and hybrid arrangements were still influenced by pandemic-era practices. Preferences observed during this period may not fully reflect post-normalization equilibrium conditions. From an IS perspective, this highlights the need for longitudinal research examining how evaluative logics evolve as digital work systems stabilize, mature, and become institutionalized. As organizations continue to refine digital coordination tools, monitoring systems, and hybrid policies, employees' trade-off thresholds may shift accordingly. Understanding these dynamic adjustments represents an important direction for future research on the sustainability of digitally mediated work.

Conclusion

This study suggests that the sustainability of remote and hybrid work is best understood as a co-produced outcome: enabled by digital infrastructures and organizational design choices yet ultimately shaped by employees' acceptance of the trade-offs those arrangements entail. Rather than treating sustainability as a fixed property of work arrangements or as an outcome that can be inferred directly from formal design, we conceptualize it as a preference-based phenomenon grounded in employees' evaluative and trade-off logic. Because sustainability is observable only longitudinally, we model employee acceptance and preference alignment as necessary behavioral preconditions for the persistence of digitally mediated work configurations. From this perspective, digitally mediated work configurations are sustained not simply because they are technically feasible, but because they fall within employees' acceptable trade-off thresholds. Future research can build on this view by examining how such configurations evolve and how organizations can design digitally supported work systems that are both structurally viable and behaviorally aligned.

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Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

While preparing this work, the author(s) used Grammarly and [Chatgpt.com](https://www.chatgpt.com) to proofread this text. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and took (s) full responsibility for the publication's content.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Beata Woźniak-Jęchorek: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project

administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Amanda Sahar d'Urso**: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Chloe Nicol Thurston**: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Megha Patnaik**: Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2026.101970>.

Data availability

Replication materials—including the survey instrument, data, and analysis code—which are deposited in the Harvard Dataverse (Woźniak-Jechorek, Beata; D'Urso, Amanda Sahar; Thurston, Chloe; Patnaik, Megha, 2026, Replication Data for: Understanding Employee Trade-Offs in Remote Work: Toward More Sustainable Workplace Design, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/OHIKOR>).

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