

Flexible Work Practices and Organizational Performance in the IT Industry: An Integrated Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Flexible work practices (FWPs) have moved from the periphery of human resource policy to the centre of strategic decision-making in the global IT industry. Yet, their consequences for organizational performance remain contested. Purpose: This conceptual paper develops an integrated cross-level framework explaining when, why, and through which mechanisms FWPs translate into organizational performance in IT firms. Approach: Drawing on Conservation of Resources theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, Social Exchange Theory, and Boundary Theory, the paper synthesizes seminal and recent (2019–2025) evidence through thematic and critical analysis. Key conceptual argument: The framework proposes that dual flexibility (combined time and place discretion) generates resource gains operating through four mediating mechanisms — job autonomy and work–life balance, work engagement, knowledge sharing and collaboration quality, and affective commitment — to shape five dimensions of IT organizational performance, bounded by four moderators (voluntariness, digital collaboration maturity, supervisory support, task interdependence) and an inverted-U dose logic. Theoretical contribution: The paper integrates four theories across individual and organizational levels, reframing contradictory evidence on the FWP–performance link as conditional rather than conflicting. Practical implications: The framework guides IT managers in designing flexibility as a system — pairing discretion with digital infrastructure, leader capability, and employee choice — rather than as a standalone policy.

Keywords: flexible work practices; hybrid work; organizational performance; IT industry; work engagement; conceptual framework

1. Introduction

Flexible work has shifted from an employee perk to a core feature of labour markets in knowledge-intensive industries. In the United Kingdom, 91 per cent of employers now offer some form of flexible working, 74 per cent operate hybrid arrangements, and 61 per cent regard advertising flexibility as important for attracting talent amid skills shortages; three per cent of employees — approximately 1.1 million workers — left a job in the past year because flexibility was unavailable (CIPD, 2025). In the information technology (IT) industry, characterized by digitizable tasks, globally distributed teams, and chronic competition for scarce digital talent, flexible work practices (FWPs) have become a strategic instrument rather than a welfare provision.

The contemporary transformation is the normalization of hybrid models. The largest randomized field experiment to date, conducted with 1,612 employees of a large technology firm, shows that a hybrid

schedule of two home days per week reduced resignations by approximately one-third without damaging performance evaluations or promotion outcomes (Bloom, Han, & Liang, 2024). Yet the same evidence base shows employers divided on productivity — 41 per cent report improvement under hybrid working and 16 per cent report decline (CIPD, 2025) — alongside perceived costs to team leadership, culture, and connection to organizational purpose (CIPD, 2025). Flexible work in IT is therefore best understood as a strategic tension between individual-level gains and collective coordination challenges.

Scholars have investigated FWP for four decades. Foundational meta-analyses established that telecommuting improves job satisfaction, perceived autonomy, and supervisor-rated performance, with weaker effects on work–family conflict (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999); recent meta-analyses confirm benefits for commitment, work–life balance, and health (Shifrin & Michel, 2022), while the most comprehensive synthesis to date — 113 studies and 88,618 participants — finds FWAs unrelated to behavioural outcomes except when time and place flexibility are combined (Harrop, Jiang, & Overall, 2025). Post-pandemic work-design research similarly shows that remote work effectiveness depends on the configuration of job resources and demands rather than location per se (Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021).

Four limitations persist. First, outcomes are overwhelmingly individual — satisfaction, well-being, turnover intention — while organizational-level outcomes remain under-theorized (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; Soga, Bolade-Ogunfodun, Mariani, Nasr, & Laker, 2022). Second, findings contradict: causal evidence shows hybrid work retention-positive and performance-neutral (Bloom et al., 2024), even as IT personnel data show falling output per hour under work-from-home (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2023). Third, documented downsides — work intensification (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), professional isolation (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008), boundary erosion (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013), and siloed collaboration networks (Yang et al., 2022) — are rarely integrated into performance models. Fourth, curvilinear evidence suggests an "optimal dose" of flexibility beyond which support, justice, and commitment deteriorate (Economics, 2025).

No single theory spans this gap. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory explains flexibility as a conditional resource (Hobfoll, 1989) but not its organizational aggregation; the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model supplies a resource–engagement–performance pathway (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) but treats engagement as an endpoint; Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains reciprocity-driven commitment (Blau, 1964) but not performance mechanics; Boundary Theory explains divergent individual responses (Ashforth, Kreiner, Fugate, & Johnson, 2000) but offers no organizational outcome. This paper integrates the four into a single cross-level chain.

The paper therefore develops the Flexible Work Practices–Organizational Performance (FWP–OP) framework linking FWP configurations to multi-dimensional IT organizational performance through four mediating mechanisms and four boundary conditions, derives eight testable propositions, and specifies a mixed-method SEM/PLS-SEM validation agenda. The remainder proceeds as follows: problem and objectives; thematic literature review; theoretical foundations; synthesis and gaps; framework and propositions; contributions and implications; proposed empirical validation and research agenda; limitations and conclusions.

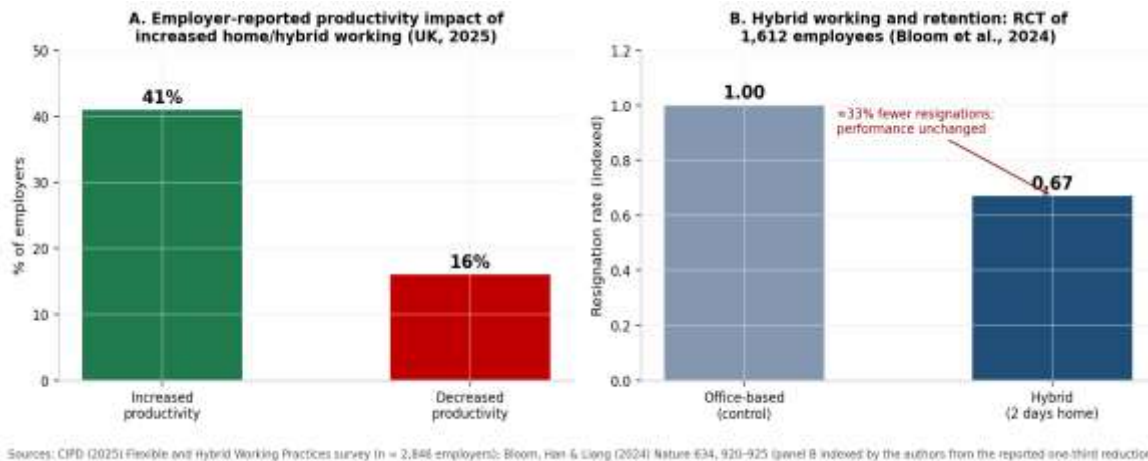


Figure 1. The organizational-level evidence puzzle: perceived productivity (A) and causal retention (B) effects of flexible/hybrid work.

2. Research Problem, Objectives, and Questions

The phenomenon investigated is the relationship between FWP and organizational performance in the IT industry. Its importance follows from three converging facts: flexibility is near-universal among employers (CIPD, 2025); IT work is highly digitizable and talent-scarce (Gibbs et al., 2023); and the strongest causal evidence shows hybrid work delivering large retention gains at zero performance cost (Bloom et al., 2024) while network analyses document collaboration costs (Yang et al., 2022). What is known: FWAs reliably improve individual satisfaction, autonomy, commitment, work–life balance, and health, with weak or null effects on task performance except for combined time-and-place flexibility (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Shifrin & Michel, 2022; Harrop et al., 2025). What remains insufficiently understood is the middle of the causal chain: the mechanisms and boundary conditions transmitting specific FWP configurations into specific organizational outcomes. Existing literature fails because dominant frameworks stop at the individual level; benefits and downsides research proceeds as separate conversations (Soga et al., 2022); and identical practices yield positive, null, and negative outcomes across studies — a pattern implying omitted mediators and moderators rather than noise. The specific contribution of this paper is the FWP–OP framework, eight derived propositions, and an empirical validation roadmap.

Four objectives structure the paper, each paired with a guiding question:

- To critically integrate COR, JD-R, SET, and Boundary Theory into a unified cross-level account of the flexible work–performance relationship. (RQ1: How can these theories be coherently integrated across levels of analysis?)
- To develop the FWP–OP framework specifying antecedents, mediating mechanisms, boundary conditions, and outcomes in the IT industry. (RQ2: Through which mechanisms, and under which conditions, do FWP configurations influence organizational performance in IT firms?)
- To derive a parsimonious set of theoretically grounded, testable propositions. (RQ3: Which direct, mediated, and moderated effects follow logically?)
- To specify a rigorous empirical agenda for validating the framework. (RQ4: How should the framework be tested using SEM/PLS-SEM and complementary designs?)

3. Literature Review:

3.1 Conceptualizing FWP's and individual-level outcomes

FWPs are employer policies granting discretion over when, where, or how much employees work — flextime, flexplace, compressed weeks, and reduced hours (Baltes et al., 1999; Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019). A critical development is the distinction between flexibility as opportunity and as demand: employee-chosen arrangements function as resources, whereas employer-imposed arrangements — often for real-estate savings — may operate as demands (Lautsch, Kossek, & Eaton, 2009). Configurational evidence shows the dimensions are complements rather than substitutes: only combined time-and-place flexibility predicted higher task performance (Harrop et al., 2025). The individual-outcome evidence base is mature: telecommuting improves satisfaction, autonomy, and rated performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007); FWAs improve health (Shifrin & Michel, 2022); remote effectiveness tracks job resources and demands (Wang et al., 2021). Collectively, attitudinal and well-being benefits are consistent, but behavioural effects are fragmented — individual benefits alone do not guarantee performance transmission.

3.2 The "other face": intensification, isolation, and boundary erosion

A parallel literature documents FWP's darker dynamics. Flexible workers intensify effort to justify flexibility (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010); extensive teleworkers suffer professional isolation that impairs performance unless buffered by face-to-face contact and communication technology (Golden et al., 2008); mobile connectivity produces an "autonomy paradox" of temporal discretion coupled with constant availability (Mazmanian et al., 2013); and organizational time norms discipline ostensibly flexible schedules (Perlow, 1998). Soga et al. (2022) catalogue downsides spanning work–life conflict, overwork, weakened teamwork, and surveillance, while curvilinear evidence indicates that the highest flexibility orientations coincide with lower perceived support, justice, and commitment (Economics, 2025). These frictions constitute the demand side that any credible performance framework must incorporate.

3.3 Collaboration and knowledge sharing in virtual IT work

Because IT work is interdependent, collective consequences matter as much as individual ones. During pandemic remote work, the collaboration networks of over 60,000 information workers became more siloed and asynchronous (Yang et al., 2022). Virtual-teams research identifies structural supports — team virtuality management, shared leadership, communication architecture — as conditions for distributed performance (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Gilson et al., 2015). Firm-level data on IT professionals show output per hour falling under work-from-home, with coordination costs implicated (Gibbs et al., 2023), while work-from-anywhere gains concentrate in low-interdependence tasks (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2021). The synthesis: flexibility's collaboration effect is conditional — positive where digital maturity and coordination norms exist, negative where flexibility fragments shared context.

3.4 Organizational-level performance evidence

This layer is the thinnest and most decisive. Systematic reviews find potential but inconsistent organizational economic effects, dependent on arrangement combinations (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; Savić, 2021); strategic HRM scholarship shows bundles — not isolated policies — affect establishment-level outcomes (Cappelli & Neumark, 2001; Wright & Boswell, 2002). The positive case rests on three anchors: causal retention gains without performance damage (Bloom et al., 2024); productivity mechanisms via telework (Kazekami, 2020); and output gains under geographic flexibility (Choudhury et al., 2021). The negative case rests on falling output per hour in IT professionals (Gibbs et al., 2023) and

split employer perceptions (CIPD, 2025). The contradiction is genuine and motivates a mediation-and-moderation architecture.

3.5 Recurring boundary conditions

Across all streams, the same moderators recur: voluntariness (Lautsch et al., 2009; Economics, 2025), supervisory and organizational support (Bentley, Teo, McLeod, Tan, Bosua, & Gloet, 2016; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006), digital communication infrastructure (Golden et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2021), task interdependence (Yang et al., 2022; Gibbs et al., 2023), flexibility stigma (Chung, 2020), and boundary-management preferences (Kossek et al., 2006). These moderators are known in isolation but have never been assembled into a single boundary-condition architecture — the integration undertaken here.

4. Theoretical Foundations

Four theories are selected because each fails alone where the next succeeds; their integration is sequential complementarity, not eclecticism. COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018) holds that individuals strive to gain and protect resources that travel in caravans; FWP are conditional resources conserving time and energy, but COR does not explain cross-level aggregation — the framework supplies engagement, collaboration, and commitment as the caravan vehicles. The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017) models job characteristics as demands or resources activating motivational and impairment paths; FWP are resources, yet flexibility can introduce demands (availability pressure, coordination overhead), and JD-R typically treats engagement as an endpoint — here it is repositioned as a mediator in a longer chain. SET (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) explains reciprocity: flexibility granted generates commitment and discretionary effort returned (Rousseau, 1995), but is silent on performance mechanics. Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) explains segmentation/integration and micro role transitions (Kossek et al., 2006), explaining why identical arrangements diverge by choice and support — here embedded as the boundary-condition engine. Table 1 summarizes the division of labour.

Table 1. Theoretical division of labour in the FWP–OP framework

Theory	Core logic	Constructs supplied	Role	Key limitation addressed
Conservation of Resources (Hobfoll, 1989)	Resource gain/loss drives motivation; caravans bundle	FWP as conditional resource; resource gains	Antecedent→resource activation	No cross-level aggregation → mediator chain
Job Demands–Resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)	Resources → engagement → performance; demands impair	Engagement; dual resource/demand paths	Motivational core; both "faces" of flexibility	Engagement as endpoint → repositioned as mediator

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)	Benefits create felt obligation and reciprocity	Commitment; trust; felt obligation	Relational/retention mechanism	No task-performance mechanics → paired with JD-R
Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000)	Domain segmentation/integration; micro transitions	Voluntariness; boundary control; preferences	Boundary-condition engine	No organizational outcome → moderator block

5. Critical Synthesis and Research Gaps

The literature agrees that FWAs improve satisfaction, autonomy, work–life balance, commitment, and health (Baltes et al., 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Shifrin & Michel, 2022; Harrop et al., 2025), and that hybrid working improves retention without harming performance (Bloom et al., 2024). It disagrees on productivity: employers split 41/16 (CIPD, 2025), IT output per hour fell under WFH (Gibbs et al., 2023), while work-from-anywhere raised output (Choudhury et al., 2021). Well-established: FWA → satisfaction/autonomy/WLB; hybrid → retention. Uncertain: FWA → task performance (null except time+place configurations; Harrop et al., 2025) and FWA → innovation. Dominant theories: JD-R and COR; underutilized: SET at organizational level and strategic-HRM/AMO perspectives (Wright & Boswell, 2002). Over-studied constructs: satisfaction, work–life balance, turnover intention; neglected: collaboration quality, knowledge sharing, employer attractiveness, objective organizational performance. Contextual limits: Anglophone dominance; causal evidence from a single Asian technology firm (Bloom et al., 2024); Indian IT — a global delivery powerhouse — under-represented (NASSCOM, 2024). Untested assumptions: that engagement gains aggregate to firm performance automatically; that hybrid intensity is linearly beneficial. Missing integration: no framework models antecedent configurations → mediators → boundary conditions → multi-dimensional organizational performance in one chain.

Table 2. Research-gap matrix

Gap type	Evidence	Limitation	Proposed response
Theoretical	Individual-level dominance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Harrop et al., 2025)	COR/JD-R stop at individual outcomes	Cross-level integration of four theories
Conceptual	Benefits and downsides literatures separate (Soga et al., 2022)	No model contains both resource and demand paths	Dual-path JD-R architecture in one framework
Empirical	Org-level outcomes thin/inconsistent (CIPD, 2025; Gibbs et al., 2023; Bloom et al., 2024)	Few causal designs; single-firm evidence	Multi-dimensional performance construct + validation agenda

Contextual	IT-specific and Indian-IT evidence scarce (NASSCOM, 2024)	General samples mask IT work design	IT framework with interdependence moderator
Methodological	Self-report, cross-sectional dominance (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015)	Common-method bias; no objective metrics	Mixed-method SEM/PLS-SEM with archival data
Integration	Moderators known in isolation (Kossek et al., 2006; Bentley et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2022)	No unified boundary-condition architecture	Four-moderator block
Temporal	Pre/post-pandemic divergence (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017 vs Wang et al., 2021)	Era effects confounded	2021–2025 evidence prioritized
Geographic	US/UK/EU concentration (Savić, 2021)	Limited Global-South evidence	Indian IT foregrounded as validation context

6. The FWP–OP Conceptual Framework and Propositions

6.1 Constructs

Table 3. Constructs, origins, and roles

Construct	Definition (abbrev.)	Origin	Role
Flexible Work Practices	Employer policies granting discretion over timing, location, or duration of work	Baltes et al. (1999); Kelliher & de Menezes (2019)	IV — antecedent configuration (flextime, flexplace/hybrid, compressed weeks, perceived choice)
Job Autonomy & Work–Life Balance	Discretion over work methods; non-conflicting work–personal integration	JD-R; Boundary Theory	Mediator 1 (resource path)
Work Engagement	Vigour, dedication, absorption toward work	JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)	Mediator 2 (motivational core)
Knowledge Sharing & Collaboration Quality	Task-relevant knowledge exchange; richness/synchronicity of team interaction	Virtual teams literature	Mediator 3 (collective path)
Affective Commitment & Employer Trust	Emotional attachment; felt obligation toward organization	SET; psychological contracts	Mediator 4 (relational path)

Voluntariness of Use	FWP use reflects choice vs imposition	Boundary Theory	Moderator
Digital Collaboration Maturity	Infrastructure, norms, skills for distributed work	Virtual teams; work design	Moderator
Supervisory & Organizational Support	Perceived support for flexible working	SET; JD-R	Moderator
Task Interdependence	Need for coordination and mutual inputs	Work design; virtuality	Moderator
Organizational Performance (IT)	Multi-dimensional firm-level results from human capital utilization	Strategic HRM	DV — innovation, productivity/delivery, retention, employer attractiveness, financial performance

6.2 Proposition development

P1. COR and JD-R treat discretion over time and place as a job resource that conserves personal resources and enables boundary control (Kossek et al., 2006); autonomy and work–family conflict gains from telecommuting are well established (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), though flexplace can increase home-to-work interference for some (Savić, 2021). Because only combined time-and-place flexibility predicted performance (Harrop et al., 2025), the proposition is configurational. Dual flexibility (combined time and place discretion) is positively associated with job autonomy and work–life balance, more strongly than either dimension alone.

P2. JD-R's motivational path runs resources → engagement → performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007); autonomy and WLB predict engagement in remote-work designs (Wang et al., 2021). Availability pressure can convert flexibility into demand (Mazmanian et al., 2013), but that demand side is routed to the boundary conditions rather than negating the resource path. Job autonomy and work–life balance mediate the positive relationship between dual flexibility and work engagement.

P3. Engaged employees invest discretionary effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The 2025 meta-analysis found FWA–behaviour links null on average except for time-plus-place configurations (Harrop et al., 2025) — a null average that conceals mediation. Work engagement transmits the effect of dual flexibility on individual task performance and team-contributory behaviours.

P4. Shared physical context supports micro-coordination; digital maturity can substitute (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Fully remote information workers develop siloed networks (Yang et al., 2022); hybrid preserves collaboration (Bloom et al., 2024); moderate telework can improve collaboration via focused work (Golden et al., 2008). Synthesis: an inverted-U in remote intensity. Dual flexibility has an inverted-U relationship with knowledge sharing and collaboration quality, peaking at moderate hybrid intensity; digital collaboration maturity moderates the curve.

P5. SET and boundary research imply imposed flexibility violates reciprocity and removes boundary control (Lautsch et al., 2009); employee-choice (vs imposed) flexibility is associated with higher support, justice, commitment, and satisfaction (Economics, 2025). Voluntariness is among the most consistent

moderators. The positive relationships between dual flexibility and the four mediating mechanisms are stronger when FWP use is voluntary than when imposed.

P6. Support signals a valued exchange, strengthening SET reciprocity and JD-R resources (Bentley et al., 2016); perceived support conditions teleworker well-being and boundary management (Kossek et al., 2006; Lautsch et al., 2009). Support is the managerial lever keeping the resource path dominant. Supervisory and organizational support strengthen the mediating paths from dual flexibility through autonomy/WLB and engagement to performance.

P7. Reciprocity converts flexibility into affective commitment, reducing exits (SET; Rousseau, 1995). Hybrid working cut resignations by roughly one-third without performance damage in an RCT of 1,612 (Bloom et al., 2024); flexibility absence drove ~1.1 million UK exits (CIPD, 2025); some telework–turnover links are null (Golden, 2006) — strongest for voluntary hybrid configurations. Dual flexibility reduces turnover and enhances employer attractiveness through affective commitment, particularly in tight IT labour markets.

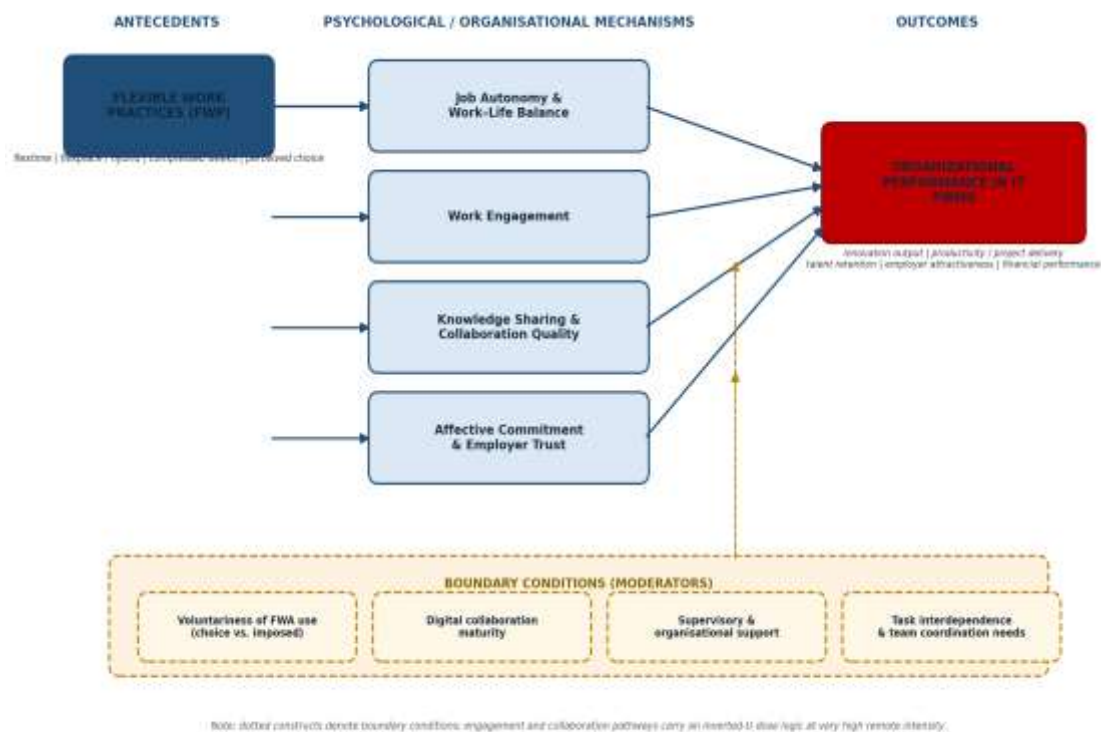
P8. Interdependence raises the coordination cost of dispersion (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Martins et al., 2004); productivity gains concentrate in low-interdependence work (Choudhury et al., 2021); IT professional output per hour fell amid WFH (Gibbs et al., 2023). Task interdependence moderates the collaboration-quality → organizational-performance link: high interdependence dampens the performance return unless digital collaboration maturity is high.

Table 4. Propositions at a glance

Prop.	Relationship	Primary theory	Key evidence
P1	Dual flexibility → autonomy & WLB	COR; JD-R	Gajendran & Harrison (2007); Harrop et al. (2025); Wang et al. (2021)
P2	Autonomy/WLB → engagement (mediation)	JD-R	Bakker & Demerouti (2007, 2017)
P3	Engagement → task/team performance (mediation)	JD-R	Harrop et al. (2025)
P4	Dual flexibility → collaboration quality (inverted-U)	Boundary Theory; virtual teams	Yang et al. (2022); Bloom et al. (2024); Golden et al. (2008)
P5	Voluntariness moderates FWP → mechanisms	SET; Boundary Theory	Lautsch et al. (2009); Economics (2025)
P6	Support moderates resource path	SET; JD-R	Bentley et al. (2016); Kossek et al. (2006)
P7	FWP → commitment → retention/attraction (mediation)	SET; psychological contracts	Bloom et al. (2024); CIPD (2025); Rousseau (1995)
P8	Interdependence moderates collaboration → performance	Virtuality theory	Choudhury et al. (2021); Gibbs et al. (2023)

6.3 The conceptual model

Figure 2 presents the framework. Borrowed: the resource–engagement–performance spine (JD-R), conditional-resource logic (COR), reciprocity (SET), segmentation/integration (Boundary Theory). Integrated: four theories into one cross-level chain. Newly conceptualized: (1) dual flexibility as a configurational antecedent; (2) collaboration quality as a collective mediator alongside individual mediators; (3) a four-moderator boundary block — voluntariness and support operating on resource paths, digital maturity and interdependence on the collective path; (4) an inverted-U dose logic. Extended: COR and JD-R from individual to organizational level; SET from attitudes to retention and attractiveness; Boundary Theory from family to team outcomes. The novelty lies in the cross-level mechanism specification: how employee-level flexibility experiences become firm-level performance in IT.



7. Contributions and Implications

Theoretical contribution: the paper extends COR and JD-R theorizing to the organizational level and integrates resource, motivational, relational, and collective mechanisms that prior models treat separately. Conceptual contribution: the FWP–OP framework itself — dual-flexibility antecedent, four mediators, four-moderator boundary block, inverted-U dose logic, five-dimension IT performance outcome. Methodological contribution: a validation template correcting the self-report, single-level bias of prior work. Contextual contribution: tailoring to knowledge-intensive IT firms, an under-theorized context, with Indian IT identified as the priority validation setting (NASSCOM, 2024). Cautious claim wording is used throughout: the paper "extends," "integrates," and "conceptualizes" rather than claiming unverifiable first-study status.

- Design the configuration, not the policy: grant discretion over both timing and location — only dual flexibility reliably predicts performance-relevant outcomes (Harrop et al., 2025).
- Protect voluntariness: return-to-office mandates without choice degrade the very mechanisms flexibility builds (Lautsch et al., 2009; Economics, 2025); treat flexibility as a negotiated i-deal.
- Invest in digital collaboration maturity before scaling hybrid; returns depend on tooling, norms, and skills, not office-days arithmetic (Yang et al., 2022; Golden et al., 2008).
- Manage interdependence explicitly: high-interdependence teams need synchronous windows and shared artefacts to prevent the output-per-hour erosion documented in IT professionals (Gibbs et al., 2023).
- Train supervisors in boundary-management support; supervisory behaviour switches the framework between its resource and demand paths (Kossek et al., 2006; Lautsch et al., 2009).
- Use flexibility as a measured retention instrument: retention is the strongest causal benefit (Bloom et al., 2024) and flexibility absence drives exits (CIPD, 2025) — ROI is computable in replacement-cost terms.

Policy implications, derived strictly from cited evidence: access rights such as the UK's day-one right to request flexibility (already associated with increased request volumes; CIPD, 2025) appear welfare-improving, but the framework adds a boundary condition — protecting employee choice within flexibility matters as much as access; two-fifths of employers say only some staff can work flexibly (CIPD, 2025), implying equity risks that digital-collaboration support for SMEs could mitigate; given the 41%/16% productivity split, governments should fund measurement infrastructure rather than legislate location. For India, where industry reporting identifies hybrid adoption as a defining IT workforce feature (NASSCOM, 2024), skills policy should prioritize distributed-leadership and digital-collaboration competencies.

8. Proposed Directions for Empirical Validation and Future Research

No empirical data are claimed; this section is explicitly forward-looking. A convergent mixed-method design is proposed. Phase 1: 25–35 IT professionals and 15 HR/line leaders (Indian and multinational IT firms) interviewed to refine boundary-condition items and validate the configurational antecedent. Phase 2: two-wave, multi-source survey (T1: FWP use and mediators; T1+3 months: engagement, collaboration, commitment, outcomes) with $n \approx 400$ –600 employees nested in 40–60 teams, powered by Monte Carlo simulation for moderated mediation; measures adapted from validated scales (UWES-9 for engagement; adapted FWA configuration items per Harrop et al., 2025; adapted autonomy, WLB, commitment, support, interdependence scales); reliability and validity thresholds: α and $CR \geq .70$, $AVE \geq .50$, $HTMT < .85$, measurement invariance across hybrid-intensity groups. Phase 3: archival objective metrics (attrition, delivery, innovation proxies) linked at team/firm level, with multilevel SEM. Analysis: CB-SEM (theory testing) with PLS-SEM robustness; 5,000-resample bootstrap indirect effects for P2/P3/P7; latent moderated structural equations for P5/P6/P8; quadratic term for P4; marker-variable, full-collinearity, and Gaussian-copula endogeneity checks; control variables: firm size, tenure, job family. Complementary designs: natural experiments exploiting staggered return-to-office policies; an Indian-IT replication of hybrid-schedule RCT logic.

Future research agenda: cross-national replications (US, UK, EU, India, Southeast Asia) and sector comparisons; theoretical extensions via AMO and strategic-HRM perspectives (Wright & Boswell, 2002) and flexibility-stigma theory (Chung, 2020); methodological extensions via organizational network analysis (extending Yang et al., 2022), experience-sampling of daily boundary transitions, supervisor-

training field experiments, and three-year longitudinal tests of the inverted-U; outcome extensions to customer-facing performance, cybersecurity behaviour of dispersed teams, and commuting-carbon co-benefits.

9. Limitations and Conclusion

Five limitations are acknowledged. The paper is conceptual: all propositions await empirical test. It inherits the field's biases — individual-level, Anglophone, self-reported evidence. Two sources (Harrop et al., 2025; the 2025 Economics curvilinear study) are only partially verified and flagged for re-confirmation before submission; the dose logic should be re-examined once full publication details are confirmed. The framework is tuned to knowledge-intensive IT work and may not transfer to low-digitizability occupations. Organizational performance measurement is partly perceptual; the proposed objective-metric linkage is essential but raises firm-level access challenges. Each limitation defines a work package for future research rather than undermining the framework.

This paper set out to resolve a structural disconnect: a mature individual-level evidence base and a thin, contradictory organizational-level evidence base connected by no explicit theory. The response is the FWP–OP framework — an integration of COR, JD-R, SET, and Boundary Theory specifying dual flexibility as the performance-relevant antecedent, four mediating mechanisms, a four-moderator boundary block, a five-dimensional outcome, and an inverted-U dose caveat, translated into eight propositions and a mixed-method validation agenda. The contradiction that 41 per cent of employers report productivity gains from hybrid work while 16 per cent report losses is reframed not as noise but as the framework's core prediction: flexibility pays when its boundary conditions are designed, and taxes performance when they are ignored.

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