



**Lisbon School
of Economics
& Management**
Universidade de Lisboa

MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT (MIM)

MASTERS FINAL WORK

DISSERTATION

EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE HAPPINESS IN HYBRID WORK: ROLES OF HYBRID AUTONOMY, VIRTUAL FATIGUE AND IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

RITIKA DHARAMRAJ SHARMA

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RESUMO

A expansão do trabalho híbrido intensificou as exigências psicológicas associadas aos ambientes mediados digitalmente e ganhou interesse ao levantar questões sobre como a liderança influencia o bem-estar dos funcionários nesses contextos. Utilizando o modelo Job Demands–Resources (JDR) e da Affective Events Theory (AET), este trabalho examina o papel da liderança emocionalmente inteligente (EIL) na contribuição da felicidade no local de trabalho e investiga os efeitos da autonomia híbrida, da fadiga virtual e da síndrome do impostor nessa relação. Utilizando um desenho de pesquisa quantitativa transversal, os dados de 113 participantes foram analisados através da Modelagem de Equações Estruturais de Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM). Os resultados indicam que a liderança emocionalmente inteligente influencia positivamente a autonomia híbrida e aumenta diretamente a felicidade no local de trabalho. No entanto, a EIL não reduz significativamente a fadiga virtual ou a síndrome do impostor. Em vez disso, a fadiga virtual surge como um mecanismo de tensão fundamental que aumenta a síndrome do impostor, o que, por sua vez, afeta fortemente e negativamente a felicidade no local de trabalho. Estes resultados identificam a síndrome do impostor como uma via central através da qual a tensão digital se traduz em bem-estar diminuído em ambientes de trabalho híbridos. O estudo aprofunda a compreensão ao distinguir entre recursos de liderança relacional e exigências profissionais digitais estruturalmente incorporadas. Enquanto a liderança emocionalmente inteligente sustenta experiências afetivas positivas, a tensão impulsionada pela tecnologia opera independentemente dos efeitos atenuantes da liderança. As conclusões destacam a necessidade de as organizações abordarem a sobrecarga digital de forma estrutural, ao mesmo tempo que promovem uma liderança emocionalmente inteligente para fomentar ambientes de trabalho híbridos sustentáveis.

Palavras-chave: Liderança Emocionalmente Inteligente; Teoria dos Eventos Afetivos; Modelo Job Demands–Resources; Autonomia Híbrida; Fadiga Virtual; Síndrome do Impostor; Felicidade no Trabalho.

Códigos JEL: J28, M54, M12

ABSTRACT

The expansion of hybrid work has intensified the psychological demands associated with digitally mediated environments and gained interest by raised questions about how leadership influences employee well-being in such contexts. Through the Job Demands–Resources (JDR) model and Affective Events Theory (AET), this research examines the role of emotionally intelligent leadership (EIL) in shaping workplace happiness and investigates the effects of hybrid autonomy, virtual fatigue and impostor syndrome. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data from 113 participants were analysed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that emotionally intelligent leadership positively influences hybrid autonomy and directly enhances workplace happiness. However, EIL does not significantly reduce virtual fatigue or impostor syndrome. Instead, virtual fatigue emerges as a key strain mechanism that increases impostor syndrome, which in turn strongly and negatively affects workplace happiness. These results identify impostor syndrome as a central pathway through which digital strain translates into diminished well-being in hybrid work settings. The study advances understanding by distinguishing between relational leadership resources and structurally embedded digital job demands. While emotionally intelligent leadership sustains positive affective experiences, technology-driven strain operates independently of leadership buffering effects. The findings highlight the need for organisations to address digital overload structurally while fostering emotionally intelligent leadership to promote sustainable hybrid work environments.

Keywords: Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, Affective Events Theory, Job Demands Resource Model, Hybrid Autonomy, Virtual Fatigue, Imposter Syndrome, Workplace Happiness.

JEL Codes: J28, M54, M12

ABBREVIATIONS

JDR: Jobs Demand Resource
AET: Affective Events theory
EI: Emotional Intelligence
EIL: Emotionally intelligent Leadership
HA: Hybrid Autonomy
VF: Virtual Fatigue
IS: Imposter Syndrome
WPH: Workplace Happiness
WLEIS: Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale
TSC: Technostress Creators scale
CIPS-10: Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale
SHAW: Shortened version of the Happiness at Work
CRa: Composite Reliability (ρ_a)
AVE: Average Variance Extracted
VIF: Variance Inflation Factor

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The recent work environments highlight how covid-19 pandemic influenced the practicing of contemporary working modes, one of which is hybrid work (Iogansen et al., 2024). Although there is limited research on hybrid work, as opposed to traditional work and remote work; studies show that hybrid work setup benefits employees with a flexible lifestyle and acts as a competitive advantage to the organizations (Dale et al., 2024; Krajčák et al., 2023). This hybrid shift has brought structural changes like flexibility, autonomy, and connectivity, however, has also brought intensive emotional demands like virtual overload, diminished social cues, increased self-regulation, which cannot be tackled with only traditional leadership practices (Jaß et al., 2024). These digitally mediated pressures contribute to factors like virtual fatigue and impostor syndrome, potentially undermining employee well-being and workplace happiness.

Despite this growing interest, there remains limited integrative research explaining how emotionally intelligent leadership can systematically mitigate technology-induced strain and associated psychological vulnerabilities within hybrid settings. Existing research conceptualises hybrid work primarily as a structural and logistical arrangement focused on flexibility and coordination (Dale et al., 2024; Waizenegger et al., 2020), overlooking the emotional and cognitive mechanisms through which digitally mediated interactions shape employee experiences. Consequently, there remains a need to examine how Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL) would function as a strategic resource that ensures fostering psychological safety and adaptive functioning in dispersed teams (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), this study focuses on understanding how EIL can promote psychologically sustainable work environments. With this we derive at the main research question guiding this study, which is

Does emotionally intelligent leadership affect workplace happiness in hybrid work, considering environmental factors like hybrid autonomy, virtual fatigue, and impostor syndrome setting from virtual settings?

To address this gap, this study integrates two complementary theoretical frameworks. First, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model that conceptualises hybrid work in terms of job demands and resources, situating EIL as a critical job resource that buffers emotional strain while enhancing personal and structural resources (Bakker et al., 2023; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Alongside, the Affective Events Theory (AET) gives a process perspective, which indicates that recurring workplace events like the leader feedback or digitally mediated interactions may

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generate affective reactions that accumulate into long term evaluations of work and overall workplace happiness (Wan et al., 2022; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Methodologically, this research adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to test the proposed relationships. The following chapters of this study is structured as follows: Chapter 2 contains the Literature review, Chapter 3 mentions the methodology, Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings and Chapter 5 discusses theoretical contributions, practical implications and directions for future research and finally the chapter 6 that presents conclusion, limitations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Job Demands-Resource Model

The Job Demands–Resources (JDR) theory, developed by (Demerouti et al., 2001) and later expanded by (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how different work characteristics influence employee wellbeing, motivation and strain. The main proposition of the JDR model suggests that all job environments can be understood through two overarching components: job demands and job resources. Table 1 summarizes the two aspects of the JDR.

Table 1. Primary components of JDR

Aspect	Definition	Examples	Source
Job Demands	Aspects of work requiring sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional effort and associated with physical or psychological costs	Work pressure; Emotional labour; Cognitive load; Complex or ambiguous tasks; Role ambiguity	Demerouti et al. (2001); Bakker and Demerouti (2007, 2023)
Jobs Resources	Aspects of work that help achieve goals, reduce demands or stimulate learning, growth, and motivation	Autonomy; Social support; Performance feedback; Opportunities for development; Role clarity	Bakker and Demerouti (2007, 2023)

The JDR model operates through two pathways. The health-impairment pathway (Demerouti et al., 2001) proposes that excessive or prolonged job demands drain employees' energy and lead to strain, fatigue and burnout. Conversely, the motivational pathway (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) suggests that job resources enhance engagement, foster commitment and support positive performance outcomes. Significantly, job resources also buffer the negative effects of high demands, which means that employees exposed to similar demands may experience very different outcomes depending on the availability of these resources (Bakker et al., 2023).

The JDR Model is particularly relevant to the context of the study of hybrid and digitally mediated work, as the balance between demands and resources is altered in distinctive ways (Coulston et al., 2025). Hybrid work arrangements often increase job demands, like virtual overload from continuous digital meetings, increased cognitive effort associated with managing asynchronous communication, reduced social cues in virtual interactions, and heightened uncertainty arising from communication delays and fluctuating expectations (Harunavamwe &

Kanengoni, 2023; Jaß et al., 2024). These characteristics of hybrid work align closely with the health-impairment pathway, indicating that such employees may experience higher levels of digital fatigue, cognitive strain and emotional exhaustion when demands accumulate without adequate support.

Simultaneously, hybrid work also provides access to key job resources. Employees experience greater autonomy, enabling them to manage their work schedules, alongside increased flexibility that supports better work–life integration and enhanced self-management that fosters competence and confidence in task organisation. Empirical studies further emphasize the importance of leader support as a resource in hybrid contexts, providing clarity, emotional reassurance and guidance that help employees navigate digitally complex and ambiguous conditions (Tummers & Bakker, 2021; Dale et al., 2024). These resources align with the motivational pathway, buffering against digital demands and promoting engagement and wellbeing.

Adapting the structure of the JDR model provides a robust conceptual foundation for understanding hybrid work. It explains how the increase in flexible and technology influenced job demands can strain employees, how structural and interpersonal resources can mitigate these effects, and why EIL would play a crucial role in supporting wellbeing in hybrid settings. This theoretical grounding enables later sections of the thesis to situate the other variables of the study better (hybrid autonomy as a job resource, virtual fatigue as a job demand, and impostor syndrome as a strain-related outcome, consistent with the JDR pathways).

2.2 Affective Events Theory

Affective Events Theory (AET), laid out by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), builds the foundation that emotions of employees arise from peculiar workplace events which cause immediate affective reactions that accumulate over the course of time and thus shape enduring attitudes and behaviours. This theory highlights the role of moment-to-moment experiences that differ from traditional job attitude models that emphasize stable evaluations. Subsequent research has shown that both minor and significant events can create emotional “hassles” or “uplifts,” eliciting discrete emotions that guide affect-driven actions (such as enthusiasm or irritation) as well as more reflective judgments, including job satisfaction, performance evaluations, and withdrawal intentions. Additionally, events outside the workplace can also shape emotional experiences, underscoring AET’s broader relevance to organisational affect research (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008; Basch & Fisher, 1998; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Hybrid and digitally mediated work environments emphasize the importance of AET because technology alters the frequency, meaning, and emotional intensity of workplace events (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008; Wang, Xiao, et al., 2023). Research applying AET to remote and

hybrid contexts explains that digital work introduces a specific set of emotionally salient micro-events, including delays in communication, absence of immediate feedback, camera-off meetings, misinterpretation of tone in virtual interactions, digital interruptions, visibility loss, and asynchronous responsiveness (Wang, Xiao, et al., 2023). Such events often involve reduced emotional bandwidth and signal distortion, which can evoke intensified emotional reactions such as frustration, uncertainty, or anxiety. Recent empirical work shows that negative digital events tend to accumulate overtime into affective strain and reduced well-being, confirming the base concept of AET in digitally mediated work (Junça Silva, 2024).

AET provides a strong theoretical foundation for the mediators examined in this study. Based on previous research, AET positions emotions and not just tasks or structures. It can be applied to macro environment as the primary mechanism through which hybrid work and leadership influence employee outcomes (Chaudhry & Espinosa, 2024; Wan et al., 2022). This theory complements the Job Demands–Resources (JDR) model by providing the affective process underpinning the mediators in this study. Whereas JDR explains what aspects of hybrid work create demands and resources, AET explains how the emotional aspects of everyday events translate these conditions into fatigue, insecurity, or happiness.

2.3 Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

The term emotional intelligence was initially coined in theories that consider EI as a social construct (Ruisel, 1992; Thorndike, 1920). EI is the ability to perceive, understand, regulate and use emotions to guide behaviour (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Adapting on this definition, EI entered organisational research as scholars began to examine how emotional capabilities influence workplace relationships, decision-making and leadership effectiveness (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Cherniss et al., 1998, 2001; Goleman & Cherniss, 2000).

Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) analysed that EI shapes the role of leaders' emotional capabilities, in turn enhancing interpersonal dynamics and follower outcomes (Van Knippenberg & Van Kleef, 2016). Contemporary research conceptualises EIL as a relational leadership competence reflected in a leader's ability to accurately identify and perceive emotional cues (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), regulate their own emotional responses and respond appropriately to the emotional needs of followers (Mayer et al., 2016). With these competencies, emotionally intelligent leaders can enhance communication, build interpersonal trust and create psychologically supportive work environments. Some meta analyses explain that higher EI is associated with greater job satisfaction, organisational commitment and performance, alongside lower levels of stress and fatigue (Doğru, 2022; Miao et al., 2017a). Applying this to the leadership context, emotionally competent leaders create supportive interpersonal climates that facilitate follower engagement, resilience and trust (Avolio et al., 2000). These emotional

competencies strengthen team functioning by enhancing cooperation, confidence and cohesion, with evidence showing that both leader EI and team-level emotional intelligence contribute to improved collective performance (Cavaletti & Bizarrias, 2023; Waglay et al., 2020).

The relevance of EIL increases when work is carried out across hybrid or digitally mediated channels. Virtual communication tends to limit the essence of interpersonal signals or non-verbal cues, often creating uncertainty and misunderstandings. Research suggests that leaders with higher emotional intelligence are efficient in displaying transformational behaviours in virtual settings, which in turn enhances team functioning and member satisfaction (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). Recent reviews on digital and virtual leadership similarly argue that the ability to recognise emotions, express empathy, and communicate supportively is essential for sustaining engagement and high-quality relationships when face-to-face interaction is limited (Contreras et al., 2020; Höddinghaus et al., 2024). These findings together, help position EIL as a critical strategic resource in hybrid environments, acting as an important buffer against counterproductive work behaviours (Audrin et al., 2025), alongside fostering employee digital well-being and engagement (Kashive & Raina, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, EIL aligns naturally with both the Job Demands–Resources model and Affective Events Theory (Miao et al., 2017a; Wan et al., 2022). Within the JDR framework, EIL operates as an important job resource by offering emotional clarity, supportive communication and relational stability that help employees manage pressures associated with digital overload and the fragmented nature of hybrid work (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Miao et al., 2017a). From an AET perspective, emotionally intelligent leaders shape how everyday work events are experienced by reducing negative emotional cues (Wan et al., 2022). Through these pathways, EIL emerges as a core interpersonal capability influencing how employees make sense of hybrid-work demands and interpret affective workplace events.

2.4 Hybrid Autonomy

Hybrid work has become a salient feature of contemporary organisational practice, emerging from the growing integration of digital technologies and flexible work arrangements (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker, 2014). Initial discussions of hybrid modes included mix of organisational systems that combined co-located and distributed work structures (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Recent research work emphasises hybrid work as a reconfiguration of temporal and spatial flexibility, allowing employees to alternate between remote and on-site environments based on task needs, organisational expectations and personal preferences of location (Choudhury et al., 2021). This shift reflects broader changes in workforce expectations, technological capability and the prioritisation of adaptive forms of collaboration.

The concept of autonomy has long held a central position in organisational behaviour research, initially grounded in the Job Characteristics Model, where it was defined as employees' discretion over the scheduling and execution of their work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Subsequent research expanded autonomy to include decision authority, control over work methods and the psychological experience of volition, which is subjective sense of acting out of one's own choice and internal motivation, rather than external pressure (Parker, 2014). Autonomy, also termed as "job autonomy" (De Spiegelaere et al., 2016), is consistently associated with higher motivation, engagement, creativity and well-being, as it enables employees to regulate their effort, manage their work environment and align tasks with personal strengths (Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2017).

Bringing the above two aspects together, hybrid autonomy refers to the extent of freedom employees have in choosing where, when and how they work within hybrid arrangements (Datta et al., 2025; Humphrey et al., 2007). Unlike traditional forms of autonomy, hybrid autonomy encompasses multiple layers of flexibility like location, timing, task conduct and technology-mediated coordination and creates a broader sense of agency in organising and executing work (Ipsen et al., 2021). This expanded form of autonomy supports employees' ability to balance work demands, manage their energy and tailor their work rhythms to changing conditions. Research increasingly highlights HA as a critical driver of well-being, performance and work-life integration, with positive effects stemming from employees' enhanced sense of control and decreased exposure to unnecessary constraints (Choudhury et al., 2021; Datta et al., 2025).

HA also aligns with emerging perspectives on employee well-being, functioning as an important job resource (Bakker et al., 2023). A few studies argue that individuals are motivated to acquire and maintain resources that help them manage current and future challenges (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Acting as a discretionary resource, HA promotes positive psychosocial outcomes such as work engagement and happiness (Ipsen et al., 2021). Additionally, the presence of HA acts as a critical buffer against negative psychosocial states and the emotional strain often exacerbated by the blurred boundaries or social isolation inherent in distributed work (Waizenegger et al., 2020). In this sense, HA is not only a structural feature of work but also a resource that enables ongoing self-regulation and adaptation in dynamic work environments.

2.4.1 Relationship between EIL and Hybrid Autonomy

EIL plays an important role in enabling employees to make effective use of hybrid autonomy. Leaders with strong emotional capabilities are better equipped to recognise individual needs, interpret socio-emotional cues and respond in ways that foster clarity and psychological security (Mayer et al., 2016). These behaviours create a supportive climate in which employees feel empowered to exercise discretion over their work arrangements (Humphrey et al., 2007; Waglay

et al., 2020). When leaders communicate expectations clearly, acknowledge challenges and demonstrate empathy, employees gain the confidence needed to navigate the flexible demands of hybrid work (Allen et al., 2024; Marstand et al., 2025; Waglay et al., 2020).

Effective use of autonomy depends not only on structural permission but also on the availability of social and interpersonal resources. Emotional support, trust and high-quality communication from leaders strengthen employees' sense of competence and reduce uncertainty in interpreting flexible work norms (Humphrey et al., 2007). Studies in hybrid and digital work contexts show that leaders who display emotional intelligence through responsiveness, relational awareness and sensitivity to individual circumstances enhance employees' ability to coordinate tasks, manage workload and regulate boundaries across locations (Contreras et al., 2020; Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). Recent research further demonstrates that emotionally attuned and empathetic leadership increases employees' perceived control over hybrid arrangements and supports effective enactment of autonomy, as leaders provide clarity, psychological safety and adaptive guidance in distributed environments (Parker et al., 2017). These relational resources increase employees' perceived capacity to self-direct their work without feeling disconnected or under-supported.

EIL serves as an essential driver of employee well-being within flexible work structures (Contreras et al., 2020). By cultivating a supportive climate, EIL enables employees to navigate the negative states of digital work, such as social isolation or blurred boundaries, while promoting positive states like happiness and job satisfaction (Ipsen et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020). Through empathy and relational awareness, EIL helps strengthen an employee's capacity for self-regulation, allowing them to form hybrid arrangements to their personal and task-related needs (Mayer et al., 2016). Consequently, EI leaders provide the psychological safety necessary for employees to maintain motivation and psychological health despite the complexities of distributed environments (Waglay et al., 2020).

Concluding with what the literature suggests, EIL enhances hybrid autonomy by providing the relational, communicative and psychological resources that enable employees to effectively utilise the flexibility inherent in hybrid work arrangements. Considering that AET suggests that empathy and emotional responsiveness in leaders' behaviour act as positive affective events and foster psychological security required for autonomous action (Waglay et al., 2020), and the JDR model positions EIL as a critical social resource that maximizes the utility of other job resources like autonomy (Bakker et al., 2023), we come to the first hypothesis:

H1: Emotional Leadership positively influences hybrid autonomy.

2.5 Virtual Fatigue

Fatigue has been understood in organisational psychology as a multidimensional state of mental, emotional and physical exhaustion that emerges when prolonged work effort exceeds an individual's capacity for recovery. Initial models explain fatigue as a decline in cognitive and attentional resources following strenuous task engagement (Hockey, 2011), while some literature suggests that such exhaustion stems from the cumulative depletion of resources that is not balanced by sufficient restoration (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Meijman & Mulder, 1998).

As work is becoming increasingly digitally mediated, literature on technostress suggests that technology-related demands such as overload, complexity, and invasion may lead to significant emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being (Baurai et al., 2025; Tarafdar et al., 2019). Building on this further, virtual fatigue arises from events like continuous screen exposure, heightened self-monitoring, reduced nonverbal cues and the cognitive effort required to interpret digital social signals (Bailenson, 2021). Empirical evidence demonstrates that virtual interactions often predict greater emotional exhaustion, attentional decline and cognitive tiredness, suggesting that these events carry a uniquely taxing socio-cognitive load that contributes to broader psychological strain (Consiglio et al., 2023; Fauville et al., 2021; Trevino Garcia & Christensen, 2025).

Research shows that digital overload, constant connectivity and information intensity generate emotional strain and fatigue among employees working in flexible arrangements (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016; Tarafdar et al., 2019). Recent literature suggests that hybrid workers may experience more fatigue compared to fully remote employees, due to increased resource losses and demands associated with transitioning between digital and physical work contexts (Stasiła-Sieradzka et al., 2023). Such dynamics also contribute to boundary blurring, making it more difficult for employees to psychologically detach and recover from work demands (Oakman et al., 2020).

Empirical studies confirm that virtual fatigue is associated with reduced well-being, lower engagement and declines in performance. Digital workload and meeting frequency are significant predictors of exhaustion and reduced motivation (Fauville et al., 2021; Ingusci et al., 2021). Taken together, this research positions virtual fatigue as a distinct strain outcome within hybrid work environments, arising from the unique cognitive and emotional demands of technology-mediated interaction and the fluid coordination that hybrid work requires.

2.5.1 Relationship between EIL and Virtual Fatigue

Virtual fatigue inflicts a strain response to the cumulative socio-cognitive demands of technology-mediated interaction, like continuous video conferences/meetings, prolonged connectivity and digital overload. Building on from empirical studies related to technostress, it is observed that remote work consistently shows high technology demands (e.g., overload,

complexity, constant availability), can be termed as job demands, which leads to emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being, especially in digitalized or flexible work settings (Baurai et al., 2025; Consiglio et al., 2023; Tarafdar et al., 2019). Within this context, leaders' emotional capabilities can function as a critical resource that shapes how employees experience and regulate these demands and finally stressful events (Ertiö et al., 2024; Farmanesh et al., 2025; Little et al., 2016).

Hybrid work often accentuates virtual challenges, like transitioning between physical and virtual settings, juggling digitally mediated communication demands or remaining continuously connected across multiple platforms (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Ingusci et al., 2021). Building further from empirical work on virtual interactions, it can be derived that meeting structure, interactional fairness and inadequate leader management contribute to heightened cognitive and emotional strain, as demands arising from technology mediated environment, whereas leader behaviours such as pacing discussions, setting clear expectations and creating opportunities for informal interaction can substantially mitigate fatigue (Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt, 2022; Shockley et al., 2021). These findings help derive that virtual fatigue often emerges from a series of small, recurring interactional events that accumulate into a broader sense of exhaustion, reflecting resource depletion (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Organizational settings have been associated with EIL aspects like favourable affective and relational results. Leaders equipped with EI are better able to perceive and interpret followers' emotional cues, regulate interpersonal tone and cultivate supportive leader–member relationships, thereby enhancing positive work attitudes and overall well-being (Little et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2017b). Most existing literature on EIL is focused on traditional workplaces where emotional cues are directly observable and interactions occur face-to-face. In contrast, hybrid and digitally mediated environment, interactions occur through reduced non-verbal cues, more reliance on asynchronous communication and heightened cognitive demands, while research on technostress suggests that persistent connectivity and communication overload can intensify strain and exhaustion in such settings (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Tarafdar et al., 2019; Wang, Ding, et al., 2023), raising questions about whether the established affect-regulatory benefits of emotionally intelligent leadership extend to buffering technology-driven strain and virtual fatigue.

Emerging research on digital leadership and technostress suggests that emotionally aware leaders may reduce technology-related strain by adapting communication practices and providing socio-emotional support in virtual contexts (Ertiö et al., 2024; Farmanesh et al., 2025). However, these studies have not explicitly examined VF nor fully integrated affective and resource-based mechanisms. From JDR view, digital intensity and techno-overload represent job demands that deplete energy over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), while AET indicates that leaders shape employees' emotional reactions to recurring work events (Weiss &

Cropanzano, 1996). Drawing from this, in hybrid environments, concurrent technology related interactions can accumulate into fatigue; thus, EIL may function as a resource that buffers the progression from digital demands to VF. This brings the second hypothesis of this study

H2: EIL is negatively associated with employees' virtual fatigue.

2.5.2 Relationship between Hybrid Autonomy and Virtual Fatigue

Hybrid work structures can increase employees' exposure to digital demands and alongside provide greater control over when, where and how they work. Research on remote and hybrid work stressors shows that digital overload, constant connectivity and low supervisor support are key drivers of emotional exhaustion and digital fatigue in technology-rich settings (Baurai et al., 2025). Aligning with the JDR framework, such pressures from technology related environment potentially depletes cognitive and emotional resources over time. Conversely, autonomy over hybrid work scheduling and location are identified as resources that can support recovery, improve work–life balance and reduce fatigue risk when appropriately designed (Andrulli & Gerards, 2023).

Empirical studies focusing on hybrid work highlight this duality. Studies examined higher perceived autonomy over hybrid work arrangements can be linked with lower fatigue, even though digital demands are prevalent (Höcker et al., 2024). Literature from cross-sectional studies suggests that having autonomy to choose hybrid work schedules themselves is associated with better mental health and lower stress compared to hybrid arrangements that are imposed or tightly controlled (Trevino Garcia & Christensen, 2025). These findings suggest that, from technostress perspective, autonomy can buffer fatigue by refining employee's perceived control over technology-related demands, thus, limiting the impact of technological strain (Ayyagari et al., 2011).

Alternately, research on autonomy paradox suggests that structural flexibility may not reduce strain. When hybrid arrangements are accompanied by strong availability norms and escalating workloads, employees' perceived autonomy may be undermined, limiting their actual control over digital demands (Andrulli & Gerards, 2023). Building on this further, studies of remote and hybrid workers show that high expectations for constant responsiveness and blurred boundaries can offset the benefits of autonomy, increasing technostress, fatigue and psychological strain (Wells et al., 2023). Therefore, it can be derived that HA acts as a resource when employees have control over digital workload

Altogether, VF in this review is conceptualized as a strain response to technology-related job demands (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Tarafdar et al., 2019), while HA is expected to reduce fatigue by enabling employees to regulate and manage those demands (Andrulli & Gerards, 2023; Höcker et al., 2024). Considering that JDR model posits that job resources buffer the impact of job

demands on strain, and that AET suggests that individuals' emotional reactions to recurring work events shape affective outcomes over a period, HA may reduce the effects from digital demands to VF by improving perceived autonomy over technology-mediated interactions.

H3: Hybrid autonomy is negatively associated with virtual fatigue.

2.6 Imposter Syndrome

Impostor syndrome, also referred as the impostor phenomenon, was initially coined by (Clance & Imes, 1978) in the study of high-achieving women who, despite clear evidence of success, experienced some sort of intellectual fraudulence and fear of being exposed as incompetent. This internal sense of “phoniness” involved attributing achievements to luck, timing or others' overestimation rather than personal ability (Clance & Imes, 1978). Subsequent work broadened the construct beyond gender and specific professions, framing impostor phenomenon as a pattern of self-doubt, inability to internalise success and chronic fear of being “found out,” often in the context of objectively strong performance (Gómez-Morales, 2021).

Within occupational psychology, impostor syndrome has gained more attention as a work-relevant psychological experience linked to high internal performance standards, perfectionistic tendencies and self-worth that is dependent on achievement (Bravata et al., 2020). Newer reviews and studies suggest that impostor feelings are prevalent across various occupations and are associated with multiple negative outcomes, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, burnout, diminished job satisfaction and impaired professional performance (Al Lawati et al., 2025; Bravata et al., 2020; Mak et al., 2019).

Empirical studies based on workplace provide further insight into how impostor tendencies manifest in organisational settings. Studies explain that employees with stronger impostor feelings experience greater strain, rely more frequently on maladaptive coping strategies and report poorer job attitudes such as reduced satisfaction and organisational commitment (Hutchins et al., 2018). Further research shows that impostor feelings can be linked to detrimental outcomes leading lower career self-efficacy (Hudson & González-Gómez, 2021). Broadening the aspect of IS, a few studies in higher education and professional service contexts similarly find that IS among staff is associated with reduced well-being, lower perceived performance and less favourable workplace experiences (Swaidan & Jabbour Al Maalouf, 2025). Taken together, this evidence illustrates the broad relevance of impostor feelings in contemporary organisational life.

Emerging studies have begun to explore how modern work arrangements, particularly digital, remote and hybrid environments, may influence impostor experiences. Adapting on from studies of remote and telework arrangements show that reduced in-person interaction and uncertainty about contributions are evaluated can heighten self-doubt and perceived illegitimacy, creating conditions that resemble impostor-like experiences (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016;

Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Building on these studies, in flexible and hybrid work arrangements, reduced visibility, fewer informal cues about performance and increased exposure to social comparison may exacerbate impostor tendencies by obscuring objective indicators of competence and encouraging employees to attribute success to external rather than internal factors (Gullifor et al., 2024).

Overall, from literature it is derived that imposter syndrome is a psychological pattern with significant implications for employee well-being, performance and workplace functioning. Within contemporary digital and hybrid work environments, emerging evidence suggests that altered feedback channels, reduced interpersonal visibility and increased social comparison pressures may intensify impostor experiences (Gullifor et al., 2024).

2.6.1 Relationship between EIL and Impostor Syndrome

Most literature posits that EIL may play a protective role against impostor syndrome by shaping employees' emotional experiences, internal attributions and self-beliefs. Building on research, it can be suggested that leaders who demonstrate higher emotional intelligence, through attributes like empathy, constructive feedback and validation, positively influence employees' affective states and perceptions of self-efficacy (Miao et al., 2017a). Employees experiencing impostor tendencies often struggle to internalise success and rely on external cues to determine their abilities; in such cases, EIL can help anchor positive self-appraisals by acknowledging accomplishments, clarifying strengths and reducing ambiguity regarding performance expectations (Little et al., 2016).

In work settings characterised by high uncertainty or frequent change, emotionally attuned leaders can also buffer the self-doubt and fear of exposure that accompany impostor feelings (Vergauwe et al., 2015). Empirical research explains that emotionally supportive leader behaviour enhances self-efficacy, reduces anxiety and fosters psychological safety, which are crucial environmental resources that encourages employees to take risks and learn from mistakes without the fear of judgment often associated with IS (Frazier et al., 2017). Additionally, by managing the follower emotions, EI leaders reduce anxiety and mitigate the internal pressures of perfectionism that often sustain impostor tendencies (Little et al., 2016; Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

Through the studies of hybrid work, it can be observed that the distributed nature of hybrid teams reduces informal feedback and increases ambiguity around performance (Handke et al., 2024). These events could potentially induce imposter feelings, and emotionally attuned leaders can mitigate these challenges by providing consistent recognition, clearly communicating performance standards and offering emotional presence despite physical distance (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Manole et al., 2025).

Overall, EIL appears to counter IS by offering emotional clarity, reinforcing internal attributions for success and providing supportive relational cues that reduce self-doubt. Through empathy, constructive feedback and the creation of psychologically safe work climates, EIL based on AET helps weaken the attributional distortions and internal pressures that underlie impostor experiences. This observation highlights the fourth hypothesis as follows:

H4: Emotionally intelligent leadership is negatively associated with impostor syndrome.

2.6.2 Relationship between Hybrid Autonomy and Impostor Syndrome

Hybrid autonomy can be termed as employees' capacity to determine when, where and in what manner they carry out their work (Choudhury et al., 2021). Practicing HA may help reduce impostor tendencies by strengthening self-regulation and fostering a stronger sense of ownership over work processes. Research on psychology in work consistently shows that autonomy promotes intrinsic motivation, deeper identification with one's work and greater confidence in one's capabilities (Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker, 2014). Such resources can be placed against the attribution patterns associated with impostor syndrome, in which individuals doubt their competence and attribute success to luck or external circumstances. When employees can organise tasks, pace their workload and tailor their environment, they develop clearer insight into how their own actions contribute to outcomes, making success feel more earned and competence-based (Choudhury et al., 2021).

Recent literature from hybrid work contexts further suggests that employees who perceive higher levels of autonomy report better mental well-being, stronger performance self-assessments and reduced feelings of self-doubt (Höcker et al., 2024; Trevino Garcia & Christensen, 2025). Although few studies have examined HA and IS directly, research on autonomy orientation demonstrates that higher autonomy is associated with lower impostor tendencies and reduced perfectionistic self-pressure (Neufeld et al., 2025). On the other hand, work arrangements that impose rigid coordination can increase self-doubt by limiting opportunities for employees to recognise their own effectiveness and weakening their sense of task ownership (Whitman & Shanine, 2012). These findings suggest that autonomy may function as a resource that helps buffer impostor feelings in flexible and hybrid work settings. Following this, the JDR model posits that job resources enhance employees' sense of control and reduce strain-related cognitions, which may underpin impostor experiences. HA may weaken self-doubt and externalised success attributions characteristic of IS. This brings the fifth hypothesis of this study.

H5: Hybrid autonomy is negatively associated with impostor syndrome.

2.6.3 Relationship between Virtual Fatigue and Impostor Syndrome

Deriving from the above sections on VF, it can be observed that VF arises as a cause of prolonged screen exposure, frequent virtual meetings and the sustained cognitive effort required to interpret reduced social cues. These particularities of VF may heighten impostor tendencies by undermining employees' ability to accurately evaluate their own performance. Research on virtual overload depicts that interactions in technology-heavy setups deplete cognitive and emotional resources, and in turn increases susceptibility to negative self-appraisals and internalised doubt (Fauville et al., 2021; Tarafdar et al., 2019). When employees experience lesser attentional capacity, they become more likely to underestimate their abilities, misinterpret base errors as incompetence and experience heightened anxiety about how they are being perceived (Mak et al., 2019; Vergauwe et al., 2015).

Hybrid and remote work environments can accentuate this process. Reduced face-to-face interaction limits access to non-verbal cues, spontaneous feedback that typically help employees validate their competence. Empirical studies in digitally mediated work settings suggest that when feedback channels are weakened and interpersonal visibility is low, employees tend to internalise ambiguous or negative virtual micro-events like brief silences, delayed responses or technical glitches as reflections of their own inadequacy (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Such cognitive misinterpretations synchronize with core mechanisms of IS, where individuals fail to consider contextual challenges and instead attribute difficulties to their perceived lack of ability (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016).

Moreover, virtual fatigue may intensify impostor feelings by exacerbating comparison-based pressures. Drawing from literature around digital and hybrid environments, employees are frequently exposed to highly curated online professional identities, which heighten self-focused attention and amplify perceived issues between their own performance and that of others (Marder et al., 2024). When this exposure meets with the emotional exhaustion associated with sustained virtual demands, individuals become more vulnerable to feelings of not being sufficient and may increasingly believe that their competence is being overestimated by others (Mak et al., 2019). These tendencies reflect well-established mechanisms within the impostor syndrome literature, which explain that depleted emotional resources and negative affect increase self-doubt and reinforce maladaptive attribution patterns.

Taken together, literature suggest that VF corrupts the psychological resources like attentional control, emotional stability and self-efficacy which typically protect against impostor thoughts. As digital demands accumulate, employees may become increasingly prone to interpreting everyday challenges as evidence of incompetence, particularly in hybrid contexts where evaluation cues are blurred. As such:

H6: Virtual fatigue is positively associated with employees' impostor syndrome.

2.7 Workplace Happiness

Workplace happiness is a multidimensional concept that reflects the extent to which employees experience positive emotions, meaningful engagement, satisfaction and overall well-being at work. Originating from positive organisational work, the concept extends beyond traditional job satisfaction and incorporates affective (momentary positive emotions), cognitive (evaluation of one's job and life at work) and eudaimonic dimensions (meaning, fulfilment and psychological functioning) (Fisher, 2010; Salas-Vallina et al., 2018). Contemporary research conceptualises workplace happiness as the coexistence of hedonic elements (joy, enthusiasm, pleasure at work) and eudaimonic elements (purpose, growth, contribution) (Ryan & Deci, 2001), reflecting the broader shift in organisational research toward understanding thriving rather than merely the absence of strain.

Recent empirical work emphasises that workplace happiness is shaped by experiences of meaning, work–life balance, affective engagement and positive social relations at work. A systematic review of happiness at work identifies three dominant components: positive affective experiences, job satisfaction and engagement, each contributing to a holistic sense of well-being in organisational settings (Ribeiro et al., 2024). High levels of workplace happiness are consistently associated with stronger psychological well-being, reduced distress, increased life satisfaction and healthier functioning at work. A recent global study explains that individuals reporting higher levels of multi-dimensional well-being, such as emotional, mental and social also experienced lower stress, fewer symptoms of poor health and overall better work functioning (Bialowolski et al., 2023). These findings reinforce workplace happiness as a crucial component of sustainable employee well-being and positive organisational outcomes.

The increase in hybrid work has derived scholarly attention to workplace happiness, as flexible arrangements reshape how employees experience autonomy, connection and work–life integration. Hybrid models, that are a blend of remote and on-site work, can be associated to improve subjective well-being, largely due to increased flexibility, decreased commuting time and greater personal control over work rhythms (Trevino Garcia & Christensen, 2025). Systematic reviews that examined post-pandemic work arrangements show that hybrid work can support happiness by enabling employees to align work schedules with personal needs, reduce daily stressors and enhance perceived balance (Wells et al., 2023). Similarly, empirical studies across Europe and Asia suggest that hybrid workers report higher job satisfaction and general well-being compared to fully on-site workers, particularly when organisations provide clear communication, task clarity and opportunities for meaningful social interaction (Ribeiro et al., 2024).

However, it is essential to note that the literature highlights that hybrid work does not increase happiness overall, instead, its benefits arise under specific conditions. Hybrid arrangements which

are poorly setup can also lead to social isolation, role ambiguity and blurred boundaries, which negatively influence well-being (Oakman et al., 2020). Research explains that employees who struggle with detachment, experience digital overload or lack adequate organisational support report lower levels of workplace happiness despite flexible work arrangements (Wells et al., 2023). Therefore, hybrid work presents both opportunities and challenges, while flexibility and autonomy can enhance happiness, insufficient social connection or lack of clarity can undermine it.

Overall, workplace happiness is a multidimensional concept that stems from affective well-being, meaningful engagement and cognitive evaluations of work life. It can be observed that in contemporary hybrid work environments, it emerges as a particularly salient outcome, shaped by how employees navigate flexibility, digital demands, work–life integration and evolving social dynamics. Understanding workplace happiness in hybrid contexts provides a foundation for examining how emotional leadership, impostor tendencies and digital fatigue interact with employees' subjective well-being.

2.7.1 Relationship with EIL and Workplace Happiness

EIL is known as a significant contributor to positive employee affect, meaning and overall workplace well-being. Leaders that can demonstrate high emotional intelligence through their behaviours such as empathy, emotional awareness, and supportive communication can potentially shape the emotional tone of daily workplace interactions, influencing employees' momentary affect and broader cognitive evaluations of their work lives (Miao et al., 2017a). As workplace happiness is relatively influenced by positive emotional experiences and meaningful relational exchanges, emotionally attuned leader behaviours play a central role in sustaining employee happiness.

Recent empirical research shows that leaders who are able to recognise and respond effectively to employees' emotional cues foster higher levels of job satisfaction, affective commitment and positive workplace emotions (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). These emotional interactions often serve as positive micro-events that accumulate into a broader sense of happiness at work. It is also observed that remote-work settings indicate positive leadership behaviours and in turn significantly enhance employees' psychological energy (vigor), which serves as a key factor of workplace happiness under digital or hybrid work conditions (Caniëls, 2023).

Higher level of engagement and meaning which are core components of workplace happiness are also related with EIL. Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leaders improve employees' intrinsic motivation, feelings of belonging and perceptions of meaningful work - all of which strengthen hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Salas-Vallina et al., 2018). When employees often experience interpersonal affirmation, recognition and high-

quality emotional exchanges from their leaders, they tend to evaluate their work positively and experience sustained happiness (Salas-Vallina et al., 2018).

Through literature it can be observed that hybrid and digitally mediated work further amplify the importance of EIL. The reduced visibility and fewer spontaneous interactions in hybrid settings can create emotional gaps that employees depend on leaders to fill. Empirical studies show that emotionally supportive leadership in remote/hybrid contexts significantly enhances positive emotions, reduces stress and contributes to higher overall well-being (Trevino Garcia & Christensen, 2025). Consistent with EIL research can be linked to positive work attitudes and happiness at work (Miao et al., 2017a; Salas-Vallina et al., 2018), fostering positive affective experiences and emotional reassurance in these environments, EIL becomes a critical predictor of workplace happiness. Therefore:

H7: Emotionally Intelligent Leadership is positively associated with workplace happiness.

2.7.2 Relationship between impostor syndrome and workplace happiness

Impostor syndrome has emerged as a significant psychological factor influencing employee well-being and broader workplace attitudes. Strong impostor tendencies influence individuals to frequently report difficulty internalising success, heightened fear of failure, persistent self-doubt and chronic evaluation anxiety, all of which hamper positive affect and job satisfaction. Recent reviews show that IS can be associated with reduced well-being, increased stress, lower work engagement and diminished happiness across occupational groups (Bravata et al., 2020).

Workplace happiness, which includes affective well-being, satisfaction and meaning, is particularly sensitive to the negative emotional characteristic of impostor syndrome. Employees with impostor tendencies tend to experience more frequent negative emotions and fewer daily positive events, both of which contrasts with overall happiness at work (Vergauwe et al., 2015). Empirical findings further indicate that impostor feelings are linked to increased emotional exhaustion, lower self-esteem and poorer psychological functioning (Hudson & González-Gómez, 2021), mechanisms that directly erode both the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of happiness at work (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

In hybrid work arrangements, impostor feelings may be further intensified by reduced informal feedback, fewer non-verbal cues and ambiguity surrounding performance evaluation. Such conditions can exacerbate perceived incompetence and increase emotional strain, in turn weakening happiness and positive psychological states (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016; Marder et al., 2024). Although direct research of IS and workplace happiness in hybrid contexts remains limited, evidence from digitally intensive and performance-driven environments suggests that persistent self-doubt and evaluation anxiety are associated with reduced affect and lower work-related well-being (Bravata et al., 2020; Hudson & González-Gómez, 2021). Deriving from these

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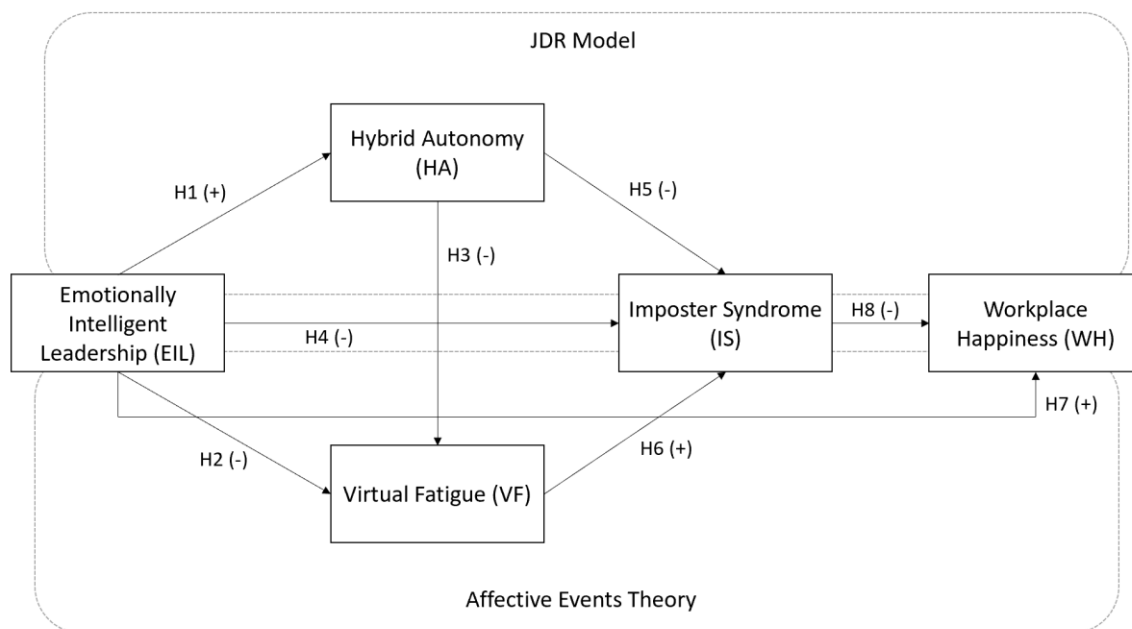
conditions, employees who feel a misfit in their roles may interpret everyday challenges more negatively, derive less meaning from work and experience fewer positive emotional reactions—all of which reduce their capacity to experience sustained happiness at work.

All in all, evidence suggests an increasing negative association between IS and workplace happiness. Individuals high in impostor feelings may experience emotional strain, diminished positive affect and maladaptive cognitive patterns, making it more difficult for them to achieve the sustained positive emotional and cognitive evaluations that define workplace happiness (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). With this comes the eighth hypothesis of this study

H8: Impostor syndrome negatively affects workplace happiness.

Based on the extensive review of this study, we derive at the research model below:

Figure 1. Research model



CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design based on positivist research framework. This framework advises that social phenomena can be measured and studied objectively through observable and quantifiable data (Saunders et al., 2019). Aligning with this framework, this study uses a deductive approach in which hypotheses are derived from established theoretical frameworks, particularly the JDR model and AET, and then empirically tested using statistical techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Primary data was collected using cross-sectional survey strategy. As the study is based on psychological and organizational variables, survey research was used to examine relationships using standardized measurement instruments (Bryman & Bell, 2015)

For analysis of the research model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was conducted using SmartPLS 4. The research model consists of five latent variables and eight structural relationships, thus, making PLS-SEM the most appropriate methodological tool as it facilitates the estimation of complex structural models involving multiple constructs and simultaneous interrelationships (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM is particularly suitable when:

- The research is prediction-oriented.
- The model includes multiple endogenous constructs.
- Strict multivariate normality assumptions cannot be guaranteed (Hair et al., 2019).

The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was assessed to establish reliability and validity through evaluation of indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT criterion). Second, the structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, collinearity diagnostics using variance inflation factors (VIF), coefficients of determination (R^2), and bootstrapped confidence intervals to determine the statistical significance of hypothesized relationships (Hair et al., 2019).

3.1 Population and Data Collection

The target population for this study focuses on employees engaged in hybrid work arrangements and have direct supervisors. This population was selected because the constructs under investigation like Hybrid Autonomy and Virtual Fatigue, are intrinsically linked to digitally mediated and hybrid work environments. Data was collected via an online survey through Qualtrics platform. The survey was distributed through professional and personal contacts and social platforms like LinkedIn and Instagram. Due to absence of a comprehensive sampling frame for hybrid employees across industries, a non-probability sampling strategy was adopted (Saunders et al., 2019). The study used convenience sampling to survey eligible participants with

snowball technique, where respondents were requested to pass on the survey with other hybrid employees (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019).

The data was collected at a single point in time, between January 06, 2026 and February 15, 2026. Participation was voluntary and anonymous maintaining confidentiality and reducing social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Demographic variables collected comprised gender, age, industry sector, seniority, organizational tenure, country of origin and country of work. These variables were used to describe the sample characteristics. A total of 270 responses were collected, out of which 164 were hybrid workers and after cleaning data, 113 responses were used. Although non-probability sampling limits statistical generalizability, it is widely accepted in structural equation modelling research where the primary objective is theory testing and model validation rather than population parameter estimation (Hulland et al., 2018; Memon et al., 2020).

3.2 Measures

In order to measure all constructs, previously validated multi-item scales drawn from peer-reviewed literature were used, ensuring construct reliability and validity (DeVellis, 2017). A seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) was used to collect responses. Seven-point Likert scales are commonly recommended in behavioural research because they provide increased sensitivity, improved variance capture, and enhanced psychometric reliability compared to shorter scales (Dawes, 2008).

EIL was measured using the measurement equivalence of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale across self and other ratings (Libbrecht et al., 2010). WLEIS introduced by Wong and Law (2002), is used for its strong reliability, factorial validity, and cross-source equivalence, in organizational research and comprises of four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion.

HA was measured using Measuring autonomy in hybrid work: Scale development (Datta et al., 2025). This scale is specific as it captures employees' perceived discretion over work location, scheduling, and task execution within hybrid work arrangements. The scale extends traditional conceptualizations of job autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Parker, 2014) to reflect the temporal and spatial flexibility characteristic of hybrid environments.

VF was measured using specifically Technostress Creators scale (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008) from The Consequences of Technostress for End Users in Organizations: Conceptual Development and Empirical Validation. TSC framework focuses on technology-related job demands such as overload, complexity, and invasion, which altogether cause cognitive strain and exhaustion. These items help reflect the fatigue-related consequences of sustained technology-mediated work.

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IS was measured using the validated short form of the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS-10) (B. Wang et al., 2024). The CIPS-10 is reliable for this study as it examines core dimensions of IS, including fear of exposure, attributional distortions, and persistent self-doubt.

The shortened version of the Happiness at Work (SHAW) (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021) was used to measure Workplace Happiness. SHAW has nine items across three dimensions namely engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. This measure assesses both hedonic (positive affect) and eudaimonic (meaning and fulfilment) aspects of workplace well-being, consistent with broader conceptualizations of happiness at work (Fisher, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

All constructs were modelled in accordance with their theoretical conceptualization within the structural equation modelling framework.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

4.1 Measurement Model

In order to assess the reflective measurement model, the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2019) were followed and a SEM-PLS analysis was performed. The data analysis includes indicator reliability (outer loadings), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha (α) and CRa), convergent validity (AVE), discriminant validity (HTMT), and lastly collinearity diagnostics (VIF). According to Chin (1998), the study first examined the outer loadings to assess indicator reliability. The loadings above 0.70 were preferred ensuring that CRa and AVE remain acceptable. To improve the construct validity and internal consistency, a removal process for loadings below 0.70 was conducted gradually. The removal was performed ensuring that no construct lost excessive, ensuring that item elimination did not compromise content validity. A total of 29 items were eliminated (11 from HA, 15 from VF & 3 from WPH).

Post item purification, all remaining indicators exhibited satisfactory loadings. Next, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$) and composite reliability (CRa > 0.7). Convergent validity was assessed using the AVE > 0.50 . All constructs satisfied these criteria. Cronbach's alpha values showed a range from 0.843 to 0.949. CRa values were from 0.864 to 0.956, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). However, CRa value for EIL was noted as 0.956, appeared slightly above the upper guideline of 0.95 (Hair et al., 2019). This could be due to the relatively large number of indicators and does not explicitly indicate redundancy. AVE values ranged between 0.510 and 0.627, surpassing the recommended threshold and confirming that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators. Collinearity was assessed using VIF values, which should remain below 5 (Hair et al., 2019). All indicators displayed VIF values between 1.36 and 4.89, indicating that there is no multicollinearity in the model. The below table represents the model based on the criteria by Chin (1998) and Hair et al. (2019).

Table 2. Measurement Model

Items	Item Load	α	CRa	AVE	VIF
EIL					
EIL 1	0.688	0.949	0.956	0.566	3.442
EIL 10	0.576				2.004
EIL 11	0.656				3.075
EIL 12	0.696				3.710
EIL 13	0.806				3.984
EIL 14	0.819				4.060
EIL 15	0.743				3.767
EIL 16	0.857				4.887
EIL 2	0.757				4.579

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EIL 3	0.779				4.481
EIL 4	0.744				2.748
EIL 5	0.649				1.798
EIL 6	0.835				4.004
EIL 7	0.778				3.745
EIL 8	0.832				4.386
EIL 9	0.758				2.934
HA					
HA 11	0.666	0.843	0.865	0.510	1.443
HA 12	0.810				2.124
HA 13	0.726				1.631
HA 14	0.767				1.959
HA 6	0.706				1.725
HA 8	0.648				1.736
HA 9	0.663				1.821
IS					
IS 1	0.817	0.916	0.923	0.572	3.186
IS 10	0.690				2.126
IS 2	0.768				2.511
IS 3	0.851				3.012
IS 4	0.791				4.046
IS 5	0.767				2.290
IS 6	0.787				3.970
IS 7	0.634				1.763
IS 8	0.752				2.472
IS 9	0.681				2.545
VF					
VF 10	0.727	0.865	0.864	0.513	2.014
VF 12	0.614				1.363
VF 17	0.652				1.493
VF 2	0.754				2.562
VF 3	0.756				2.533
VF 5	0.717				2.171
VF 6	0.764				2.331
VF 9	0.732				1.917
WPH					
WPH2 1	0.808	0.885	0.918	0.627	2.250
WPH 1	0.789				1.967
WPH 2	0.889				3.061
WPH 4	0.736				2.266
WPH 5	0.743				3.038
WPH 6	0.776				3.081

A discriminant validity test was also performed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), as recommended by (Hair et al., 2019), ensuring the a conservative threshold of 0.90 was applied. All HTMT values ranged between 0.124 and 0.470, which are below the 0.90 threshold,

suggesting that all constructs are empirically distinct. Below is the table representing the discriminant validity.

Table 3. Variable HTMT

	EIL	HA	IS	VF	WPH
EIL					
HA	0.263				
IS	0.124	0.175			
VF	0.170	0.151	0.470		
WPH	0.229	0.268	0.436	0.169	

To further examine the relationships among constructs, the latent variable correlation matrix was also analysed. As observed in Table 4, correlations range from weak to moderate in magnitude. There was a strong positive correlation between IS and VF ($r = 0.442$), while a moderate negative association was found between IS and WPH ($r = -0.432$). All remaining correlations were observed indicating the absence of multicollinearity, which suggested the distinctiveness of the constructs.

Table 4. Correlation of Variables

	EIL	HA	IS	VF	WPH
EIL	1.000	0.261	-0.051	-0.140	0.207
HA	0.261	1.000	-0.046	-0.061	0.229
IS	-0.051	-0.046	1.000	0.442	-0.432
VF	-0.140	-0.061	0.442	1.000	-0.083
WPH	0.207	0.229	-0.432	-0.083	1.000

4.2 Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated following the measurement model in accordance with the analysis proposed by Hair et al. (2019). The analysis focused on collinearity statistics (VIF), explanatory power (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and the significance and relevance of path coefficients obtained via bootstrapping. Collinearity between predictor constructs was examined using inner VIF values, which were below the recommended threshold of 5, suggesting that there was no multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). Regarding overall model fit, the SRMR values were 0.086 for the saturated model and 0.089 for the estimated model, suggesting a borderline overall fit for the structural model.

The coefficient of determination (R^2), was used to assess the explanatory power of the model, which reflected the proportion of variance of the dependent variables explained by the independent ones. R^2 values above 0.30 indicate meaningful explanatory power (Saunders et al.,

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2019). Based on PLS-SEM guidelines, Hair et al. (2019) further classify R^2 values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 as weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively. The analysis obtained the following R^2 values for the model: WPH ($R^2=0.230$) demonstrates weak-to-moderate explanatory power; IS ($R^2 = 0.196$) indicates weak explanatory power; HA ($R^2 = 0.063$) shows low explanatory power; and, VF ($R^2 = 0.017$) reflects very weak explanatory power. Overall, the model explains a meaningful proportion of variance in Workplace Happiness and Impostor Syndrome, while the predictive capacity for Hybrid Autonomy and Virtual Fatigue remains limited.

The significance of the structural relationships was assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. Path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values were analysed. A p-value below 0.05 was considered statistically significant and the sign and magnitude of β indicate the direction and strength of the relationships. The results indicate that Virtual Fatigue significantly increases Impostor Syndrome ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.001$), and Impostor Syndrome significantly reduces Workplace Happiness ($\beta = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$). EIL also shows a significant positive influence on Workplace Happiness ($\beta = 0.206$, $p = 0.035$).

As per the predictive analysis, PLSpredict results indicate that Q^2 values above zero suggest predictive capability for the constructs of the model (Hair et al., 2019). From the model, only the items HA_11: 0.026, HA_12: 0.005, HA_13: 0.027, HA_8: 0.002, WPH2_1: 0.023, WPH_1: 0.012, and WPH_2: 0.007 depict a positive prediction. Overall, the hypothesis testing results provide empirical support for H1, H6, H7, and H8. It can be predicted that Emotional Intelligent Leadership positively influences Hybrid Autonomy and Workplace Happiness, while Virtual Fatigue significantly increases Impostor Syndrome, which then negatively affects Workplace Happiness. With regards to the mediation effects, only the indirect relationship between Virtual Fatigue and Workplace Happiness through Impostor Syndrome was supported. These findings showcase the central role of Impostor Syndrome as a key psychological mechanism linking digital strain to reduced workplace happiness. The remaining proposed mediation pathways were not statistically significant. Table 5. below represents the above discussions.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T-statistics	P values	Results
H1	EIL -> HA	0.251	1.962	0.050	Supported
H2	EIL -> VF	-0.121	0.874	0.382	Not Supported
H3	HA -> VF	-0.030	0.198	0.843	Not Supported

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H4	EIL -> IS	0.005	0.049	0.961	Not Supported
H5	HA -> IS	-0.022	0.176	0.860	Not Supported
H6	VF -> IS	0.442	5.338	0.000	Supported
H7	EIL -> WPH	0.206	2.105	0.035	Supported
H8	IS -> WPH	-0.421	4.589	0.000	Supported

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

The results provide empirical support for H1, suggesting that EIL has a positive influence on HA ($\beta = 0.251$, $p = 0.050$). The effect appears to be moderate and statistically significant at the threshold level and its direction is fully consistent with the theoretical arguments developed in Chapter 2. As per the JDR model, leadership can function as an important social job resource that enhances employees' ability to utilise other structural resources, such as autonomy (Bakker et al., 2023; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Emotionally intelligent leaders foster emotional clarity, empathy, and supportive communication, which may strengthen employees' confidence in exercising discretion over when, where, and how they work (Mayer et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2017a). Hybrid setups offer flexibility, however, require self-regulation and interpretation of ambiguous norms, resulting in being classified as relational resources that appear to foster perceived control. This finding is also aligned with Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), as emotionally supportive leader behaviours may act as positive affective events that enhance psychological safety and thereby encourage autonomous action.

However, the relatively low explanatory power for hybrid autonomy ($R^2 = 0.063$) suggests that autonomy in hybrid work is not primarily driven by EIL alone. Research conceptualises HA as structurally embedded in organisational policies, task design, and digital infrastructure (Choudhury et al., 2021; Datta et al., 2025) and as a broader work design characteristic (Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2017). Therefore, while EIL contributes positively to employees' perceived autonomy, it probably acts as an aiding relational factor rather than a structural determinant. From a JDR perspective, this indicates that leadership may enhance the effective utilisation of existing job resources rather than directly creating them (Bakker et al., 2023). Consequently, the findings from the analysis refine the theoretical argument by suggesting that EIL strengthens employees' confidence and psychological readiness to enact hybrid autonomy, but formal organisational arrangements remain critical in shaping the overall level of autonomy experienced in hybrid environments.

Next, we check H2. The results of the analysis did not support H2, as EIL was not significantly associated with VF ($\beta = -0.121$, $p = 0.382$). The hypothesised relationship was negative as it was statistically insignificant and the explanatory power for virtual fatigue was very weak ($R^2 = 0.017$). This finding contrasts with prior research suggesting that emotionally aware leaders may mitigate digital stress by adapting communication practices and providing socio-emotional support in digital contexts (Ertiö et al., 2024; Farmanesh et al., 2025). From a JDR point of view, leadership can be conceptualised as a job resource that buffers the impact of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). However, the results obtained suggest that the socio-cognitive demands adding to VF like prolonged screen exposure, meeting density and

technological overload (Fauville et al., 2021; Tarafdar et al., 2019) may operate at a structural or technological level that exceeds emotional leadership intervention potential.

Proceeding to H3, the findings of the analysis did not support H3, as HA was not significantly associated with VF ($\beta = -0.030$, $p = 0.843$). The hypothesised direction was negative including the effect that was negligible and statistically insignificant, lastly the explanatory power for VF remained very weak ($R^2 = 0.017$). This result similar to H2 also contrasts with prior research, suggesting that autonomy can function as a job resource that buffers strain and supports recovery in flexible work arrangements (Andrulli & Gerards, 2023; Höcker et al., 2024). As per JDR, autonomy may typically be conceptualised as a motivational resource that mitigates the impact of demands on strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). On the contrary, the present findings suggest that the digital intensity may not be curbed by EIL itself.

One possible explanation for the negative result could be the autonomy paradox highlighted in hybrid work literature (Andrulli & Gerards, 2023). While employees may have formal flexibility regarding where and when they work, strong availability norms, high workload expectations and blurred boundaries may limit their actual control over digital demands (Andrulli & Gerards, 2023; Wells et al., 2023). In such contexts, autonomy does not necessarily translate into reduced technological strain if employees remain continuously connected or exposed to intensive virtual interactions. Aligning with AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), recurring digital stressors may accumulate into fatigue regardless of structural flexibility. Therefore, the non-significant finding refines the theoretical assumption by suggesting that HA may enhance motivational outcomes, but it does not directly buffer the cognitive depletion associated with technology-driven fatigue in hybrid environments.

Furthering, the analysis did not support H4, as EIL was not significantly associated with IS. The path coefficient was close to zero, indicating no meaningful relationship was analysed. This result contrasts with prior literature suggesting that emotionally supportive leadership can enhance self-efficacy, reduce anxiety and foster psychological safety (Frazier et al., 2017; Little et al., 2016), thus potentially buffering impostor feelings. Based on academic literature, AET would suggest that emotionally attuned leaders shape how employees interpret work events, which could reduce maladaptive attribution patterns linked to impostor syndrome (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). However, the current observations indicate that impostor tendencies may not be directly shaped by emotional competencies of leaders.

The reason could be that impostor syndrome is a relatively stable, internally rooted cognitive pattern rather than a purely relational outcome. Literature also suggests that impostor feelings are associated to personality traits, perfectionism and attributional styles (Vergauwe et al., 2015; Whitman & Shanine, 2012), thus, may not be easily altered through EIL alone. In hybrid environments, structural ambiguity and reduced performance visibility (Handke et al., 2024), may

trigger impostor feelings regardless of leader empathy or support. Therefore, while EIL enhances workplace happiness directly (as observed in Table 5), it does not appear to directly weaken the deeper cognitive distortions underlying impostor syndrome.

Regarding H5, the findings of the PLS-SEM analysis did not support H5, as HA showed no significant relationship with IS. The present results suggest that perceived discretion over work location and scheduling does not directly mean reduced self-doubt, even though, autonomy may be traditionally conceptualised as a motivational job resource that enhances control, competence and intrinsic motivation (Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2017). Within the JDR framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), autonomy is expected to reduce strain-related cognitions, however, IS may not operate purely as a strain outcome but rather as a cognitive self-evaluative construct.

Similar to the H3, this could be a result of the autonomy paradox within hybrid work. While employees may experience flexibility in where and when they work (Choudhury et al., 2021), hybrid arrangements can at the same instance increase performance ambiguity and reduce informal feedback (Handke et al., 2024). In such conditions, autonomy may even increase responsibility and self-monitoring, potentially reinforcing rather than alleviating self-doubt. This aligns with research indicating that impostor tendencies are linked to internal attribution patterns and perfectionistic pressures (Neufeld et al., 2025; Whitman & Shanine, 2012), which autonomy alone may not support. Thus, HA appears insufficient as a single resource to buffer impostor feelings in digitally mediated work environments.

Next, the analysis supported H6, VF and IS. The findings provide strong empirical support for H6, indicating that VF significantly increases IS ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.001$). The magnitude of this relationship is substantial compared to other paths in the model, highlighting virtual fatigue as a distinct psychological antecedent of impostor feelings in hybrid environments. Consistent with prior literature, this result suggests that sustained digital demands like prolonged screen exposure, constant connectivity and reduced non-verbal cues tend to deplete cognitive and emotional resources (Fauville et al., 2021; Tarafdar et al., 2019). According to the JDR framework, such technology-related demands turn out to drain energy that impairs attentional capacity and emotional regulation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). Impostor tendencies often intensify when cognitive resources are depleted rendering individuals more prone to negative self-evaluations and maladaptive attribution patterns (Mak et al., 2019; Vergauwe et al., 2015). The strong coefficient ($\beta = 0.442$) observed in this study empirically confirms that digital strain is not merely a temporary discomfort but may turn into deeper self-doubt and perceived inadequacy.

From AET angle, recurring negative digital events, namely delayed responses, camera-off meetings, ambiguous feedback or technological disruptions may accumulate into persistent negative affect (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In hybrid settings, employees may internalise

ambiguous virtual interactions as personal shortcomings due to the unavailability of informal validation and spontaneous performance cues (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Over time, this process reinforces the core cognitive distortions associated with IS, particularly the tendency to attribute challenges to internal incompetence rather than contextual constraints (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). The empirical findings therefore extend existing impostor syndrome research by positioning VF as a contemporary, technology-driven mechanism that intensifies impostor feelings in hybrid work environments. This highlights virtual fatigue as a critical strain pathway linking digital work demands to deeper psychological vulnerability.

Next, the findings of the analysis support H7, suggesting that workplace happiness is positively influenced by EIL ($\beta = 0.206$, $p = 0.035$). The magnitude of the effect is moderate, and is also statistically significant and consistent with the theoretical arguments mentioned in the literature review. Meta-analytic reviews suggest that EI leaders enhance job satisfaction, affective commitment and positive workplace emotions (Miao et al., 2017a), all of which are essential components of workplace happiness (Fisher, 2010; Salas-Vallina et al., 2018). Leaders who show empathy, emotional awareness and supportive communication shape the emotional climate of daily interactions, thereby fostering positive affect and meaningful relational exchanges. From an AET view, such emotionally supportive leader behaviours can be understood as recurring positive affective events that accumulate over time into broader cognitive evaluations of happiness at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The empirical findings identified may help further understand that EIL directly contributes to employees' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in hybrid contexts.

Furthermore, the hybrid work environment appears to amplify the relevance of EIL. Reduced visibility, limited informal interaction and digitally mediated communication can create emotional ambiguity and weaken spontaneous validation (Handke et al., 2024; Trevino Garcia & Christensen, 2025). Prior research suggests that positive leadership behaviours in remote contexts enhance vigor, engagement and psychological energy (Caniëls, 2023), which are essential elements of workplace happiness. These findings therefore position EIL as a central interpersonal capability that sustains happiness in hybrid work environments.

Finally, the findings provide strong support for H8. The results demonstrate that IS significantly and negatively influences workplace happiness ($\beta = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$). The magnitude of this coefficient indicates a substantial effect, placing IS as one of the strongest predictors of workplace happiness in the model. This result aligns with prior research linking impostor tendencies to increased stress, emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction (Bravata et al., 2020; Hudson & González-Gómez, 2021). Employees who face challenges in internalising success and experience persistent self-doubt are less likely to experience the positive affect, engagement and meaning that define workplace happiness (Fisher, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Consistent with AET, recurring negative self-evaluations may accumulate into broader negative job attitudes (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Individuals experiencing increased impostor feelings tend to interpret ambiguous work events as evidence of incompetence (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016), which due to hybrid environments can be intensified as feedback cues are less visible (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016). The strong negative relationship found in this study also suggests the supported mediation effect of virtual fatigue on workplace happiness through impostor syndrome, highlighting impostor feelings as a central psychological mechanism in the model.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on hybrid work, leadership and employee well-being by integrating the Job Demands–Resources (JDR) model and Affective Events Theory (AET) within a digitally mediated work context.

The supported hypotheses (H1, H6, H7 and H8) suggest that emotionally intelligent leadership enhances hybrid autonomy and workplace happiness, while virtual fatigue significantly increases impostor syndrome, which in turn strongly impacts in the reduction of workplace happiness. Based on the results, impostor syndrome can be derived as a central psychological mechanism linking digital strain to diminished well-being. With regards to the non-supported hypotheses (H2, H3, H4 and H5), the results suggest that virtual fatigue or impostor feelings are neither impacted by emotionally intelligent leadership nor hybrid autonomy. Rather, virtual fatigue appears primarily driven by structural and technological job demands, while impostor syndrome reflects deeper cognitive and attributional patterns that are not easily altered by relational or flexibility-based resources alone. Overall, the findings refine the theoretical integration of the JDR model and Affective Events Theory by distinguishing between relational resources that shape affective evaluations (such as workplace happiness) and structural digital demands that drive strain-related outcomes in hybrid work settings. With this the study offers a clear answer to the central research question by demonstrating that emotionally intelligent leadership influences workplace happiness in hybrid environments primarily through direct affective pathways and indirectly through the strain–impostor mechanism instead of autonomy-based buffering effects. As such, the findings extend the application of the JDR model to hybrid environments by suggesting that not all job resources function equally in reducing digital strain. While academic research places leadership and autonomy as key resources that mitigate job demands (Bakker et al., 2023; Tummers & Bakker, 2021), the findings of this study suggest that emotionally intelligent leadership and hybrid autonomy do not significantly reduce virtual fatigue. Instead, virtual fatigue emerges as a structurally embedded job demand that operates independently of relational resources. This refines JDR theory by distinguishing between interpersonal resources (e.g., emotionally

intelligent leadership) and technology-driven structural demands (e.g., virtual fatigue), suggesting that digital strain may require system-level rather than purely relational interventions.

Next, the study contributes to Affective Events Theory by demonstrating how recurring negative digital events accumulate into deeper cognitive self-evaluations. The strong positive relationship between virtual fatigue and impostor syndrome provides empirical evidence that sustained exposure to digitally mediated strain can later evolve into persistent self-doubt. This extends AET beyond short-term affective reactions and shows how repeated negative work events in hybrid contexts may shape more enduring cognitive states, such as impostor feelings.

Additionally, the findings place impostor syndrome within contemporary organisational theory. Rather than being directly influenced by leadership or autonomy, impostor syndrome appears primarily driven by strain-based mechanisms, particularly virtual fatigue. This challenges assumptions that EIL by itself can mitigate impostor tendencies and instead conceptualises impostor syndrome in hybrid work as a cognitive strain outcome emerging from cumulative digital demands.

Finally, the analysis strengthens the theoretical positioning of EIL as a direct predictor of workplace happiness. EIL maintained a significant positive relationship with workplace happiness, confirming its role as a core interpersonal resource supporting both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in hybrid settings.

Collectively, these contributions refine existing theory by demonstrating that in hybrid work environments:

- Digital demands act as main drivers of cognitive strain,
- Impostor syndrome functions as a central psychological mechanism linking strain to reduced happiness,
- Emotionally intelligent leadership sustains workplace happiness directly rather than by buffering technology-driven fatigue.

These findings expand the theoretical understanding of leadership and well-being in digitally mediated work systems and provide a clearer differentiation between relational resources and structural digital demands within hybrid contexts.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for organisations operating within hybrid and digitally mediated work environments. In accordance with SDGs, specifically with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), this study reinforces the need to create psychologically sustainable hybrid work systems. The following are some implications that this study proposes.

The strong positive relationship between VF and IS highlights digital strain as a central psychological risk in hybrid work. As observed in the study, EIL did not significantly reduce VF. Thus, organisations should recognise that relational leadership alone is insufficient to address technology-driven exhaustion.

To reduce VF, organisations should:

- Audit meeting frequency and duration to prevent excessive screen exposure.
- Introduce structured “meeting-free” time blocks.
- Establish clear norms regarding digital availability and response expectations.
- Review platform overload and consolidate communication tools where possible.

By directly reducing digital overload, organisations can prevent the cognitive depletion that causes impostor feelings and protect employees’ psychological health, thereby supporting SDG 3 objectives.

Although EIL did not buffer virtual fatigue, it significantly enhanced workplace happiness. This suggests that leadership plays a direct role in fostering positive work experiences in hybrid contexts. Organisations should therefore implement the following:

- Implement emotional intelligence development programs for managers.
- Train leaders in virtual empathy, emotionally supportive communication, and recognition practices.
- Promote psychologically safe climates where employees can express concerns without fear of judgment.

By strengthening emotional leadership capabilities, organisations can create higher-quality relational environments that enhance engagement, motivation and sustainable performance directly contributing to SDG 8 by promoting decent and meaningful work.

The buffering effect of hybrid autonomy suggests that flexibility alone does not automatically reduce strain or self-doubt. Hybrid work policies should therefore cover aspects beyond offering discretion over time and location and instead focus on clarity and structure. Organizations must align flexibility with clear workload expectations. They must ensure providing regular check-ins to reduce ambiguity around contribution and visibility. Most importantly, organizations must practice boundary management to prevent flexibility from becoming constant availability.

One of the main implications that this study identifies is addressing IS tendencies proactively. Given the strong negative effect of impostor syndrome on workplace happiness, organisations should treat them essentially as a well-being concern rather than an individual weakness.

Practical interventions may help employees could be as follows:

- Normalising discussions around self-doubt in leadership communications.
- Providing mentoring and peer-support systems.
- Offering coaching or workshops focused on attribution styles and cognitive reframing.

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All in all, the central managerial insight of this study is that in hybrid environments, digital strain acts as the primary mechanism undermining employee well-being, while EIL acts as a stabilising force that sustains happiness but does not eliminate technology-driven fatigue. A future outlook for sustainable hybrid systems therefore requires a dual approach; Structural management of digital demands and relational investment in emotionally intelligent leadership.

Organisations that integrate both dimensions are more likely to promote employee health (SDG 3) while fostering productive, resilient and sustainable work environments (SDG 8).

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The shift of working towards hybrid and digitally mediated formats has intensified questions about how leadership and technological demands jointly shape employee well-being. This research adds to that subject by analysing the role of emotionally intelligent leadership in influencing workplace happiness and by clarifying the mechanisms through which hybrid autonomy, virtual fatigue and impostor syndrome operate within this relationship. The results reveal a differentiated and theoretically meaningful pattern. Emotionally intelligent leadership directly enhanced workplace happiness and positively influenced hybrid autonomy. However, it was unable to significantly mitigate virtual fatigue or impostor syndrome. The study identified that virtual fatigue emerged as a central strain mechanism that substantially increased impostor syndrome, which in turn strongly diminished workplace happiness.

These findings indicate that in hybrid environments, digital intensity functions as a structurally embedded job demand that is not easily buffered by relational leadership resources. While EIL is essential in fostering positive affective events and sustaining employee happiness, it does not eliminate the cognitive depletion associated with prolonged virtual engagement. Impostor syndrome therefore appears as an important psychological pathway through which technology-driven strain turns into reduced well-being. By integrating the Job Demands–Resources model with Affective Events Theory, this research advances theoretical understanding by distinguishing between relational resources that shape affective evaluations and structural digital demands that generate cognitive strain in hybrid environments.

This study encountered several limitations alongside the contributions. One of the biggest limitations was the relatively small sample size which reduced the generalisability of the findings, additionally the cross-sectional design restricted causal interpretations. To counter the limitations and advance further, future research should adopt longitudinal or time-lagged designs to examine how virtual fatigue and impostor syndrome evolve over time, draw on larger and more diverse samples, and explore additional moderating factors such as personality traits, resilience or organisational culture. More attention to structural and technological interventions aiming to reduce digital overload would also deepen understanding of how to build psychologically sustainable hybrid work systems.

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DECLARATION OF AI USE

Below is the declaration for the use of AI tools and AI assisting technologies that were used to aid the formation of this study.

Content Assistance:

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT 5.2 and Gemini 3 for content assistance, specifically to source relevant literature, comparing articles and books and structuring arguments based on gathered material. The author reviewed and revised the material generated and takes full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Translation Assistance:

The “Abstract” of this manuscript was translated from English into Portuguese using DeepL and then refined using ChatGPT to create the “Resumo” The author further reviewed and revised the translation for accuracy, terminology, and meaning, and takes full responsibility for the final text.