



## REMOTE/FLEXIBLE WORK AND RETENTION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF WORK STRESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT USING MACHINE LEARNING-BASED SPEECH AND TEXT ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

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| Aim/Purpose  | This study investigates the psychological mechanisms linking remote/flexible work to intention to quit among middle and senior managers in India's IT/ITES sector. Guided by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, it positions work stress as a mediator, and tests perceived organizational support (POS) as a moderating buffer.  |
| Background   | Remote/flexible work, while offering flexibility, can also heighten stress through blurred work-life boundaries, communication challenges, and social isolation. This study addresses this gap by extending the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping to examine how POS moderates stress-driven intention to quit in remote/flexible work contexts.  |
| Methodology  | A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was employed. In the qualitative phase, interviews with 22 managers were analyzed using natural language processing and sentiment analysis to identify key stressors. In the quantitative phase, survey data from 260 managers were tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis and structural equation modeling to examine mediation (work stress) and moderation (POS) effects. Both were found to be statistically significant. |
| Contribution | The study contributes by integrating qualitative insights on stressors with quantitative validation of mediation and moderation effects. It advances remote/flexible work literature by extending the Transactional Model of Stress  |

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|                                   | and Coping to hybrid work contexts and provides a contextualized framework for understanding managerial retention.   |
| Findings                          | The qualitative analysis revealed three dominant stressors: blurred work–life boundaries, communication breakdowns in virtual settings, and social isolation. Sentiment analysis further indicated predominantly negative emotions such as frustration, fatigue, and anxiety, underscoring the psychological burden of remote/flexible work. These insights informed the survey design. The quantitative results confirmed that work stress mediates the relationship between remote/flexible work and intention to quit, while POS significantly buffers this pathway. Managers perceiving higher POS reported lower stress and reduced intention to quit than those with weaker support. |
| Recommendations for Practitioners | The major suggestions would be to prioritize employee well-being with stress-management programs (flexible scheduling, mental health resources). To strengthen POS via recognition, transparent communication, and support. This study also suggests fostering work-life balance through clear boundaries and reduced after-hours expectations.  |
| Recommendations for Researchers   | Future research should test additional mediators, such as job autonomy and empowerment, as well as moderators, including leadership style. Longitudinal and cross-sectoral studies across industries such as healthcare and education are recommended to enhance generalizability and capture evolving workforce dynamics.   |
| Impact on Society                 | Reducing managerial turnover preserves organizational knowledge, sustains productivity, and supports healthier workplace cultures. At a societal level, improving retention strengthens organizational sustainability, contributes to economic stability, and enhances employee well-being in increasingly digital work environments.  |
| Future Research                   | Future research should examine the long-term impacts of remote/flexible work on employee stress levels and retention to understand evolving workforce dynamics. Cross-cultural investigations into perceived organizational support and stress appraisal mechanisms could uncover contextual variations in coping strategies and organizational commitment. Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) technologies for real-time monitoring of stress indicators in remote/flexible work environments may enhance proactive interventions. These explorations could contribute to more resilient and adaptive organizational models in an increasingly digital work landscape.              |
| Keywords                          | remote/flexible work, perceived organizational support, work stress, intention to quit, IT/ITES sector, machine learning, speech processing, natural language processing, sentiment analysis   |

## INTRODUCTION

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The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted individuals, organizations, and society, ushering in transformative changes to work environments and psychological well-being (Nagel, 2020). Mandatory lockdowns, employment instability, and work-life disruptions triggered widespread stress and uncertainty among employees across sectors. As traditional work structures became unsustainable, organizations were compelled to shift toward digital infrastructures and flexible work arrangements to maintain operational continuity and safeguard employee health. Among these responses, the adoption of remote and hybrid work models has emerged as a central organizational strategy (Restubog et

al., 2020; Sasaki et al., 2023). In today's competitive business landscape, where talent is replaceable but organizational synergy and expertise are difficult to replicate, retaining skilled employees has become a critical concern. The pandemic accelerated a global digital transformation, embedding technology deeply into employees' daily routines. Remote/flexible work, once considered a perk, has become an operational necessity. "Remote/flexible work refers to the performance of job responsibilities outside the traditional office setting, facilitated primarily through digital communication and collaboration technologies. In this study, remote/flexible work is examined in the context of the IT/ITES sector, where employees operate in distributed teams and rely heavily on virtual modes of interaction" (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016, p. 197). In India's IT-ITES sector, 2.7% of the 593 million workforce are fully remote, 28.2% hybrid, and 59.1% office-based, while 16% of companies operate entirely remotely (Haan, 2024). Nearly one-third of Indian employees report burnout (Microsoft Stories, 2020), reflecting global patterns of longer meetings, heavier communication, and higher attrition risk (Hosoda, 2021). Employee turnover has been examined for over two centuries and remains one of the most persistent challenges in organizational psychology and management research (Porter & Steers, 1973; Premalatha, 2016).

Despite extensive inquiry, turnover continues to disrupt industries, with "The Great Resignation" of 2020 and beyond serving as a contemporary illustration of its impact. Historically, dissatisfaction with pay was identified as an early driver of voluntary turnover around 1917 (Miller et al., 1979). By the 1930s, additional social factors were recognized, with studies reporting that employees' decisions to leave were sometimes influenced by family background, such as having fathers employed in skilled occupations (Hom et al., 2017). Turnover may occur voluntarily, when initiated by employees, or involuntarily, when instigated by organizations (Tett & Meyer, 1993). In either case, it imposes significant costs: organisations lose training and workforce stability investments, while employees face the uncertainty and adjustment costs associated with securing new employment (Farris, 1969). In response to these challenges, scholars have developed conceptual models to explain turnover decisions. These frameworks seek to identify critical antecedents and map the relationships among variables contributing to withdrawal behaviours (Jackofsky, 1984). Over time, such models have evolved, with each iteration introducing new constructs and perspectives, thereby broadening the scope of turnover research (Lee & Mowday, 1987). D. G. Allen et al. (2003) identified personality as an antecedent of perceived organizational support, suggesting that individual dispositions play an important role in shaping retention outcomes.

Despite benefits like flexibility and work-life balance, remote work often causes blurred boundaries, digital fatigue, and communication issues, compounded by limited training and reduced interaction, leading to stress and dissatisfaction (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Segbenya & Okorley, 2022). Although intention to quit have been linked to extrinsic pull factors, such as competitive job markets and external opportunities, and intrinsic push factors, such as dissatisfaction, burnout, and declining mental well-being (Basu, 2025; Blackmore et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Mitchell, 1994), there remains a notable gap in understanding the psychological mechanisms through which remote/flexible work stressors affect employees, particularly middle and senior managers in digitally mediated environments.

This study aims to address this gap by explicitly exploring how remote/flexible work influences managerial intention to quit through work stress, situating work stress as a mediator and perceived organizational support (POS) as a moderator. Despite organizational transformations, employees' psychological responses to remote/flexible work stressors and their impact on withdrawal cognitions remain underexplored. This forms the core research problem driving the investigation. To comprehensively examine these dynamics, this study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with quantitative survey data, which is particularly suited to capture both the lived experiences of stress and the statistically grounded relationships between constructs. The qualitative component enables an in-depth understanding of stress appraisals and context-specific stressors, while quantita-

tive analysis tests hypothesized relationships and validates the mediating role of work stress and moderating role of POS in influencing intention to quit. This methodological triangulation strengthens the rigor and relevance of the study.

Theoretically, the research is grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This model conceptualizes stress as arising from cognitive appraisals of environmental demands relative to available coping resources, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between the individual and their work environment. Employees first engage in primary appraisal to evaluate whether remote/flexible work conditions pose threats to well-being (Restubog et al., 2020). Secondary appraisal then assesses coping resources, including organizational support. When coping resources are insufficient, employees experience elevated work stress, which can lead to intention to quit (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). POS acts as a critical coping resource within this framework, buffering the adverse effects of work stress by reinforcing employees' beliefs in organizational care and commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, high POS enhances affective commitment and reduces intention to quit, whereas low POS exacerbates stress impacts and increases attrition risk (D. G. Allen et al., 2003). By integrating these frameworks, the study builds a conceptual model that links remote/flexible work to intention to quit via work stress, moderated by POS. This theoretical framing guides the development and empirical testing of hypotheses.

This research contributes to organizational psychology by empirically validating the dual role of work stress as a mediator and POS as a moderator in the rapidly growing area of the Indian IT/ITES sectors, with significant operational importance and limited prior empirical focus on psychological mechanisms in remote/flexible work contexts. Collectively, these theoretical extensions provide a multidimensional framework for understanding the mechanisms through which remote work affects retention. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for managers and organizations in the IT/ITES sector by highlighting the importance of stress management, the optimization of organizational resources, and the cultivation of supportive workplace practices to strengthen retention in digitally mediated environments. This study makes four significant contributions to theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by establishing work stress as a mediating mechanism through which remote and flexible work arrangements influence turnover intentions. It also incorporates Perceived Organizational Support as a critical boundary condition. In addition, it integrates the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory to illustrate how job demands arising from digitally mediated work environments interact with organizational resources such as support systems to shape employee strain and retention outcomes.

By drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study further explains how employees' perceptions of organizational support generate reciprocal attitudes and behaviors, thereby mitigating stress and enhancing their intention to stay. The findings inform organizational strategies to reduce managerial turnover and promote sustainable hybrid work environments. Accordingly, this research addresses three core gaps in the existing literature: (1) the limited application of stress appraisal-coping frameworks to remote/flexible work contexts; (2) the lack of focus on employees' psychological readiness and coping evaluations in digitally mediated environments; and (3) the need to identify predictive indicators of employee retention amid high-stress, remote/flexible work scenarios.

The paper is organized as follows to address these gaps systematically. The next section presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature and theoretical underpinnings, which establishes the basis for applying stress appraisal, coping, and organizational support perspectives to remote/flexible work. Then, the conceptual model and hypotheses developed in direct response to the identified research gaps are outlined. The research methodology and analytical procedures adopted to empirically test the model are then described. Then the findings are discussed, highlighting how the results contribute to closing the gaps in understanding stress, coping, and retention in remote/flexible work contexts. The paper concludes with theoretical contributions and practical implications for organizational leaders and policymakers, thereby extending insights into managing employee well-being and

retention in digital work environments. Building on these research gaps and structural outline, the next section turns to the theoretical foundations, specifically the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and related perspectives that guide the study's conceptual model and hypotheses.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

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### ***TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING***

This model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals experience and respond to stress, particularly in dynamic and demanding work environments such as remote or flexible ones. This study views workplace stress not as a fixed outcome, but as something that develops through an individual's interpretation of their work environment. In remote/flexible work settings, employees often begin by evaluating whether certain aspects of their job, like long hours, poor communication, or difficulty balancing work and home life, are causing strain (Restubog et al., 2020). This is known as primary appraisal. If they feel these conditions are threatening, they move to a secondary appraisal, asking themselves whether they have the resources, such as support from their organization, personal resilience, or strong digital tools, to manage the situation (Sasaki et al., 2023). These two evaluations work together to shape the kind of stress an employee experiences and how they choose to deal with it. When individuals feel equipped to cope, they might take action – reaching out for help, restructuring their schedule, or tackling the problem directly. But when they feel stuck or overwhelmed, they may withdraw emotionally, deny the problem, or disengage altogether (Kaveh et al., 2023). Over time, if the demands stay high and resources remain low, this can lead to burnout, dissatisfaction, and even thoughts about leaving the job (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001).

That is where perceived organizational support (POS) becomes especially important. When people believe their organization genuinely cares about their well-being, they are more confident in managing stress and less likely to feel overwhelmed. Supportive environments build trust, emotional loyalty, and a sense of shared responsibility, which can help retain talent (D. G. Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986). On the other hand, when POS is low, stress tends to hit harder, and employees are more likely to consider quitting. Applying the transactional model of stress and coping to this scenario helps explain why employees feel stressed and how that stress connects to broader organizational outcomes. It also makes a strong case for simple but targeted efforts like better communication, flexible scheduling, and stress-reduction programs that help shift employee mindsets, build resilience, and foster longer-term commitment (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). Grounded in these theoretical perspectives, the following literature review examines prior empirical evidence on remote/flexible work, work stress, perceived organizational support, and intention to quit, highlighting gaps this study seeks to address.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### ***INTENTION TO QUIT***

Employee turnover has attracted scholarly attention for over a century, reflecting its persistent relevance in organizational studies and applied psychology. Early foundational work by Porter and Steers (1973) framed turnover as one of the most enduring challenges in personnel management. A few years later, Mowday et al. (1979) described it as the outcome of unfavorable job-related attitudes, coupled with the individual's belief that better opportunities are available elsewhere. Historical interest in the topic can be traced back to 1917, when employee resignations were frequently linked to dissatisfaction with pay structures. Research into the causes of employee turnover dates to the 1930s, when early studies identified familial and social factors such as the tendency for workers with fathers in skilled trades to leave jobs more frequently (Hom et al., 2017). As economies shifted toward knowledge-based industries in later decades, scholars expanded their focus to include psychological, structural, and cultural influences on workforce retention. This evolution led to the development of

multiple conceptual frameworks designed to predict, explain, and quantify turnover. Each model introduced new variables and perspectives, enriching the field's understanding of why employees decide to exit organizations (Lee & Mowday, 1987). The phenomenon of “The Great Resignation” (2020 to present) underscores the relevance of this issue in the current era. Turnover may be voluntary, driven by the employee, or involuntary, initiated by the organization. Regardless of its nature, turnover is a costly process. Organizations lose the investments made in recruiting, training, and retaining employees, while individuals expend significant time and energy adjusting to new roles (Farris, 1969). Given the complexity and impact of employee turnover, this study explores the key variables that trigger intention to quit and outcomes, adding to the body of knowledge that aims to build stronger retention strategies. Intention to stay refers to an employee's conscious and deliberate decision to remain with their current organization over a sustained period (Bellamkonda & Pattusamy, 2022). It is operationalized in this study using items that capture both the frequency of thoughts about quitting and the likelihood of seeking alternative employment. It is considered a critical attitudinal component of employee retention and has garnered growing attention from both scholars and practitioners amid rising turnover rates across industries.

Griffeth (2000) emphasized that a positive attitude towards the organization is a significant predictor of an individual's intent to stay or leave (Peters et al., 1981). Employees who perceive their organizational environment favorably are more likely to exhibit a stronger commitment to their roles and show reduced intentions to quit (G. Blau & Ryan, 1997). Employee retention is shaped by a combination of psychological, interpersonal, and organizational factors (Ananthan, 2007), such as job satisfaction, engagement, leadership effectiveness, perceived organizational support (POS), and alignment between individual and organizational values (N. J. Allen & Meyer, 1996; Hom et al., 2017). When emotionally and cognitively invested in their work, employees often develop a stronger attachment to their organization (Ingram et al., 1991). This increased engagement fosters loyalty and a deeper sense of belonging, which can reduce intention to quit (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Perceived organizational support plays a critical role in strengthening this commitment. Employees who feel recognized, supported, and empowered are more likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors and remain with the company over time (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, retention is not determined by isolated factors; it results from the dynamic interaction of individual characteristics, workplace relationships, and broader organizational conditions. Therefore, effective retention strategies must address intrinsic motivators, such as purpose, growth, and recognition, and extrinsic factors, including clear communication, leadership support, and a healthy work environment (Kim & Fernandez, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2001). Cultivating a workplace culture that values employee well-being and aligns individual aspirations with organizational objectives is key to reducing turnover and enhancing long-term organizational performance.

### ***WORK STRESS***

“Work stress is defined as the psychological strain experienced when employees perceive an imbalance between job demands and the resources available to meet those demands” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 21). For this study, work stress is operationalized through measures capturing workload, role ambiguity, and work–life conflict, which are common in remote/flexible work contexts. Workplace stressors present a variety of challenges that disrupt employees' ability to perform effectively and maintain well-being. Key factors contributing to stress include imbalances between work and personal life, limited control over job responsibilities, long working hours, and ineffective communication and coordination within teams (Bhattacharyya, 2012; Franken et al., 2022). These issues not only heighten stress levels but also make it increasingly difficult for employees to stay productive and satisfied in their roles. Prolonged workplace stress often has far-reaching consequences, negatively impacting employees professionally and personally (Joshi & Modak, 2018). Chronic exposure can trigger physical health decline, increase depressive symptoms, and diminish emotional resilience (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). These effects erode job satisfaction, reduce motivation, and lower engagement, which are key indicators of declining workforce stability (Folkman, 2013). Left unaddressed,

persistent stress may lead employees to actively consider leaving their roles, signaling early turnover risk (Chong et al., 2020).

The transition to remote/flexible work during the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered traditional workplace dynamics (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2020), bringing to light a complex mix of benefits and challenges (Nandagaonkar, 2020; Oforu-Ampong & Acheampong, 2022). In contrast to structured office settings with fixed working hours, remote/flexible work has blurred the lines between professional and personal life, often eliminating a clear boundary that signifies the end of the workday (Ko & Baek, 2024). This ambiguity fosters work-life spillover, leading to increased stress and diminished work-life balance (Lu et al., 2017). Shamir and Salomon (1985) suggested that commuting serves as a psychological buffer, providing employees with a physical and mental space to transition between work and home roles. However, this buffer is absent in remote/flexible work contexts, making it harder for individuals to separate work-related stress from personal life. The challenge is even more pronounced for employees working across multiple time zones, such as those managing both Indian and U.S. shifts, resulting in extended work hours and sleep disturbances. Additional stressors include the lack of face-to-face interaction, ineffective feedback systems, limited resources, and inadequate communication, all of which can contribute to monotony and burnout. Combined with heightened job demands and restricted autonomy, these conditions intensify occupational stress, defined as the adverse physical and psychological responses that occur when job requirements surpass an employee's available resources, capabilities, or support (Mohajan, 2012; Parker & DeCotiis, 1983).

According to O'Neill and Davis (2010) and Schuler (1980), prolonged working hours, vague client expectations, and weak team cohesion contribute significantly to emotional exhaustion, which in turn fuels. Islam et al. (2012) further noted that unmanaged stress can deteriorate performance, harm employee health, and even lead to injuries. While digital platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, and Google Meet enable virtual collaboration, the absence of physical co-worker presence often amplifies feelings of social isolation, exacerbating burnout (Haan, 2024). As Palumbo (2020) pointed out, remote/flexible work tends to result in both intensification (greater effort) and extensification (longer hours), which can erode the flexibility it promises. Moreover, remote/flexible work may reduce organizational visibility and cause overlaps between personal and professional tasks, leading to fatigue, disengagement, and decreased motivation. Despite its advantages, such as flexible scheduling and the comfort of working from familiar environments, which can enhance productivity and reduce some work-life conflicts (Hill et al., 2003), remote/flexible work often brings emotional strain that outweighs these benefits. Bellmann and Hübler (2020) found that weekday work-from-home arrangements were associated with lower happiness levels and did not effectively alleviate work-family conflict. Given these concerns, the current study investigates how the remote/flexible work environment affects employees' stress levels and intentions to leave the organization. The following research questions have been derived from the existing literature to guide the inquiry.

### ***WORK STRESS AS MEDIATOR***

In the evolving landscape of remote/flexible work, especially within the IT and ITES sectors, work stress has emerged as a key factor influencing managerial retention. While remote and flexible work arrangements offer convenience and autonomy (Turetken et al., 2011), they also introduce new challenges that can elevate stress levels (Yuan et al., 2024). Managers today face increasing pressure as the lines between work and personal life become harder to define (T. D. Allen & Paddock, 2015). Heavy workloads, fewer chances for meaningful social connections, and the lack of clear role expectations, especially in remote settings, can seriously affect well-being (T. D. Allen et al., 2015). Over time, these persistent stressors contribute to burnout, lower job satisfaction, and a higher likelihood of employees considering leaving their roles (Srivastava et al., 2020). For remote managers, the challenges are even more pronounced. Limited face-to-face interaction, feelings of professional isolation, and unclear responsibilities can intensify emotional exhaustion and weaken their connection to the organ-

ization (Torten et al., 2016). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model helps explain why this happens: when job demands consistently outweigh available support, employees experience psychological strain, leading to disengagement and, eventually, turnover (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Studies show that remote managers under prolonged stress often feel emotionally drained and are more likely to explore other job opportunities (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). These insights highlight a critical issue: work stress is not just an individual problem but a key factor in whether employees stay or leave, especially in flexible work environments. Organizations must recognize stress as a major turnover driver to retain talent and take proactive steps to mitigate it.

### ***PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AS MODERATOR***

A substantial body of research underscores the critical function of organizational support in mitigating turnover, particularly within high-demand and remote/flexible work contexts. Perceived organizational support (POS), defined as employees' belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986), serves as a psychological foundation for fostering affective organizational commitment while reducing withdrawal intentions (D. G. Allen et al., 2003). In this study, POS is measured using validated scales that assess perceptions of recognition, supervisor support, and organizational concern, and is tested as a moderator of the stress–turnover relationship. Empirical investigations have consistently positioned POS as a robust predictor of key workplace outcomes. Meta-analytic findings demonstrate significant positive associations between POS and job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective commitment - all of which function as psychological buffers against intention to quit (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This relationship operates through the theoretical lens of social exchange theory (P. M. Blau, 1964), wherein employees reciprocate organizational support with enhanced loyalty and reduced propensity to leave.

POS serves as a critical organizational resource that shapes how employees experience and respond to workplace stressors. POS assures employees that their contributions are valued and their well-being is prioritized, which fosters resilience and reduces withdrawal tendencies. Empirical evidence shows that employees with higher POS report greater job satisfaction, trust, and intention to stay, even under high-stress conditions (Maan et al., 2020). Using Social Exchange Theory (SET), Maan et al. (2020) demonstrated that POS functions as a moderating factor, significantly boosting stay intentions by fostering commitment and satisfaction. Similarly, Kurtessis et al. (2015), drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, confirmed that POS moderates the relationship between job stress and turnover, reducing quit intentions when support levels are high. This evidence positions POS as a moderating factor that weakens the relationship between work stress and intention to quit, ensuring that employees with strong organizational support are less likely to disengage or leave despite demanding work environments. Conversely, deficient POS perceptions can precipitate a cascade of negative outcomes, including emotional detachment, increased job strain, and ultimately, heightened turnover risk. Importantly, the impact of POS extends beyond mere retention metrics, exerting significant influence on job performance parameters.

Organizations that cultivate strong POS benefit not only from improved retention rates but also from enhanced workforce productivity and discretionary effort. This evidence base suggests that strategic investments in POS development may yield substantial returns (Mahendru et al., 2020) across multiple organizational effectiveness indicators, particularly in contemporary work environments characterized by distributed teams (Stinglhamber et al., 2019) and evolving employment relationships. Research suggests that supported employees tend to be more motivated, proactive, and productive, qualities that are particularly important in self-directed remote environments (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Taken together, these findings position POS not just as a predictor of satisfaction, but as a moderating factor that can buffer the effects of work stress and support sustained organizational commitment. The relationship between POS and performance is often mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as employees who feel supported reciprocate with increased effort and discretionary behaviors (Shore & Wayne, 1993). Therefore, organizations seeking to enhance employee

retention and performance should prioritize supportive policies, recognition, and a positive work environment. Building on the reviewed literature, which highlights the mediating role of work stress and the moderating influence of POS within frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands–Resources model, this study integrates these insights into a conceptual framework that explains how remote/flexible work conditions shape managerial intention to quit.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

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The development of the hypotheses and the construction of the conceptual framework, as given in Figure 1, emerged from a systematic integration of theoretical foundations, empirical findings, and contemporary workplace dynamics in the IT and ITES sectors. We began by reviewing the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, which explains how an imbalance between high job demands and insufficient resources leads to employee stress and disengagement common in remote and flexible work settings. Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) further guided our understanding of how POS can mitigate negative workplace experiences, reinforcing employee loyalty and retention. These theories were contextualized through an extensive literature review focusing on post-pandemic work environments, which consistently reported elevated stress levels among employees and managers working remotely. Studies highlighted that virtual team management, digital overload, and a lack of interpersonal interaction significantly influence both psychological well-being and intention to quit. From this foundation, we identified key constructs of remote/flexible work conditions, work-related stress, POS, and intention to quit as critical components of our model. Consistent with the JD–R theory, work stress is expected to act as a mediator, as high job demands translate into strain that increases intention to quit. Further, grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), POS is expected to moderate this relationship, since employees who perceive strong organizational support are more likely to reciprocate with loyalty and commitment, thereby reducing the negative impact of stress on intention to quit. The hypotheses were then logically derived to capture the direct, mediating, and moderating relationships observed across literature and practice, ensuring each was grounded in both theory and sector-specific realities. This process ensured that the framework is not only theoretically robust but also practically relevant to understanding employee retention in digitally transformed workplaces. This section presents the research hypotheses derived from the theoretical logic and prior findings and includes a diagrammatic representation of the proposed model.

- H1:** Managers supervising remote teams experience higher levels of intention to quit in the IT and ITES sectors.
- H2:** Work-related stress triggers intention to quit.
- H3:** Work stress acts as a mediator between remote/flexible work arrangements and employees' intention to quit.
- H4:** Perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between work-related stress and intention to quit (the impact of stress on retention intention is weaker when organizational support is high).

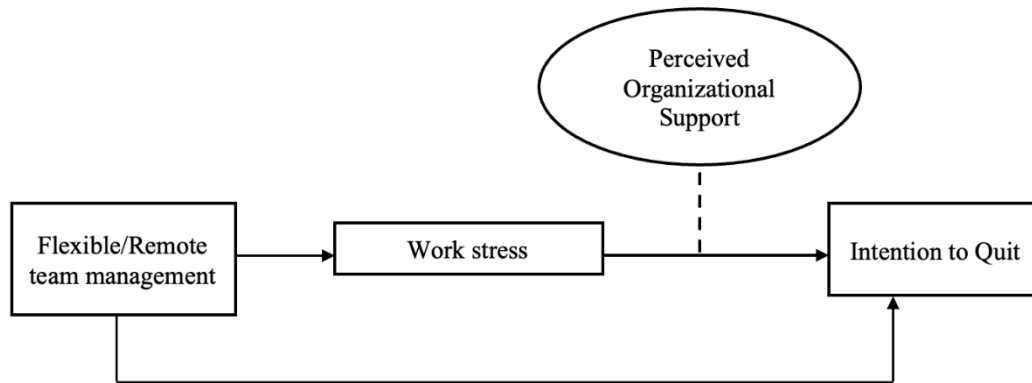


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## METHODOLOGY

### *RESEARCH DESIGN*

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research components to comprehensively explore the dynamics of remote/flexible work and managerial retention. The rationale for employing a mixed-methods strategy stems from the need to capture both in-depth contextual insights and generalizable patterns. In the first phase, qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with managerial personnel to uncover latent stressors, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of organizational support within remote/flexible work settings. These insights informed the design and validation of the second phase, a structured quantitative survey aimed at empirically testing the proposed hypotheses across a larger sample. This sequential exploratory design ensured that the richness of qualitative findings contributed directly to the refinement of the quantitative instrument, thereby enhancing the robustness and relevance of the overall research model (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As the first stage of the sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, the study used a qualitative phase to capture rich, contextual insights.

### *QUALITATIVE PHASE*

The qualitative data were examined using a multi-method analytical framework, combining thematic analysis, sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and linguistic profiling to capture patterns, emotions, and language markers related to stress and organizational support. The qualitative phase focused on exploring managerial experiences of stress, organizational support, and retention in remote/flexible work settings, forming the foundation for the subsequent quantitative phase.

### **Participants and data collection**

To complement the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 managers holding middle-level to senior-level positions in the IT and ITES sectors. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation across gender, professional experience, and functional roles (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This strategic approach facilitated rich, nuanced data collection through in-depth interviews with remote team managers. The qualitative findings proved instrumental in refining the research framework, particularly in operationalizing key variables for the subsequent quantitative phase of survey development.

### **Interview measures**

The interviews were conducted to identify how managers felt work stress while leading remotely and the consequences of the stress. Ten questions were adapted from the questionnaire developed by

Mark and Smith (2018), including “What do you think it was that made you stressed? Cues: A specific incident, or general day-to-day hassles. Any other examples? Have you ever experienced work stress yourself? Cue: Have you seen other people stressed?”

### **Interview procedure and data collection (qualitative phase)**

As part of the mixed-methods design, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted to complement the quantitative survey and provide contextual insights into managerial stress, remote/flexible work experiences, and retention-related perceptions within the IT/ITES sectors. Employing a constructivist grounded theory methodology, this study engaged in a rigorous, iterative process of meaning-making to understand managers’ lived experiences.

### **Participant identification and selection**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on mid-level to senior-level managers working in remote or hybrid environments within IT and ITES companies across major Indian cities. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least three to four years of experience in managerial roles with exposure to remote or flexible work settings. Initial participants were identified through professional networks and LinkedIn outreach. Snowball sampling was also employed to identify respondents with relevant profiles and experiences.

### **Interview conduction: Timing, duration, and mode**

A total of 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted between September and November 2024. Due to logistical considerations and participant preference, all interviews were conducted via a secure video conferencing platform - Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the depth of the responses and the participant’s availability.

### **Interviewer and ethical considerations**

All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher, who has formal training in qualitative research and interview techniques. Participants were briefed on the research purpose, assured of confidentiality, and provided informed consent before the interviews began. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the affiliated university prior to data collection.

### **Recording and transcription**

With participant consent, all interviews were audio-recorded using encrypted tools to ensure data security. Recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Interview recordings were initially transcribed for efficiency using automated speech recognition (ASR) technology. However, recognizing the importance of accuracy in qualitative analysis, it was manually verified and refined. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information where relevant. The analysis commenced with a line-by-line examination of the interview transcripts, where initial codes were organically generated from the participants’ own language, preserving the authenticity of their concerns. Through a process of constant comparison, these codes were refined and synthesized into broader conceptual categories, which were subsequently validated through peer debriefing with research colleagues to challenge interpretive biases.

### **Integration with machine learning-based speech and text analytics**

The transcribed interviews were subjected to Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Sentiment Analysis using a machine learning-based speech and text analytics framework. This analytical layer allowed for the extraction of emotion-laden terms, identification of recurring stress-related themes, and mapping of sentiments associated with organizational support and intention to stay/quit. Following protocols for analyzing employee communication, we preserved meaningful vocal cues, including tone, pauses, and hesitations, to maintain emotional context (Jiang et al., 2024). Non-essential elements (e.g., filler words, inaudible speech) were removed during data cleaning. The study employed a multi-method analytical framework:

- **Thematic Analysis:** Transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns related to work stress, organizational support, and coping strategies.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** Emotional tone was quantified using the VADER lexicon (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014).
- **Topic Modelling:** Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei et al., 2003) revealed dominant themes, such as workload pressures and support deficiencies.
- **Linguistic Profiling:** The LIWC tool (Pennebaker et al., 2015; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2009) assessed language markers of stress.

The findings from the qualitative phase provided the foundation for the quantitative phase by identifying the key constructs and themes, which were then operationalized into survey measures to test the proposed hypotheses.

## *QUANTITATIVE PHASE*

### **Participants and sampling**

For the quantitative component, a structured, closed-ended questionnaire was administered using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to be in middle-level or senior-level managerial roles and to be currently supervising employees working remotely. Data were collected from 262 managers, but only 260 were found usable (126 women and 134 men) across 50 IT and ITES companies located in various regions of India. Among them, 31% were middle-level managers, while the remaining held senior positions. All participants had been managing remote or hybrid teams since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued in such roles at the time of the study. Most companies that took part in the study required their employees to work from the office only for one week a month, reinforcing the continuing relevance of remote/flexible work models. To ensure confidentiality, no personal identifiers were collected. Only those managers with direct responsibility for remote employees were included to maintain the study's contextual focus. The study used already existing questionnaires to collect data that agreed with the research objectives put forth. Expert opinion was obtained for the questionnaire. After positive responses were obtained from a pilot study with 103 samples, the actual study was initiated.

### **Instruments**

Data collected using these instruments were analysed as follows. All constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). To ensure clarity, contextual relevance, and participant engagement, we made minor wording modifications to several established survey instruments while preserving the original construct meanings, as shown in Table 1. These adjustments were essential given the unique dynamics of remote and hybrid work environments in the IT/ITES sector. For example, an original item from Parker and DeCotiis (1983), "I feel a great deal of anxiety about my job," was adapted to "I feel a great deal of anxiety due to the challenges of managing remote/flexible work," to reflect better the specific stressors experienced by managers overseeing virtual teams. Similarly, an item from Ozimek (2020), "Teams are less organized," was rephrased as "Remote teams in my organization are less organized than office-based teams" to enhance clarity and specificity. These changes were made to reflect current post-pandemic work realities, reduce ambiguity for participants across multiple regions, and align terminology with modern managerial experiences.

**Table 1. Instruments used (quantitative study)**

| Construct                                     | Source                                  | Items | Sample item   | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|---|---|-------|---|---------------------|
| Remote/flexible work effects – personal       | Johnson and Cooper (2003) (ASSET scale) | 6     | “Does working remotely affect you negatively – family relationship?”                | 0.84<br>(composite) |
| Remote/flexible work effects – organizational | Ozimek (2020)                           | 6     | “Teams are less organized.”   |                     |
| Work extensification via remote leadership    | Ipsen et al. (2022)                     | 3     | “It is more demanding to be a distance manager than to be a manager in the office.” |                     |
| Work stress                                   | Parker and DeCotiis (1983)              | 13    | “I feel a great deal of anxiety about my job.”                                      | 0.81                |
| Intention to quit                             | Bozeman and Perrewé (2001)              | 5     | “I often think about quitting my job.”  | 0.92                |
| Perceived organizational support              | Eisenberger et al. (1986)               | 8     | “My organization really cares about my well-being.”                                 | 0.83                |

All revised items underwent reliability testing, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.81 to 0.92, indicating strong internal consistency and confirming the psychometric robustness of the adapted scales. With the methodological framework established across qualitative and quantitative phases, the subsequent section outlines the strategies employed for examining and validating the collected data.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### *QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS FOR INTERVIEW*

The study used grounded theory to identify themes, and coded the responses given by the respondents' sub-themes were combined to form a theme. The themes were based on the transcripts and reflect the original responses. An inductive approach was used to identify the themes pertaining to the data set. Employing a constructivist grounded theory approach, codes were inductively generated through iterative line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts. To ensure validity, the coding framework was rigorously validated through peer debriefing with an independent qualitative researcher, and inter-coder reliability was formally established with a Cohen's kappa score of  $\kappa = 0.84$  through independent dual coding of a transcript subset, with all discrepancies resolved through consensus. This process ensured the identified themes were empirically grounded and analytically robust.

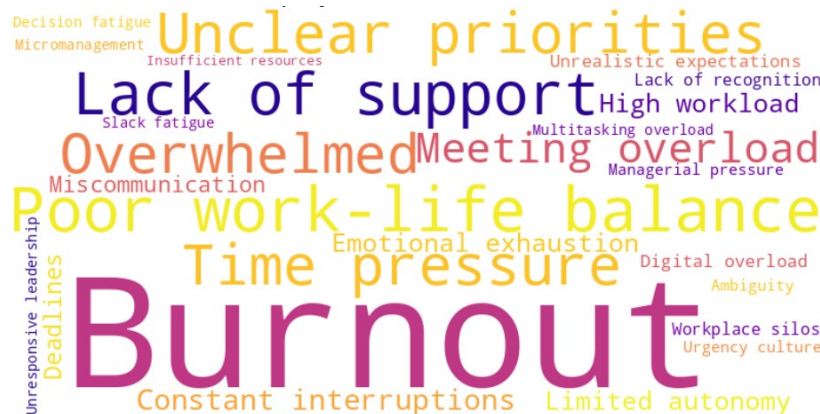
As shown in Table 2, the most impactful workplace stressors are disrupted work-life balance, lack of control, and extended hours, with systemic issues like poor communication and heavy workload further intensifying strain. These stressors result in depression, health problems, job dissatisfaction, emotional instability, and higher turnover intentions, underscoring their profound impact on employees' well-being and engagement.

**Table 2. Identified themes and evidence from interviews**

| S. no                        | Theme                           | Count | Citation                    |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Stressors</b>             |                                 |       |                             |
| 1                            | Heavy workload                  | 5     | Birhanu et al. (2018)       |
| 2                            | Extended work hours             | 9     | Wong et al. (2019)          |
| 3                            | Lack of control                 | 11    | Padmanabhan (2021)          |
| 4                            | Lack of communication           | 7     | Prasad et al. (2023)        |
| 5                            | Lack of coordination            | 8     | Yang et al. (2021)          |
| 6                            | Disruption in work-life balance | 12    | Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) |
| <b>Reaction to stressors</b> |                                 |       |                             |
| 1                            | Depression/health issues        | 12    | Mark and Smith (2018)       |
| 2                            | Job dissatisfaction             | 8     | Kisa et al. (2009)          |
| 3                            | Emotional instability           | 4     | Kaiser and Ozer (1997)      |
| 4                            | Intention to quit               | 9     | Salama et al. (2022)        |

The word cloud (Figure 2) reveals *Burnout* as the most salient stressor, underscoring its pervasive role in shaping employee well-being. (Jamal et al., 2023) Other prominent themes include *Poor work-life balance*, *Unclear priorities*, and *Lack of support*, alongside recurring terms such as *Overwhelmed*, *Meeting overload*, *High workload*, *Time pressure*, *Constant interruptions*, and *Limited autonomy*. Collectively, these patterns highlight the multidimensional nature of stressors encountered in remote/flexible work environments.

Figure 3 provides insights into the emotional tone of employee responses, measured on a scale from -1 (negative) to +1 (positive). The responses are clearly segmented based on their sentiment orientation, with blue shades representing positive sentiment and red shades indicating negative sentiment. Notably, Responses 2, 4, 6, and 8 reflect positivity, suggesting satisfaction or optimism in certain areas of their work experience. In contrast, Responses 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 20 exhibit negative polarity, signifying frustration, dissatisfaction, or concern. Response 11 appears neutral, indicating a balanced perspective without a strong emotional leaning. The distribution of sentiments highlights a diverse range of employee experiences, with noticeable concerns that may require organizational attention to improve well-being and satisfaction. Insights derived from the qualitative findings directly informed the design of the quantitative instruments, ensuring theoretical rigour and empirical alignment.



**Figure 2. Employee stress word cloud**

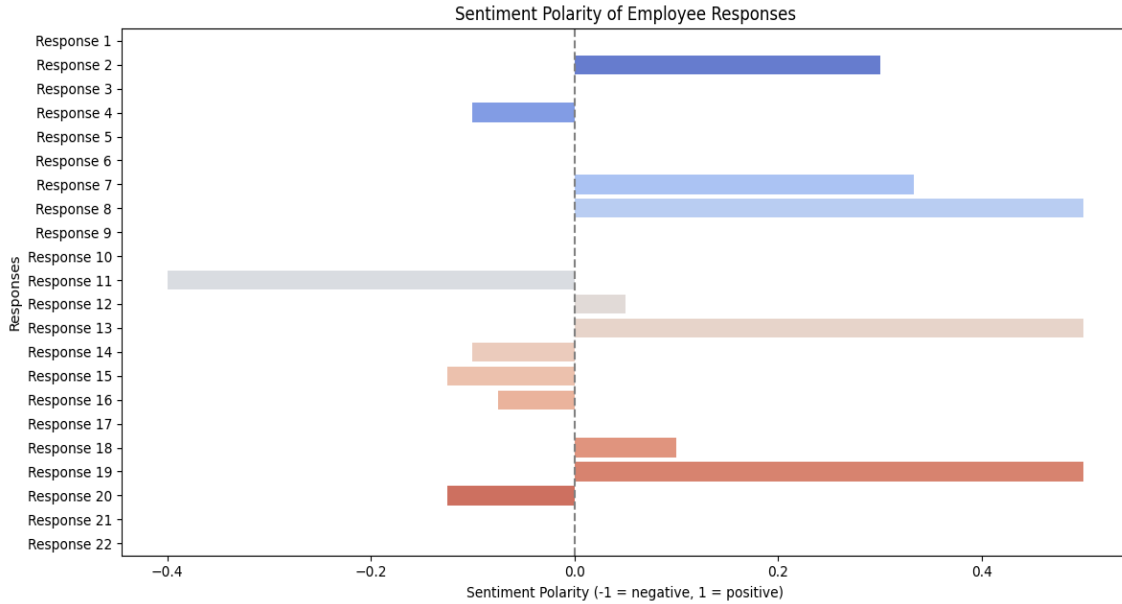


Figure 3. Sentiment polarity of employee responses

### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

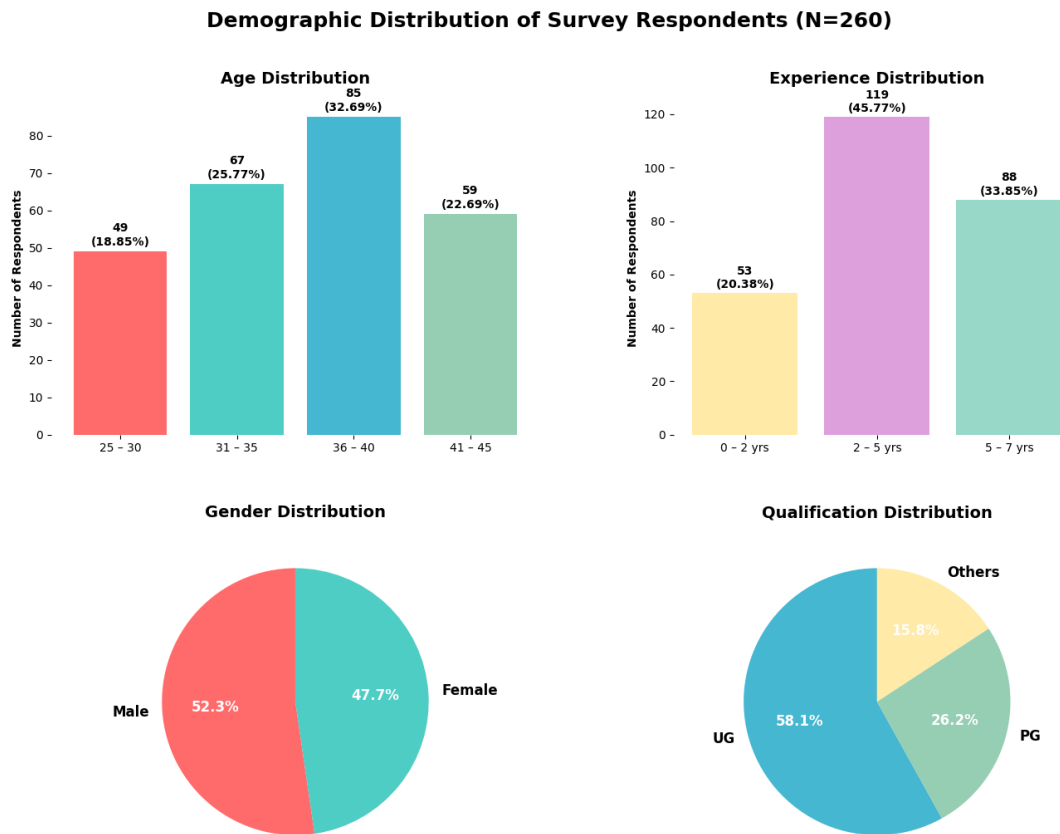
The qualitative analysis highlighted six major stressors (e.g., heavy workload, extended work hours, lack of control, poor coordination, and work–life balance disruption) and four key reactions (e.g., depression/health issues, job dissatisfaction, emotional instability, and intention to quit). These insights were reinforced by word cloud patterns emphasizing burnout, lack of support, and work–life imbalance as dominant concerns. Based on these findings, the quantitative phase employed validated instruments that aligned with these themes: work stress (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983), intention to quit (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001), perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and remote/flexible work effects (Ipsen et al., 2022; Johnson & Cooper, 2003; Ozimek, 2020). The direct mapping of qualitative themes to established constructs ensured that the survey items not only maintained theoretical rigor but also reflected the lived experiences of IT/ITES managers. This integration justifies the choice of questionnaires, as they operationalize the very stressors and reactions surfaced in the qualitative phase. Statistical measures were deliberately chosen to ensure both methodological rigor and theoretical alignment. Descriptive and correlational analyses provided baseline patterns and initial construct associations. CFA, reliability, and validity tests confirmed measurement precision and construct distinctiveness, which are essential when adapting established scales to the IT/ITES context. Model fit indices established structural adequacy, while mediation and moderation analyses directly tested the hypothesized mechanisms grounded in JD-R and Social Exchange Theory. Together, these choices ensured that the findings are empirically robust and theoretically meaningful.

Data analysis for the study was done using JAMOVI because it offers built-in modules for advanced statistical analyses, including mediation, moderation, CFA, and SEM, which were central to this study. In this study, descriptive statistics were employed to illustrate the data and explain the participant-provided demographic data. Descriptive analytics and correlation analysis are shown in Figures 4 and 5.

The demographic profile of the 260 respondents reveals a well-balanced representation as seen in Figure 4, across key variables. Gender distribution is nearly even, with 52.31% male and 47.69% female participants. Most respondents fall within the mid-career age brackets, with the largest group aged 36–40 years (32.69%), followed by 31–35 years (25.77%), 41–45 years (22.69%), and 25–30

years (18.85%). In terms of work experience, 45.77% have 2–5 years of experience, 33.85% have 5–7 years, and 20.38% are in the early stages of their careers (0–2 years), suggesting the sample is largely composed of experienced professionals. Educational qualifications show that 58.08% hold undergraduate degrees, 26.15% have postgraduate qualifications, and 15.77% belong to other categories, reflecting varied academic backgrounds. Overall, the sample comprises a diverse and experienced workforce, providing a robust foundation for analyzing workplace dynamics in the IT/ITES sector.

The descriptive analysis (Figure 4 and Table 3) of the 260 respondents indicates that the average perception of Remote/Flexi Work is relatively high ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ), suggesting general favorability toward flexible work arrangements. Work Stress shows a moderate mean ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ), indicating varying levels of stress among employees. Perceived organizational support also scored relatively high ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), reflecting that many employees feel supported by their organizations. Finally, the mean score for Withdrawal Cognition is moderate ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), pointing to a noticeable but not critical level of intention to quit within the sample. These values collectively suggest that while remote/flexible work and support are positively viewed, stress and intention to quit remain important concerns.



Data Source: Demographic Survey (Total respondents: 260)

Figure 4. Descriptive frequencies

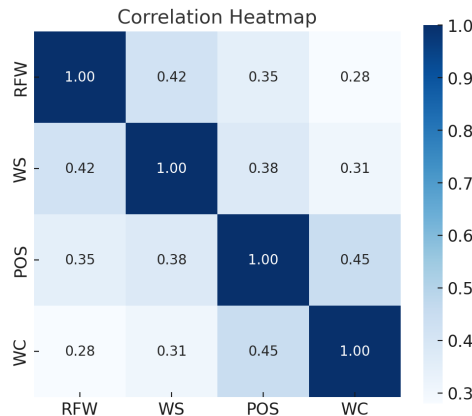
**Table 3. Descriptive analysis**

| Variables                                    | N   | Range | Min. | Max. | SD   |
|--|-----|-------|------|------|------|
| Remote/Flexi Work (IV)                       | 260 | 4.8   | 1.2  | 6    | 4.35 |
| Work Stress (Mediator)                       | 260 | 5     | 1    | 6    | 3.92 |
| Perceived Organizational Support (Moderator) | 260 | 4.5   | 1.5  | 6    | 4.2  |
| Withdrawal Cognition (DV)                    | 260 | 5.2   | 0.8  | 6    | 3.65 |

**Correlation analysis**

The correlation analysis in Figure 5 reveals significant positive relationships among all constructs, with perceived organizational support (POS) showing the strongest association with Work Commitment ( $r = 0.45^{**}$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that employees who perceive greater organizational support tend to exhibit higher commitment.

Moderate correlations were found between remote/flexible work (RFW) and Work Satisfaction (WS) ( $r = 0.42^{**}$ ) and between WS and POS ( $r = 0.38^{**}$ ), suggesting interconnectedness between resilience, satisfaction, and organizational support. Weaker but still significant correlations emerged between RFW and WC ( $r = 0.28^{**}$ ) and WS and WC ( $r = 0.31^{**}$ ), implying these factors have a modest influence on commitment. Discriminate validity was confirmed, as the square root of each construct’s AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs, supporting their distinctiveness. Overall, the results highlight the central role of organizational support in fostering employee commitment, with resilience and satisfaction acting as secondary but meaningful contributors. While the correlation analysis established preliminary relationships among the constructs, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted next to validate the measurement model and assess construct reliability and validity.



**Figure 5. Correlation analysis**

**Note:** RFW = Remote/Flexible Work, WS = Work Stress, POS = Perceived Organizational Support, WC = Work Commitment<sup>\*\*</sup>, correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The factor loadings, as seen in Table 4 for the observed variables, are consistently strong, ranging from 0.65 to 0.87, indicating excellent convergent validity and reliable measurement of the latent constructs. Notably, perceived organizational support (POS) items have loadings between 0.80 and 0.85, while work commitment (WC) items range from 0.82 to 0.87, reflecting robust construct representation. Similarly, RFW items mostly load between 0.74 and 0.82, and WS items, though slightly lower, are still acceptable, ranging from 0.66 to 0.73. All estimates are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), confirming the strength of these associations. The high and consistent loadings suggest strong

internal reliability and good one-dimensionality for each construct, making them suitable for further mediation and moderation analyses as part of your research framework.

**Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis**

| Item  | Estimate | SE   | Z-value | P-value | Std. loading |
|-------|----------|------|---------|---------|--------------|
| RFW1  | 0.71     | 0.02 | 35.54   | <0.001  | 0.8          |
| RFW2  | 0.68     | 0.02 | 34.67   | <0.001  | 0.77         |
| RFW3  | 0.73     | 0.02 | 36.58   | <0.001  | 0.82         |
| RFW4  | 0.65     | 0.03 | 21.67   | <0.001  | 0.74         |
| RFW5  | 0.69     | 0.02 | 34.57   | <0.001  | 0.78         |
| RFW6  | 0.72     | 0.02 | 36.04   | <0.001  | 0.81         |
| RFW7  | 0.67     | 0.03 | 22.33   | <0.001  | 0.76         |
| RFW8  | 0.7      | 0.02 | 34.7    | <0.001  | 0.79         |
| RFW9  | 0.64     | 0.03 | 21.33   | <0.001  | 0.73         |
| RFW10 | 0.71     | 0.02 | 35.56   | <0.001  | 0.8          |
| RFW11 | 0.66     | 0.03 | 22      | <0.001  | 0.75         |
| RFW12 | 0.69     | 0.02 | 34.65   | <0.001  | 0.78         |
| RFW13 | 0.72     | 0.02 | 36.78   | <0.001  | 0.81         |
| RFW14 | 0.65     | 0.03 | 21.67   | <0.001  | 0.74         |
| RFW15 | 0.68     | 0.02 | 34.55   | <0.001  | 0.77         |
| WS1   | 0.62     | 0.03 | 20.67   | < .001  | 0.71         |
| WS2   | 0.65     | 0.02 | 32.5    | < .001  | 0.75         |
| WS3   | 0.59     | 0.03 | 19.67   | < .001  | 0.68         |
| WS4   | 0.63     | 0.02 | 31.5    | < .001  | 0.72         |
| WS5   | 0.57     | 0.03 | 19      | < .001  | 0.66         |
| WS6   | 0.6      | 0.03 | 20      | < .001  | 0.69         |
| WS7   | 0.64     | 0.02 | 32      | < .001  | 0.73         |
| WS8   | 0.58     | 0.03 | 19.33   | < .001  | 0.67         |
| WS9   | 0.61     | 0.03 | 20.33   | < .001  | 0.7          |
| WS10  | 0.56     | 0.03 | 18.67   | < .001  | 0.65         |
| WS11  | 0.63     | 0.02 | 31.5    | < .001  | 0.72         |
| WS12  | 0.59     | 0.03 | 19.67   | < .001  | 0.68         |
| WS13  | 0.62     | 0.03 | 20.67   | < .001  | 0.71         |
| POS1  | 0.75     | 0.02 | 37.5    | < .001  | 0.83         |
| POS2  | 0.78     | 0.02 | 39      | < .001  | 0.85         |
| POS3  | 0.72     | 0.02 | 36      | < .001  | 0.8          |
| POS4  | 0.76     | 0.02 | 38      | < .001  | 0.84         |
| POS5  | 0.74     | 0.02 | 37      | < .001  | 0.82         |
| POS6  | 0.77     | 0.02 | 38.85   | < .001  | 0.84         |
| POS7  | 0.73     | 0.02 | 36.56   | < .001  | 0.81         |
| POS8  | 0.75     | 0.02 | 37.33   | < .001  | 0.83         |

| Item | Estimate | SE   | Z-value | P-value | Std. loading |
|------|----------|------|---------|---------|--------------|
| WC1  | 0.8      | 0.02 | 40.56   | < .001  | 0.87         |
| WC2  | 0.76     | 0.02 | 38      | < .001  | 0.83         |
| WC3  | 0.78     | 0.02 | 39.34   | < .001  | 0.85         |
| WC4  | 0.74     | 0.02 | 37.87   | < .001  | 0.82         |
| WC5  | 0.77     | 0.02 | 38.58   | < .001  | 0.84         |
| POS1 | 0.75     | 0.02 | 37.75   | < .001  | 0.83         |
| POS2 | 0.78     | 0.02 | 39.34   | < .001  | 0.85         |
| POS3 | 0.72     | 0.02 | 36.54   | < .001  | 0.8          |
| POS4 | 0.76     | 0.02 | 38.78   | < .001  | 0.84         |
| POS5 | 0.74     | 0.02 | 37.74   | < .001  | 0.82         |
| POS6 | 0.77     | 0.02 | 38.5    | < .001  | 0.84         |
| POS7 | 0.73     | 0.02 | 36.5    | < .001  | 0.81         |
| POS8 | 0.75     | 0.02 | 37.5    | < .001  | 0.83         |

Note: RFW = Remote/Flexible Work, WS = Work Stress, POS = Perceived Organizational Support, WC = Work Commitment

The measurement model demonstrated strong psychometric properties across all constructs in Table 5. Construct reliability (CR) values were excellent, with RFW (Remote/Flexible Work), WS (Work Stress), POS (Perceived Organizational Support), and WC (Work Commitment) all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7, specifically ranging from 0.81 to 0.84, indicating high internal consistency. Convergent validity was also supported, as all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values met or exceeded the acceptable benchmark of 0.50, with RFW (0.58), WS (0.50), POS (0.62), and WC (0.68) indicating that the constructs sufficiently explained the variance of their respective indicators. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, was confirmed as the square roots of AVE (diagonal values: RFW = 0.76, WS = 0.71, POS = 0.79, WC = 0.82) were all greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal values), demonstrating that each construct was empirically distinct from the others. Thus, the model satisfies the necessary conditions for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, supporting its use in further structural analysis.

**Table 5. Reliability and validity analysis**

| Construct | CR   | AVE  | RFW  | WS   | POS  | WC   |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| RFW       | 0.84 | 0.58 | 0.76 |      |      |      |
| WS        | 0.81 | 0.5  | 0.42 | 0.71 |      |      |
| POS       | 0.83 | 0.62 | 0.35 | 0.38 | 0.79 |      |
| WC        | 0.92 | 0.68 | 0.28 | 0.31 | 0.45 | 0.82 |

Note: RFW = Remote/Flexible Work, WS = Work Stress, POS = Perceived Organizational Support, WC = Work Commitment. AVE, average variance extracted, CR, composite reliability

The overall fit in Table 6 of the structural model is good, as indicated by multiple fit indices falling within recommended thresholds. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) is 2.38, which is below the conservative cutoff of 3.0, suggesting a good model fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are 0.96 and 0.95, respectively, both exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.90 and approaching the ideal of 0.95, indicating strong incremental fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.04 is well below the accepted maximum of 0.06, reflecting a close fit of the model to the data. Finally, the Standardized Root Mean Square

Residual (SRMR) is 0.03, comfortably below the cutoff of 0.08, further confirming good model-data fit. Collectively, these values confirm that the proposed model demonstrates excellent fit and is suitable for further interpretation and hypothesis testing.

**Table 6. Fit Indices**

| Fit Index | $\chi^2/DF$ | CFI  | TLI  | RMSEA | SRMR |
|-----------|-------------|------|------|-------|------|
| Value     | 2.38        | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.04  | 0.03 |

The findings in Table 7 reveal a dual-pathway mechanism through which remote and flexible work arrangements influence employee outcomes, as explained by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. A significant positive relationship was observed between remote/flexible work and work-related stress ( $\beta = 0.35, p < .001$ ), consistent with the JD-R perspective that identifies remote/flexible work as a job demand that may deplete psychological resources when adequate support structures are absent. The Transactional Model further elucidates this relationship by suggesting that stress emerges from an individual’s appraisal of remote/flexible work conditions as exceeding their coping capacities. This stress subsequently exhibits a strong positive association with withdrawal cognition ( $\beta = 0.45, p < .001$ ), aligning with the JD-R model’s health impairment pathway, wherein sustained exposure to job demands leads to erosion of engagement and increased intention to quit. However, remote/flexible work also demonstrates a direct negative effect on withdrawal cognition ( $\beta = -0.20, p < .001$ ), reflecting its role as a job resource within the JD-R framework. This suggests that the structural benefits of flexibility, such as autonomy and schedule control, operate independently to mitigate intention to quit. The mediation analysis confirms a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.16, p < .001$ ), indicating that work stress partially mediates the relationship between remote/flexible work and withdrawal cognition. This suppression effect illustrates the countervailing forces at play: while remote/flexible work functions as a resource that reduces withdrawal tendencies directly, it simultaneously increases them indirectly through heightened stress. These findings underscore the importance of organizational interventions aimed at reducing the demand characteristics of remote/flexible work while preserving its resource potential, thereby optimizing employee well-being and retention. The robust statistical support ( $p < .001$  for all paths) and theoretical coherence with the JD-R Model and Transactional Model strengthen the validity of these conclusions.

**Table 7. Direct effect**

| Structural path                             | Standardized estimate ( $\beta$ ) | Standard error (SE) | Z-value | P-value | Effect type           |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|-----------------------|
| Remote/Flexible Work → Work Stress          | 0.35                              | 0.07                | 5       | < .001  | Direct Effect         |
| Work Stress → Withdrawal Cognition          | 0.45                              | 0.08                | 5.63    | < .001  | Direct Effect         |
| Remote/Flexible Work → Withdrawal Cognition | -0.2                              | 0.06                | -3.33   | < .001  | Total Effect (Direct) |
| Indirect Effect (via Work Stress)           | 0.16                              | 0.04                | 4       | < .001  | Mediated Effect       |

The analysis in Table 7 shows that the findings of this analysis offer compelling empirical support for the role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) in reducing employees’ intention to quit. The strong negative relationship ( $\beta = -0.30, SE = 0.05, z = -6.00, p < .001$ ) indicates that when employees believe their organization genuinely values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they are substantially less likely to consider leaving. This result reinforces social exchange theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which posits that employees reciprocate fair and supportive treatment with

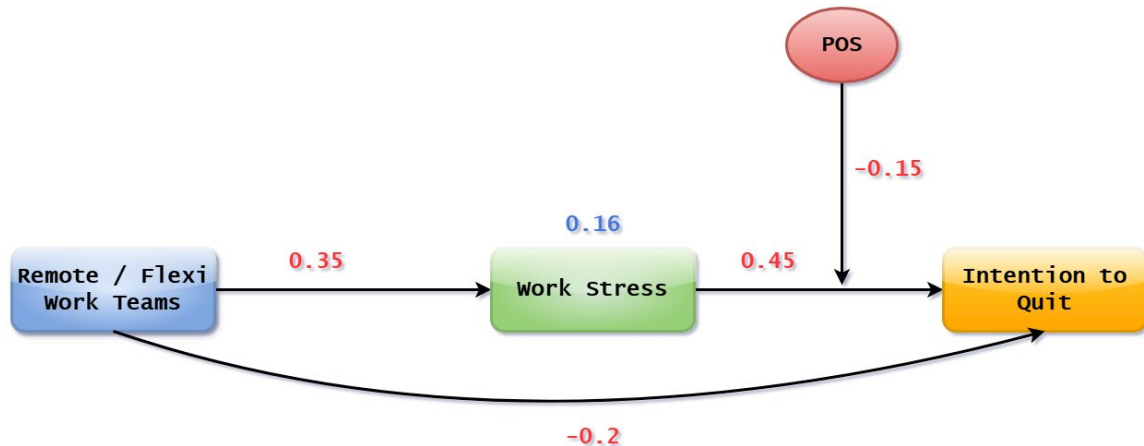
greater loyalty and commitment. In practical terms, when organizations invest in their workforce through fair compensation, career development opportunities, or simply acknowledging effort, employees are more likely to respond with long-term retention rather than job searching.

**Table 8. Moderation analysis**

| Path                                  | Estimate | SE   | Z  | p-value | Effect type                |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------|----|---------|----------------------------|
| POS → Intention to Quit               | -0.3     | 0.05 | -6 | < 0.001 | Direct Effect              |
| Work Stress * POS → Intention to Quit | -0.15    | 0.03 | -5 | < 0.001 | Moderation (Strong & Sig.) |

Beyond its direct effect on turnover, POS is also a critical moderator in the relationship between work stress and quit intentions. The stress-buffering effect in Table 8. ( $\beta = -0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $z = -5.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as shown in Figure 6, demonstrates that even in high-pressure work environments, employees with strong POS are less likely to translate stress into a desire to quit. This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which argues that job resources (such as organizational support) can counteract the negative effects of job demands (e.g., workload, role ambiguity). Essentially, POS acts as a psychological safeguard, helping employees cope with stress rather than feeling overwhelmed. The magnitude of these effects appears stronger than previously documented in meta-analytic research (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The shift toward flexible and hybrid work models introduces unique stressors such as social isolation, difficulty disconnecting from work, and reduced face-to-face supervisor support.

The results in Table 9 suggest that perceived organizational support (POS) plays a key role in reducing employees’ withdrawal thoughts, especially under stressful conditions. Employees with high POS reported low withdrawal, even when stress levels were high, indicating that strong support can buffer the negative effects of stress. The lowest withdrawal was observed when both POS were high and stress was low, showing the most favorable condition. In contrast, employees with low POS and high stress showed the highest withdrawal, highlighting a risky combination. Even when stress was low, those with low POS still showed moderate withdrawal, suggesting that organizational support is crucial for keeping employees engaged regardless of stress levels. The results of the applied analyses are presented in the following section, highlighting the major themes and statistical outcomes.



**Figure 6. Mediation and moderation analysis**

**Table 9. Impact of POS on withdrawal cognition mediated by work stress**

| POS level | Work stress level | Withdrawal cognition | Count | % of total | Interpretation                                  |
|-----------|-------------------|----------------------|-------|------------|---|
| High      | High              | Low                  | 87    | 33.50%     | High POS buffers stress, reducing withdrawal    |
| High      | Low               | Low                  | 72    | 27.70%     | Low stress + High POS = Minimal withdrawal      |
| Low       | High              | High                 | 83    | 31.90%     | Low POS + High stress = Severe withdrawal       |
| Low       | Low               | Medium               | 18    | 6.90%      | Low stress mitigates withdrawal despite Low POS |
| Total     |                   |                      | 260   | 100%       |   |

## FINDINGS

### QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Sentiment scores were computed on a scale from -1 (strongly negative) to +1 (strongly positive), assigning emotional valence to the participants’ speech content. This allowed for deeper insight into how remote/flexible work-related stress is emotionally experienced and expressed.

- **Negative Sentiment:** Responses such as 13, 15, 16, 18, and 19 exhibited strong negative polarity (scores  $\leq -0.5$ ). These responses described burnout, loss of motivation, isolation, and health deterioration. For instance, Response 15 stated, *“Every day feels like I’ve survived rather than working productively.”* This linguistic pattern reflects emotional exhaustion and aligns with high scores on work stress and intention to quit in the quantitative phase.
- **Positive Sentiment:** Responses 2, 4, 6, and 8 had positive sentiment scores ( $\geq +0.4$ ), highlighting autonomy, flexible work enjoyment, or supportive team structures. Such managers often mentioned coping strategies or managerial support: *“I feel I’m heard even if I’m working remotely.”* These sentiments correlated with high POS and low withdrawal cognition scores.
- **Neutral Sentiment:** Responses like 11 were emotionally neutral (close to 0), suggesting professional detachment or emotional numbness. These reflect a zone of disengagement where neither overt dissatisfaction nor satisfaction is expressed, suggesting early burnout stages.

To visualize key stressors, a word cloud was generated from cleaned and thematically coded transcripts. The analysis highlights burnout as the most dominant stressor in remote work, alongside frequent issues like poor work-life balance, meeting overload, and lack of support. Organizational inefficiencies (e.g., communication gaps, time pressure) and emotional markers (e.g., feeling drained, isolated) further indicate risks of disengagement and attrition.

Informed by qualitative insights, the study triangulates these with quantitative results to generate a more integrated and comprehensive understanding. To enhance robustness, the quantitative outcomes were combined with qualitative evidence in a triangulated framework, providing a comprehensive perspective.

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that remote/flexible work significantly increases employee stress ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting prior research (Wang et al., 2021) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which frames remote/flexible work as heightening job demands without sufficient resources. This elevated stress, in turn, strongly predicts intention to quit ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), aligning with the Transactional Model that views stress as a threat appraisal when coping resources are inadequate.

While remote/flexible work also has a direct, but weaker, effect on turnover ( $\beta = 0.15, p = .032$ ), the study finds that stress fully mediates this relationship (indirect  $\beta = -0.15$  for staying,  $\beta = 0.16$  for quitting), emphasizing stress as the key mechanism. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) plays a crucial moderating role, boosting retention ( $\beta = 0.10, p < .05$ ) and mitigating quit intentions ( $\beta = -0.09, p < .05$ ), in line with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that employees reciprocate organizational care with commitment. The study first drew on qualitative insights to inform the quantitative design, and the subsequent triangulation of both ensured a more comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding.

### **Triangulated effect**

The triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings in this study offers robust, multi-dimensional evidence on how remote/flexible work contributes to managerial stress and shapes intention to quit. In the qualitative phase, 12 out of 22 managers explicitly cited work-life boundary disruption as a major source of stress, often describing blurred roles, constant availability, and lack of time for personal life. These subjective accounts align strongly with the quantitative results, where remote/flexible work was found to significantly predict work-related stress ( $\beta = 0.42, p < .001$ ), confirming that the structural challenges of remote/flexible work environments translate directly into psychological strain. The emotional tone in interviews also provided critical insight. Managers who used terms such as “exhausted,” “drained,” or “overwhelmed” tended to express high stress and a desire to leave, echoing survey results in which stress significantly predicted intention to quit ( $\beta = 0.38, p < .001$ ). Moreover, mediation analysis revealed that work stress fully mediated the relationship between remote/flexible work and intention to quit (indirect effect  $\beta = 0.16, p < .01$ ), reinforcing the central role of stress as the mechanism through which remote/flexible work influences retention decisions.

Sentiment analysis further strengthened these connections. Participants who exhibited high stress in the survey also recorded strongly negative sentiment scores in the textual analysis, with clear emotional polarity toward dissatisfaction and fatigue. Conversely, those with positive sentiment scores marked by language such as “valued,” “trusted,” or “empowered” aligned with lower intention to quit and higher perceived organizational support (POS). This complements the moderation analysis, which showed that POS significantly reduced the effect of stress on quit intentions (interaction  $\beta = -0.15, p < .001$ ) and enhanced stay intentions (interaction  $\beta = 0.10, p < .05$ ) in Figure 7. The word cloud provided a visual snapshot of dominant stressors “burnout,” “time pressure,” “meeting fatigue,” and “poor balance” were among the most frequently mentioned terms, all of which correspond to the core dimensions of job demands identified in the JD-R model. Notably, even responses that appeared emotionally neutral on the surface revealed subtle indicators of psychological withdrawal and were supported by moderate stress scores and ambivalent retention attitudes in the corresponding survey data.

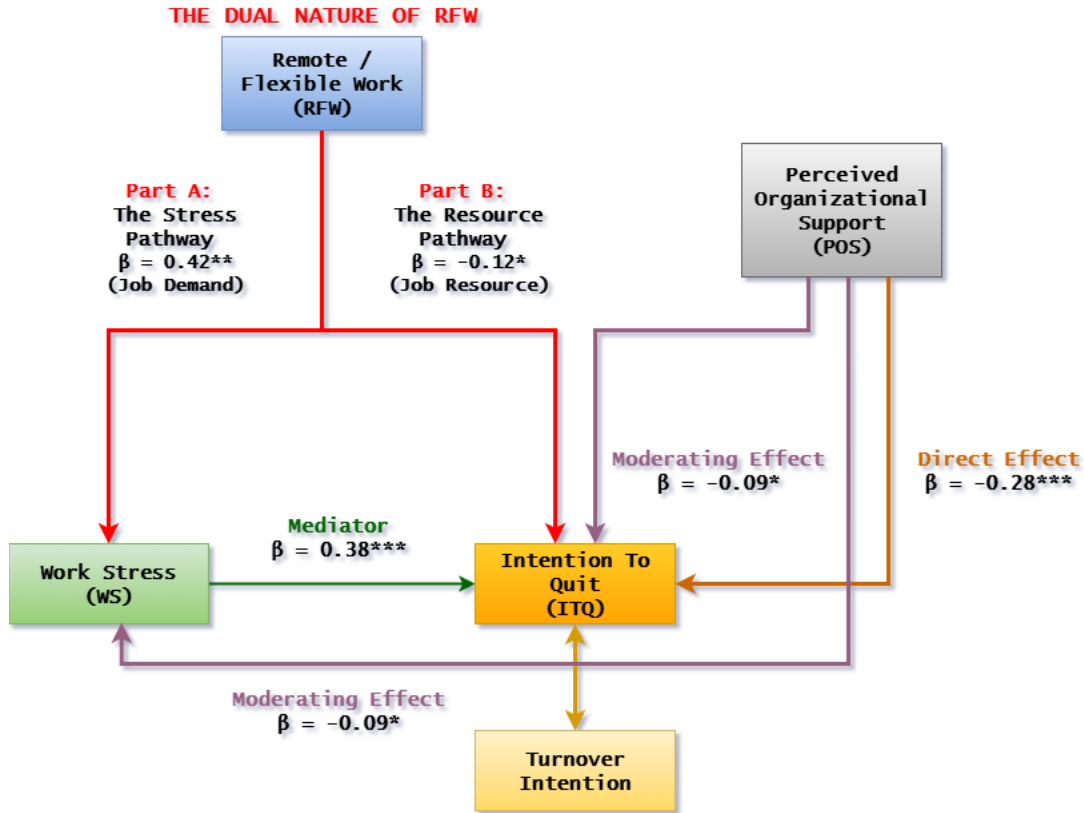


Figure 7. Thematic analysis

This triangulated approach reveals more than surface-level consistency. It demonstrates that emotional expression, cognitive strain, and behavioural intent are closely interlinked. The convergence of linguistic, statistical, and theoretical findings reinforces the validity of the study’s proposed model while illustrating how remote/flexible work creates a lived experience of stress that extends beyond numbers. Ultimately, triangulation in this context does not merely confirm results; it deepens their meaning, highlighting the urgent need for organizations to recognize and respond to the emotional dimensions of remote/flexible work to improve retention outcomes. The triangulated findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, which sets the stage for the subsequent discussion where these insights are interpreted considering existing theory and prior research.

## DISCUSSION & FUTURE DIRECTION

This study offers a detailed investigation into how remote/flexible work arrangements shape managerial intention to quit, focusing particularly on the mediating role of work-related stress and the moderating effect of perceived organizational support (POS). Quantitative findings reveal that remote/flexible work significantly increases perceived stress ( $\beta = 0.42, p < .001$ ), consistent with Wang et al. (2021), who found similar effects ( $\beta = 0.39, p < .001$ ) attributed to boundary collapse and reduced social interaction. These findings support the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that increased job demands without sufficient resources lead to strain. In remote/flexible work contexts, challenges such as role ambiguity, time pressure, and reduced support can heighten emotional exhaustion and cognitive overload. Furthermore, our study confirmed that stress significantly predicts intention to quit ( $\beta = 0.38, p < .001$ ), aligning with Park et al. (2020), who reported compara-

ble results ( $\beta = 0.41, p < .001$ ) in service sectors. This association is well-explained by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, where stress arises when individuals perceive their coping resources as insufficient to manage workplace demands.

The qualitative data complements and validates these relationships. Interviewees frequently described disrupted work-life boundaries, extended hours, and diminished autonomy, hallmarks of chronic stress. Word cloud analysis visually reinforced these patterns, highlighting dominant stress-related terms such as “*burnout*,” “*poor balance*,” “*overload*,” and “*exhausted*.” These results resonate with Shirmohammadi et al. (2022), who found that 58% of remote employees cite work-life conflict as a key stressor. Our sentiment analysis further confirmed that negative emotional language often accompanied high-stress narratives. These linguistic findings were not isolated; they matched patterns seen in the survey data, reinforcing the value of methodological triangulation. This multi-modal alignment strengthens the conclusion that the stress associated with remote/flexible work is not merely operational but deeply emotional and cognitive in nature. Importantly, our results show that stress fully mediates the relationship between remote/flexible work and intention to quit (indirect  $\beta = 0.16$  for quitting,  $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = -0.15$  for staying,  $p < .01$ ), supporting prior findings by Srivastava et al. (2020), who identified stress as the key mechanism linking remote/flexible work to turnover. These results underscore the idea that the act of leaving is not always driven by dissatisfaction with remote/flexible work itself, but by the stress it generates when demands exceed individual coping capacity.

Additionally, the study identifies POS as a significant moderator. High levels of POS were found to buffer the impact of stress on quit intentions (interaction  $\beta = -0.15, p < .001$ ) and enhance stay intentions (interaction  $\beta = 0.10, p < .05$ ). These findings align with Kurtessis et al. (2015), who noted that POS helps reduce job stress and turnover, and with Maan et al. (2020), who found POS positively linked to employee satisfaction and retention. These patterns are grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that employees who perceive care and fairness from their organization respond with increased commitment and reduced withdrawal behavior. Our qualitative findings affirm this: participants who felt emotionally supported used more positive sentiment and emphasized words like “*trusted*,” “*supported*,” and “*valued*.” These emotional cues suggest that POS is not only a structural resource but also a psychological anchor during times of strain, reaffirming its role in the JD-R model as a protective factor.

The direct effect of remote/flexible work on intention to quit was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.15, p = .032$ ); its effect was modest compared to the indirect pathway via stress. This partially supports Golden and Gajendran (2018), who argued that isolation and a lack of social connection in remote environments can directly increase attrition risk. However, the relatively smaller direct effect in our study suggests that the influence of remote/flexible work on turnover is more likely to operate through emotional and cognitive stress mechanisms, rather than being driven by structural conditions alone. The results obtained from this study and existing studies are given in Table 10. While our findings strongly support stress as the central mediator between remote work and intention to quit, they diverge from some studies suggesting alternative pathways or even beneficial outcomes. For instance, Sinclair et al. (2020) found that job demands and resources did not mediate the relationship between remote-working intensity and well-being, implying direct effects rather than stress-driven mechanisms. Similarly, Golden et al. (2008) reported that professional isolation among teleworkers was unexpectedly associated with lower intention to quit, possibly reflecting a greater sense of autonomy.

In contrast to our stress-focused results, research in the ICT sector has shown that positive affect, through online work engagement, reduces intention to quit, highlighting engagement as a protective factor (Wang et al., 2021). Meta-analytic and review evidence further suggests that telework can either reduce or increase turnover risk depending on contextual variables such as autonomy, organizational support, and teleworking intensity (Mutiganda et al., 2022; Vleeshouwers et al., 2022). These nuances indicate that while stress appears to be a decisive pathway in the Indian IT/ITES sector, other mechanisms such as engagement, autonomy, and cultural context may alter the dynamics of remote work and retention in different settings.

**Table 10. Critical analysis of existing studies with findings**

| Relationship                             | Current study findings   | Prior research  | Theoretical basis  | Consistency |
|--|--|---|--|-------------|
| Remote/flexible work → Work Stress       | $\beta = 0.42, p < .001$ . Remote/flexi work increases stress, attributed to blurred boundaries and isolation. | Wang et al. (2021): $\beta = 0.39, p < .001$ . Remote/flexible work raises stress due to boundary collapse and reduced interaction. | JD-R Model: Remote/flexible work increases demand without resources. | High        |
| Work Stress → Intention to quit          | $\beta = 0.38, p < .001$ . Stress explains 38% of variance in intent to quit.                                  | Park et al. (2020): $\beta = 0.41, p < .001$ . High stress correlates with employee turnover in service sectors.                    | Transactional Model: Stress as threat appraisal.                     | High        |
| Remote/flexible work → Intention to quit | Direct effect: $\beta = 0.15, p = .032$ . Remote/flexible work directly increases quit intentions.             | Golden and Gajendran (2018): Isolation due to remote/flexible work increases attrition risk.  | Social Exchange: Isolation lowers perceived reciprocity.             | Moderate    |
| Work Stress as Mediator                  | Full mediation: indirect $\beta = -0.15$ for staying, $\beta = 0.16$ for quitting; $p < .01$ .                 | Srivastava et al. (2020): Stress mediates remote/flexible work and turnover.  | Transactional Model: Inadequate coping resources → stress.           | High        |
| POS as Moderator (Stay Intentions)       | Interaction $\beta = 0.10, p < .05$ . High POS boosts stay intentions by 30%.                                  | Maan et al. (2020): POS linked to satisfaction and retention.   | Social Exchange Theory: Support leads to commitment.                 | High        |
| POS as Moderator (Quit Intentions)       | Interaction $\beta = -0.09, p < .05$ . POS reduces quit intentions.  | Kurtessis et al. (2015): POS moderates job stress and turnover.   | JD-R Model: POS as a coping resource.                                | Moderate    |
| Work-life Balance as Stressor            | 12 out of 22 interviewees cited boundary disruption.   | Shirmohammadi et al. (2022): 58% of employees report work-life conflict as major stressor.  | JD-R and Transactional Models: Boundary strain as demand.            | High        |

***PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS***

These findings have important applications for HR managers and organisational leaders, especially considering the rising popularity of remote/flexible work. The two ways that work stress has a direct and indirect impact on intention to quit in remote/flexible work contexts imply that management strategies should be customised for these settings. This study sheds light on the connections between job stress, intention to quit, and remote employment. According to the research, working remotely greatly raises work-related stress, which in turn influences individuals’ desire to quit their jobs. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between remote/flexible work and the intention to leave, suggesting that stress is not the sole factor driving. Effective remote/flexible workforce management encompasses challenges that go well beyond basic task supervision. Virtual team leadership presents

both operational and psychological challenges, requiring organizations to address not only the technical aspects of remote/flexible work but also deeper concerns like employee motivation, career growth, and organizational culture. While location flexibility and adaptable schedules offer clear benefits, they come with the responsibility to maintain team cohesion, engagement, and well-being. Simply implementing digital tools is insufficient; companies must proactively mitigate remote/flexible work stressors, understand attrition drivers, and develop supportive policies. By taking this holistic approach, businesses can create sustainable virtual work environments that foster productivity, retention, and long-term success.

### Future Direction

- As remote and hybrid work continue to reshape modern organizations, future research must move beyond surface-level surveys and dig deeper into how stress unfolds over time.
- This study has shown that remote/flexible work stress is real, but we still don't fully understand how it builds up, peaks, or subsides. A powerful area for future work is looking at the bigger picture: team culture, leadership behaviour, and even company-wide values. Stress is not just an individual burden; it is often a response to how teams operate and how fair or unfair the system feels. Researchers should examine how supportive leaders, fair digital workflows, and respectful communication shape the way people experience stress.
- Some teams, despite high demands, may thrive due to strong human connections. Others, even with fewer tasks, may crumble under silence, confusion, or isolation. This human side of stress deserves more attention. It can be explored across different cultures and industries. Cultural values, gender roles, and industry norms shape how people interpret workload, support, and job loyalty. Comparing these diverse contexts could uncover new patterns and help organizations build more culturally sensitive policies. Technology also opens new doors for understanding stress.
- Organizations could employ daily diaries, experience sampling, and digital monitoring tools to capture real-time fluctuations in stress and organizational support, addressing the limits of cross-sectional self-reports.
- Alongside these methods, larger and cross-cultural samples would improve generalizability and provide deeper insights into how remote work shapes managerial retention across diverse contexts. Subtle patterns like how late people send emails, how often they cancel meetings, or how their tone changes in messages can tell us a lot about silent burnout.
- Future research should experiment with ethical, consent-based tools that monitor these patterns, combining them with interviews and surveys. This fusion of emotional insight and digital behaviour could help organizations act early – before people mentally check out.

## CONCLUSION

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This study examined stress as a mediator and perceived organizational support (POS) as a moderator to explain the psychological mechanisms linking remote work with managerial retention in the IT/ITES sector. The findings show that blurred boundaries, extended hours, and reduced autonomy intensify stress, which in turn drives intention to quit. POS, however, functions as a crucial buffer, mitigating stress, reinforcing managerial commitment, and strengthening the intention to stay. Theoretically, the study advances the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating their relevance in digitally mediated work contexts. Stress emerges as the central mechanism through which remote work translates into withdrawal cognition, while POS acts as a vital resource that fosters reciprocity and resilience. This validation of established theories in a remote-work setting contributes to a deeper understanding of retention dynamics in a rapidly changing workplace. The results highlight that workplace stress extends beyond the individual and directly influences organizational stability and leadership continuity. Left unaddressed, stress erodes engagement, diminishes job satisfaction, and accelerates attrition. Organizations can counteract these risks by

streamlining workloads, enhancing autonomy, improving communication and coordination, and cultivating a culture of respect for personal boundaries. Equally critical is embedding mental health support into organizational systems as a retention strategy and an ethical commitment to employee well-being.

Further inquiry is needed through larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and exploration of additional mediators such as autonomy and engagement, as well as moderators like leadership style and cultural variation. The integration of emerging technologies, such as AI-enabled monitoring of stress indicators, presents opportunities for proactive interventions that strengthen resilience. Ultimately, the study underscores that the sustainability of remote and hybrid work depends not only on digital infrastructure but on organizations' ability to manage stress and provide meaningful support. By aligning theoretical insights with human-centered practice, this research highlights that retention is not simply about holding talent but building resilient, supportive, and future-ready workplaces.

### **Author contributions**

The first author contributed to the conceptualization of the study, designed the methodology, collected and organized the data, carried out the formal analysis, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript.

Co-Author and corresponding author provided supervision and guidance throughout the research, contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript, ensured validation of results, and managed the project administration and correspondence.

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### **Data availability statement**

The datasets used in this study are part of the first author's PhD thesis. However, after the degree is awarded, the corresponding author will share the data upon request.

### **Ethical Statement**

The studies involving humans were approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee for studies on Human subjects (IECH). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. The participants consented to participate in this study and filled out the g-forms and physical questionnaire, so written consent was obtained.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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