

Article

Employee Profiles of Remote Work Benefits and the Role of Leadership in a Medium-Sized Italian IT Company

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Abstract

Remote working is increasingly being recognized as a practice that can advance organizational sustainability across environmental, economic and social dimensions. However, little is known about how employees perceive its benefits within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and about the role of leadership in shaping these perceptions. This study aimed to identify distinct profiles of perceived remote working benefits and to examine how socio-demographic characteristics and leader–member exchange (LMX) predict profile membership. Data were collected through an online survey administered to 377 employees of a medium-sized Italian IT company. Measures included perceived benefits of remote working and supportive leadership, and analyses were conducted using latent class analysis (LCA) and multinomial logistic regression. Results revealed four profiles: Enthusiastic Supporters (37%), Cautious Adopters (25%), Remote Work Skeptics (22%), and Core Pragmatists (17%). Younger employees were more likely to belong to the Enthusiastic Supporters category, while supportive leadership increased the probability of being Cautious Adopters rather than Skeptics. These findings stress the importance of considering diverse employee experiences when implementing remote work policies and highlight the role of leadership in fostering positive evaluations of remote working. The study provides practical insights for SMEs aiming to align remote working practices with sustainability goals.



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1. Introduction

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability has become an even more pressing concern for organizations, with leadership playing a central role in guiding organizational practices connected to sustainability (Gupta et al., 2025). A clear example is the recent statement signed by more than 40 European companies opposing EU policies aimed at reducing corporate reporting obligations (Eurosif, 2025). According to these organizations, regulations that promote transparency and responsible corporate conduct can foster growth, enhance risk management, redirect investments toward green technologies, and support sustainable development (Reuters, 2025). The benefits of restructuring production with a focus on sustainability are increasingly recognized and integrated not only by large organizations and multinational corporations, but also by small and medium-sized enterprises, which are now more actively engaged in sustainability-related practices and policies

(United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025). Nevertheless, despite the significant investments made to promote the sustainability transition, ten years after the launch of the 2030 Agenda—and just five years before the target date—only 35% of the 137 Sustainable Development Goal targets show sufficient progress to be achieved by 2030 (United Nations General Assembly, 2025). Despite uneven progress, encouraging results in certain regions indicate that positive change is still attainable, provided that efforts are urgently intensified (United Nations General Assembly, 2025).

Consequently, it is particularly relevant at this stage to promote and implement every strategy that may contribute to sustainable development. One such strategy is remote working, which, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (2019–2022), has become progressively more widespread across European regions since the COVID-19 Pandemic (Sostero et al., 2024). Indeed, remote and hybrid forms of working have been argued to support and advance progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with potential impacts on indicators related to health, well-being, education, gender equality, economic growth, innovation, sustainable cities, and consumption patterns, as well as climate change (Moglia et al., 2021). Remote work supports progress across the three dimensions into which sustainability is commonly divided: environmental, economic, and social (Abdulrahim, 2024). The latter, social sustainability, is often overlooked in organizational contexts (Kumari & Singh, 2023). This dimension can also be understood as the sustainability of organizational life, oriented toward fostering well-being and healthy workplace cultures. It emphasizes the importance of meaningful work experiences and constructive narratives that inspire hope and success, while promoting cultural change aimed at embracing diversity and enhancing performance (Di Fabio, 2017).

For organizations aiming to become more sustainable, addressing leadership is also essential (Boeske, 2023; Gupta et al., 2025; Molino et al., 2019; Sacchi et al., *in press*). Leadership is a critical enabler of sustainability, as it not only shapes the organization's vision and communication around sustainability, but also supports the development and effective implementation of sustainable practices by aligning internal goals with broader social and environmental priorities (Epstein, 2008; García-Sánchez et al., 2024). Leadership has also been proven to play a fundamental role in fostering sustainable remote work practices (Spagnoli et al., 2020). However, this role has so far been examined only partially, often through approaches that overlook the complexity of employees' attitudes and perceptions toward remote work. Given the central role of leadership in fostering sustainability, it is particularly relevant to investigate how leadership can shape employees' experiences and perceptions of remote work in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where leaders can directly influence practices that promote sustainability (Boeske & Murray, 2022).

In line with this perspective, this study was conducted in a medium-sized enterprise in the Italian information technology sector. The Italian entrepreneurial landscape, according to OECD, is predominantly composed of SMEs, with more than 4 million operating across the country (OECD, 2024). Specifically, in 2022 Italy had approximately 221,000 small enterprises (10–49 employees) and about 21,000 medium-sized enterprises (50–249 employees) (Istat, 2024b). In addition, according to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Sabbatini, 2023), the information and communication sector is among the most compatible with remote working. In the second quarter of 2020, it was the leading sector in terms of remote work adoption, with 60 percent of employees working remotely. Considering the sector of activity is essential when studying remote work because the potential of remote work depends both on the type of activity offered and the sector in which the company operates. Consistent with the data reported by Italian national statistics, the study conducted by Susan et al. (2020) also suggests that the information and technology sector is among those with the highest potential for remote work (Colak & Saridogan, 2023).

In conclusion, despite the growing importance of remote work and its implications, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most studies focus on large organizations, whereas the organizational dynamics typical of SMEs are often overlooked (Castro & Moreira, 2024; Zahari et al., 2024). Second, even if some studies have created workers profiles connected to remote work (Laborie et al., 2024; Bakaç et al., 2023), none specifically investigate perception profiles of remote work benefits and how such profiles are distributed across workers. Finally, the role of leadership in shaping these perceptual profiles is scarcely explored. Although some studies examine leadership quality in relation to remote workers' characteristics (Chang et al., 2023; Varma et al., 2022), the literature rarely addresses how differences in leadership quality relate to distinct configurations of benefit perceptions in remote work contexts.

This exploratory study aims to address existing gaps by identifying employee profiles based on their perceived benefits of remote work and examining how leadership—specifically the quality of leader–member exchange (LMX)—along with socio-demographic factors, shapes these profiles. The study consists of two steps: first, creating a typology of the profiles that emerge from employees' perceptions, and second, analyzing how LMX and socio-demographic variables influence these profiles within a medium-sized enterprise. By doing so, it provides a contextualized understanding of remote work, supporting more effective and conscious management practices and, ultimately, fostering organizational sustainability. Moreover, this study is particularly significant because it explores these relationships in the specific context of a medium-sized enterprise in the information technology sector. Studying organizational phenomena in their specific contexts is essential for understanding how such phenomena are shaped by environmental and organizational factors (Rousseau & Fried, 2001).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. What Is Sustainability?

Although widely discussed in both everyday discourse and academic literature, the meanings of sustainability and sustainable development continue to evolve (Coca & Pislaru, 2024; Ruggerio, 2021). While extensively documented, we briefly recall its core meaning to contextualize our study. Sustainable development was defined by the Brundtland Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). This definition emphasizes long-term thinking and the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Emas, 2015; Tenuta, 2009). Sustainability is commonly associated with the capacity to preserve resources, as reflected in the Oxford English Dictionary (2022), which defines it as “the degree to which a process or enterprise is able to be maintained or continued while avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources”. There is an ongoing debate about the distinction between sustainable development and sustainability. Although often used interchangeably in the literature (Olawumi & Chan, 2018; Sartori et al., 2014), sustainable development is conceptually contested, as it implies unlimited economic growth on a finite planet and contains internal tensions (Redclift, 2005; Sachs, 1999; Spaiser et al., 2017). Despite these distinctions, this article uses the terms interchangeably, in line with common academic usage.

As widely recognized, sustainability is commonly conceptualized as the balance between economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Coca & Pislaru, 2024), and numerous models have been proposed to represent this framework, e.g., the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1994), or the three overlapping circles (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Ramcilovic-Suominen & Pülzl, 2018).

Although these models differ in structure, focus, and underlying assumptions, most of them converge on a shared understanding: sustainability requires the systemic and balanced integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations within a long-term, interdependent framework.

2.2. Sustainability and Remote Work

Among the strategies organizations can adopt to foster sustainability, remote working stands out as a relevant opportunity, which can support progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting well-being, equality, innovation, and reduced environmental impact (Moglia et al., 2021). From an environmental sustainability perspective, remote working is associated with a number of transformations, for instance: the decrease in energy consumption associated with the use of large offices during the day (Orzeł & Wolniak, 2022), and the reduction in travel demands and road congestion (Eldér, 2020). From the economic point of view, remote work reduces operational costs and expands talent pools while improving organizational efficiency (Ríos Villacorta et al., 2025).

From a psycho-social perspective, which is the focus of this study, remote work combined with face-to-face interaction appears to offer several advantages: it aligns with employees' desire for meaningful work (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023) and meets their need for flexibility, as highlighted by a recent Gallup (2023) survey showing that six in ten U.S. employees prefer hybrid work arrangements, while fewer than one in ten favor exclusively on-site work.

However, there are also challenges associated with remote work: for instance social isolation (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020b) and the difficulty in maintaining cohesion and effective communication within the team (Stratone et al., 2022; Caputo et al., 2024). In addition, although remote working is often sought after with the expectation of improving work-life balance, research findings do not consistently associate it with lower levels of work-life conflict, but rather the reverse (Palumbo, 2020). This is because working remotely presents several challenges. In particular, when remote work is carried out at home, the boundaries between life domains become more flexible and permeable (Hellemans & Vayre, 2022). On the one hand, this flexibility can make role transitions easier, but on the other, it increases the risk of role blurring (Ashforth et al., 2000). Remote workers differ in their preferences for segmenting or integrating these boundaries. While home-based remote work tends to foster greater integration between life spheres, employees also adopt strategies to maintain separation between them as much as possible (Kreiner et al., 2009).

These same border segmentation strategies tend to fail when employees face excessive workload, numerous tasks to manage, and frequent technological solicitations (Dolce et al., 2024). Moreover, segmentation tactics and the right to disconnect are difficult to implement if the organizational context does not also play its part by encouraging positive leadership and preventing risks such as micromanagement and destructive leadership (Hellemans & Vayre, 2022; Spagnoli et al., 2021).

2.3. Attitudes Toward Remote Work

Despite these potential challenges, several research findings indicate that employees generally value flexible remote working (Kim & Dirks, 2023) and express positive attitudes toward it. In many cases, they report a desire to spend less time in the office than they currently do (National Council of University Research, 2021). Although the study of attitudes toward remote working is not new, it has often been investigated in a non-systematic way. As early as 1984, DeSanctis (1984) examined attitudes toward telecommuting in a computer service firm, comparing managers and programmers: while the latter were more interested in this possibility, particularly for its association with greater autonomy,

both groups identified similar advantages and risks. In the 1990s and early 2000s, further investigations followed, but these were generally small-scale and unsystematic, without generating a substantial or structured body of research. Even after the pandemic, when the use of remote working increased dramatically, this specific aspect has remained somewhat marginal, often considered only in relation to broader themes such as the relationship between remote working, well-being and performance (Rampasso et al., 2022).

In this scenario, the available data suggest a persistent gap in attitude toward remote working between employees and employers (Ghislieri et al., 2023). According to the Littler 2023 report, while employers recognize employees' generally positive stance toward remote work, they are often inclined to reduce or even eliminate its use (Littler, 2023). Overall, these attitudes vary and fluctuate over time, as evidenced by comparisons across 2021, 2022 and 2023. Furthermore, only a limited number of studies, especially during the pandemic, have systematically examined the perceived benefits and disadvantages of remote working (Ingusci et al., 2023).

It is within this frame that our study objective is to identify the main profiles of workers in terms of their attitude toward remote working in a medium-sized Italian company. We focus primarily on the positive aspects of remote working, including better work–life balance, financial savings, savings in commuting time, reduced stress, increased autonomy and concentration, improved relationships at work, higher job satisfaction and more effective use of technology.

2.4. Leadership, Sustainability and Remote Work

In our study, we focused on leadership, as it plays a crucial role in promoting organizational sustainability. Leaders influence how environmental and social priorities are communicated and translated into everyday practices (Epstein, 2008), including the adoption of work arrangements such as remote working. Over the last thirty years, extensive research has examined the intersection of leadership and sustainability, revealing a variety of leadership behaviors and skills associated with achieving sustainable outcomes (Boeske, 2023). However, there remains no clear consensus on which leadership styles most effectively foster sustainability (e.g., Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018; Knight & Paterson, 2018; Boeske & Murray, 2022; Eustachio et al., 2023).

Leaders influence organizational culture and employee behavior, facilitating the incorporation of sustainability into decision-making at all levels (Epstein, 2008). Accordingly, research highlights the importance of democratic leadership and values alignment in supporting sustainable initiatives, as seen in studies of Swedish and Austrian organizations (Nedelko & Potocan, 2021). Moreover, top management support is essential to legitimize and formalize bottom-up sustainability efforts by clarifying policy goals and fostering long-term, proactive strategies through collaboration and innovation (Richardson & Lynes, 2007; Lozano, 2006; Kemp & Martens, 2007; Martínez de Anguita et al., 2008).

As recent contributions argue, sustainability cannot be fully pursued without leadership, which serves as a bridge between individual experiences and broader systemic challenges. Leadership enables organizations to engage with the human and relational dimensions of sustainability, operating at the level where personal perception, organizational culture, and macro-level dynamics intersect (Sacchi et al., *in press*). Thus, leadership for sustainability encompasses a complex interplay of individual traits, organizational culture, and contextual factors that collectively influence an organization's capacity for sustainable development.

In the context of remote work, recent evidence highlights that effective leadership requires a reconfiguration of traditional skills and behaviors in order to sustain employee well-being and long-term sustainable working conditions (Wang et al., 2021). Leaders must

reduce both operational and relational distance in virtual teams by providing clear digital communication, setting transparent goals, and fostering trust through autonomy rather than micromanagement (Contreras et al., 2020).

High-quality leader–member exchange (LMX; Bauer & Erdogan, 2015) relationships have emerged as critical to sustaining employee well-being in remote and hybrid work contexts. By offering individualized consideration and consistent communication, leaders can maintain strong exchanges with employees. In this way, high-quality LMX supports employees' adjustment to new work modes, reducing both exhaustion and turnover intention (Petrilli et al., 2024). It also plays a significant role in fostering engagement among remote workers through strengthening their sense of connection and belonging to the organization (Lartey, 2022). Moreover, LMX moderates the impact of proactive coping on teleworker productivity, particularly under conditions of loneliness (Chang et al., 2023). Studies further demonstrate that high-quality LMX enhances work-nonwork enrichment and job satisfaction (Goswami & Jena, 2024; Tummers & Bronkhorst, 2014), and fosters greater professional fulfillment through adaptive leadership and trust-building (Schreier et al., 2024). However, in distributed remote work contexts, heavy reliance on electronic communication and reduced face-to-face interaction may erode supervisory trust and diminish LMX quality (Wong & Berntzen, 2019).

In line with this literature, the study extends the analysis of profiles of attitudes toward remote working by investigating the association between leadership—here operationalized as LMX—and the probability of belonging to a specific profile.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Procedure

Data was collected from a private IT company through an online questionnaire hosted on Limesurvey. The instrument was sent to the institutional emails of all employees. For the purpose of this study, we included only the participants working in the Research and Development, Operations, and Delivery units.

Data collection ran from October 2023 to January 2024. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained from each participant. The cover letter outlined the study's objectives, participation details, the right to withdraw at any time, and data management information.

The research did not involve any procedures that could pose psychological or social risks, and adhered to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), Italian data protection and privacy laws (Law 196/2003) and the GDPR. Ethical approval was granted by the Bioethics Committee of the University of Turin [Approval Code: 0558878; Approval Date: 6 October 2023].

3.2. Participants

The sample consisted of 377 participants employed in different branches of the company, predominantly located in Northern Italy. Most of the sample identified as male (70%), with a mean age of 39.7 years ($SD = 9.59.1$), ranging from 20 to 64 years. This gender distribution is consistent with the overall demographics of the Italian ICT sector, in which women represent only about 15.7% of ICT specialists (Istat, 2024a). Almost every participant worked full-time (97%) on permanent contracts (98%). Regarding job seniority, 53% had been with the company for over seven years, 23% between three and seven years, and 23% for less than three years. All participants had access to remote work arrangements.

3.3. Measures

Remote working benefits were measured with seven items from the scale of Ingusci et al. (2023). Participants were asked how much the adoption of remote working arrangements could lead to a series of positive outcomes, using a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Totally*). The items pertained to positive aspects of remote working such as better opportunities to balance work and private life, reduced commuting, more concentration, and increased autonomy. For a full outline of the items, see Table 1.

Table 1. Full list of remote working benefits.

Remote Working Benefits	
1.	Greater ability to better coordinate personal and work life and/or to adequately meet family needs
2.	Savings in time and/or money on commuting
3.	Reduced stress and/or more time available for oneself
4.	Ability to work autonomously and/or improved focus, organization and planning of one's work
5.	Better relationships with colleagues and/or supervisors
6.	Increased job satisfaction
7.	Better use of available technology

Supportive leadership was assessed with five items from the Leader-Member Exchange Scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Participants were asked to answer based on their experience with their direct supervisor, using a scale from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). An example item was “My supervisor uses his or her influence to help me solve my problems at work”. McDonald's Omega was 0.93.

3.4. Data Analysis

We employed Jamovi (version 2.3; The Jamovi Project, 2022) to conduct descriptive and correlational analyses, calculate composite reliability via McDonald's Omega. A latent class analysis (LCA) was performed using the package *snowlatent* (Seol, 2022), testing models with an increasing number of classes to identify distinct profiles of worker's attitudes towards the positive aspects of remote working. The LCA was based on seven indicators of perceived benefits: better work–life balance, financial and time savings, reduced stress, increased autonomy and concentration, improved relationships at work, higher job satisfaction, and better use of technology. Model fit was evaluated using several criteria: lower log-likelihood (LL), likelihood ratio chi-square statistic (G^2) Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and Consistent AIC (CAIC); higher entropy values (>0.80); no underpopulated classes ($<5\%$); and the likelihood ratio test comparing models with k and $k-1$ classes.

After identifying the best solution, and assessing that entropy was higher than 0.80, we saved the most likely class membership. The four resulting classes represented qualitatively different patterns of how workers evaluate the advantages of remote working. Finally, we conducted a multinomial logistic regression including age, gender, and supportive leadership as predictors of class membership. To examine all pairwise contrasts among the four latent classes, we rotated the reference category, resulting in six sets of comparisons. Supportive leadership and age were standardized prior to the inclusion in the model. The dataset, code, and Supplementary Materials are available on the Open Science Framework at the link provided in the Data Availability statement.

4. Results

Latent Classes Based on Remote Working Benefits

Before fitting the model, we conducted correlational analyses between the indicators included in the LCA and the other study variables. The seven indicators included showed moderate positive correlations with each other ($r = 0.35\text{--}0.64$), indicating related but distinct aspects of employees' remote-work experiences. Supportive leadership (LMX) and demographic variables (age and gender) were only weakly associated with these indicators, suggesting that they functioned appropriately as external predictors rather than class-defining variables. The full correlation matrix is presented in Table S1 of the Supplementary Materials.

Table 2 presents the absolute model fit for latent class solutions ranging from two to six classes. Entropy remained consistently high across all models, indicating reliable class separation, with only a slight decrease in the six-class model. Although the five-class model demonstrated lower AIC, CAIC, and BIC values compared to the six-class model, both CAIC and BIC increased relative to the four-class model (BIC = 4981.38; CAIC = 5068.38 for the four-class model vs. 5035.08 and 5144.08 for the five-class model, respectively).

Table 2. Absolute model fit for remote working benefits LCA.

Class	LL	AIC	CAIC	BIC	Entropy	df	G ²
2	−2404.03	4894.05	5106.02	5063.02	0.86	332	1311.07
3	−2282.62	4695.25	5015.67	4950.67	0.86	310	1068.27
4	−2232.75	4639.51	5068.38	4981.38	0.86	288	968.53
5	−2194.38	4606.75	5144.08	5035.08	0.86	266	891.77
6	−2177.02	4616.04	5261.82	5130.82	0.85	244	857.06

Relative model fit comparisons (Table 3) showed that the most substantial improvement occurred between the two-class and three-class models, with smaller yet still significant improvements in the subsequent solutions. However, we observed diminishing returns in fit with the increased complexity, especially between the five-class and six-class models. Although the five-class model showed a significant improvement over the four-class model, inspecting the item-response probabilities suggested that the additional class did not offer substantially distinct response patterns. Specifically, the new class closely resembled response patterns of existing classes, namely class 4 in the four-class solution and class 3 in the five-class solution, which were characterized by high probabilities of selecting the lowest response option across most items. This pattern indicated that the fifth class may represent a more extreme subgroup of skeptical workers, raising concerns about potential overspecification.

Table 3. Relative model fit for remote working benefits LCA.

Class	Parameters	LL	df	Deviance	p
2	43	−2404.03	−	−	−
3	65	−2282.62	22	242.8	<0.001
4	87	−2232.75	22	99.74	<0.001
5	109	−2194.38	22	76.76	<0.001
6	131	−2177.02	22	34.71	0.041

Considering the relatively small reduction in AIC, the increase in CAIC and BIC, and the limited interpretative value of the additional class, the four-class model was retained due to its balance between model parsimony, interpretability, and statistical fit.

Table 4, as well as Figure 1, presents the expected scores for each item derived from the response probabilities in the four-class model.

Table 4. Expected scores of each class based on response probabilities to remote working benefits.

Items	Classes			
	Enthusiastic Supporters (37%)	Remote Work Skeptics (22%)	Core Pragmatists (17%)	Cautious Adopters (25%)
1. Work–life balance	3.98	3.00	4.00	3.58
2. Save time and money	3.99	3.15	4.00	3.61
3. Less stress/more free time	4.00	2.11	3.85	2.96
4. More autonomy and focus	3.94	1.99	3.70	3.16
5. Better relationships	3.19	1.14	1.77	2.09
6. More job satisfaction	3.89	1.60	2.70	2.77
7. Better ICT use	3.74	1.81	2.36	2.84



Figure 1. Expected scores of each class based on response probabilities to remote working benefits.

The first and largest class (37%, $n = 139$) was labeled “Enthusiastic Supporters”. Members of this class showed a strong endorsement of remote work benefits, especially concerning work–life balance, time and cost savings, greater autonomy, and reduced stress. Although ratings for improved workplace relationships were more moderate, they were higher than those observed in other classes.

The second class was named “Remote Work Skeptics” (22%, $n = 81$), reflecting a largely critical stance toward remote working. Participants in this group showed the lowest expected scores across all items, especially with regard to improved relationships at work and job satisfaction. The only partial exceptions were work–life balance and savings on commuting, where scores, although still the lowest comparatively, hovered around 3 (i.e., “Quite a lot”), showing that they still saw some benefits of remote working.

The third and smallest class (17%, $n = 63$), the “Core Pragmatists”, displayed very strong beliefs in the possibility of remote working arrangements leading to better work–life balance, commute savings, and providing a reduction in stress and the opportunity to have more concentration and autonomous planning and organization. In fact, they surpass even the “Enthusiastic Supporters” on the first two items, with all members choosing the highest response category. However, they expressed markedly lower expectations regarding the social and technological benefits of remote work, ranking second-lowest on the last three items. This pattern suggests a selective endorsement, focused more on individual or private benefits.

Finally, the fourth class (25%, $n = 93$), was named “Cautious Adopters”. This group reported moderate to high levels of endorsement across all items. Although not as unequivocally as the “Enthusiastic Supporters” or “Core Pragmatists” (at least in some aspects), they recognized a broad range of remote work benefits. The lowest-scoring item in this class was again the one concerning workplace relationships, but even in this case, the expected score hovered just above 2 (A little), rather than just below it, like the “Core Pragmatists”, or closer to 1, like the “Remote Work Skeptics”.

Following the identification and interpretation of the four latent classes, we conducted a multinomial logistic regression with supportive leadership, age, and gender as predictors of class membership. To examine all pairwise contrasts among the classes, we rotated the reference category, resulting in six comparisons (Table 5). Two significant effects emerged. First, higher supportive leadership was associated with lower odds of belonging to the “Remote Work Skeptics” relative to the “Cautious Adopters” ($\beta = -0.35$, OR = 0.70, $p = 0.028$). A one-standard deviation increase in supportive leadership corresponded to roughly a 30% decrease in the odds of belonging in the former class. Second, age significantly distinguished “Enthusiastic Supporters” from “Cautious Adopters” ($\beta = -0.35$, OR = 0.70, $p = 0.012$); specifically, for every 10-year increase in age (approximately one standard deviation in this sample) the odds of being an Enthusiastic Supporter rather than a Cautious Adopter decreased by about 30%. No other predictors reached statistical significance across the remaining contrasts. Tables S2 and S3 in the Supplementary Materials present the estimated probabilities of class membership as a function of LMX and age, respectively, and Figures S1 and S2 illustrate these relationships graphically.

Table 5. Results from multinomial logistic regressions with LMX, age and gender as predictors of class membership.

	1 vs. 2		1 vs. 3		1 vs. 4		2 vs. 3		2 vs. 4		3 vs. 4	
	Coef. (SE)	OR	Coef. (SE)	OR	Coef. (SE)	OR	Coef. (SE)	OR	Coef. (SE)	OR	Coef. (SE)	OR
LMX	0.18 (0.14)	1.19	−0.06 (0.16)	0.94	−0.18 (0.14)	0.84	−0.23 (0.17)	0.79	−0.35 (0.16) *	0.70	−0.12 (0.17)	0.89
Gender	0.17 (0.33)	1.18	−0.35 (0.33)	0.71	−0.03 (0.31)	0.97	−0.52 (0.37)	0.60	−0.20 (0.35)	0.82	0.32 (0.35)	1.37
Age	−0.21 (0.02)	0.81	−0.30 (0.16)	0.74	−0.36 (0.01) *	0.70	−0.08 (0.16)	1.06	−0.15 (0.16)	0.86	−0.06 (0.17)	0.94

Note. 1 = Enthusiastic Supporters; 2 = Remote Work Skeptics; 3 = Core Pragmatists; 4 = Cautious Adopters. Gender is dummy coded with 1 = F. * $p < 0.05$. Significant contrasts are reported in bold.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate attitudes toward remote work by identifying distinct worker profiles that better capture potential reactions to this work modality. Moreover, it examined differences across these profiles, particularly with respect to socio-demographic variables (gender and age) and the quality of LMX. The emphasis on leadership was especially relevant given the pivotal role of managers in shaping the future of organizations, fostering sustainable working conditions, and safeguarding employee well-being.

The results showed the emergence of four remote workers profiles: “Enthusiastic Supporters”, “Cautious Adopters”, “Remote Work Skeptics”, and “Core Pragmatists”. With the exception of the class “Remote Work Skeptics”, the other groups (although there are differences that will be detailed later) seem to have a moderately to strongly positive view of the benefits of remote working. This evidence seems to at least partially explain some evidence related to employees’ desires for remote work (Virtanen, 2020) and results of several surveys that have been published lately on remote working, such as the Gallup survey of 2023 (Gallup, 2023), which reports that less than 10% of workers would like to work in a 100% presence-based office, preferring other types of working arrangements (e.g., hybrid working conditions).

Going into more detail about the results, this study shows that more than a third of the sample falls into the profile of the “Enthusiastic supporters”. These workers seem to express a strong belief in the transformative potential of remote work, particularly concerning work–life balance, time and cost savings, autonomy, and stress. Notably, the item that stands out most for this group (as well as the others) concerns the economic benefits associated with remote work. This specific result is in line with an Austrian study (Ebner et al., 2021) that showed distance to work as a strong predictor of motivation to work remotely. In fact, when working away from one’s home, remote working means less time spent in the car or on transport, less constant exposure to traffic stress and savings in terms of expenditure on petrol, possible toll booths, etc. Beyond the individual level, these advantages also translate into ecological benefits, such as lower carbon emissions from reduced mobility, thus positioning it as a lever for sustainable development in work practices (Eldér, 2020; Orzeł & Wolniak, 2022; Roberto et al., 2023). Considering that this was the most common profile, SME should leverage the potential of remote working for attractiveness and retention, while also positioning this practice as part of broader sustainability strategies, with ecological and social payoffs that go beyond the individual.

“Cautious Adopters”, the second most common group, view remote work positively but with more reservations. The scores are not unequivocally high as in the case of “Enthusiastic Supporters”, but they still express a moderate to very positive opinion towards various benefits of remote work. This profile seems to represent workers that, while open to remote working arrangements, are more sensitive to the potential deterioration of relationships and seem to require additional organizational support. Results from logistic regressions also indicate that workers in the “Cautious Adopters” profile are more likely to be older than “Enthusiastic supporters”. This result can perhaps be explained by a greater tendency of younger people to see remote working as something that, while not new, has only become particularly widespread in recent years and therefore represents a separation with an “old way” of working. Remote work could mark for this generation a watershed between how people (their parents and grandparents) used to work (in most cases in presence) associated with sacrifice of personal life time and sometimes with a loss of job (Fodor & Jaeckel, 2018) and how they can work now. Some studies showed that new generations (generation Z and millennials) desire more flexible working hours, pay particular attention to work–life balance in assessing the success of their careers (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Fodor & Jaeckel, 2018; Ng et al., 2010) and therefore are enthusiastic with remote work which they see as a means to achieve these goals. Having said this, it seems that for “Cautious Adopters” remote working is more of a perk, a positive concession, rather than a new way of working. They welcome the benefits, but remain rooted in more traditional models of work, with a measured caution that could stem from concerns about increased technology use, which imply adapting to new routines and modes of communication that could impair the in-presence connection that shaped their careers. As such, this group would benefit

from tailored support, specifically concerning the aspects of workplace connections, to reduce the risk of alienation especially for mid-career and senior staff.

The “Remote Work Skeptics”, comprising just over a quarter of participants, stand out as the group most resistant to remote work. Their skepticism centers on concerns about social relationships and job satisfaction. This group still sees some benefits (specifically, better work–life balance and cost and time savings), but it is possible that aspects like social isolation and difficulties to maintain cohesion and effective communication within the team, which has been confirmed as key negative consequences of remote working (e.g., [Toscano & Zappalà, 2020b](#); [Stratone et al., 2022](#); [Caputo et al., 2024](#)), play a rather significant role in shaping employees’ overall negative evaluation of this work arrangement. This profile clearly outlines that remote working is not a suitable arrangement for everyone. While this could signal an underlying resistance to change, it is also plausible that there is a genuine misalignment between the workers’ preference and needs and the characteristics of remote working; thus, organizations should offer the possibility to opt in or out remote working voluntarily, in order to avoid frustration in those that genuinely prefer to work in presence. On the other hand, some deeply skeptical workers may not see the benefits of remote working because in previous experiences they lacked support. Logistic regressions results indicated that lower perceptions of supportive leadership increased the likelihood of belonging to this class, rather than “Cautious Adopters.” This result is consistent with other studies that confirm how supportive and positive leadership is positively related to more effective remote working practices (e.g., [Dolce et al., 2024](#); [Spagnoli et al., 2020](#); [Sinclair et al., 2020](#)). As such, leadership behaviors that emphasize communication, inclusion, and seem to play an important role in reassuring workers on the fence that remote working will not erode their social connections and thus career opportunities.

Finally, the “Core Pragmatists”, the least represented group, occupy an intermediate position. Similar to the “Enthusiastic Supporters”, they strongly acknowledge that remote working is associated with positive outcomes in terms of work–life balance, time and money savings, greater autonomy and flexibility, and reduced stress. However, they are much more critical about the relational consequences of remote work, a stance that aligns them more closely with the “Remote Work Skeptics”. Rather than the strong resistance which seems more evident for the “Remote Work Skeptics”, their ambivalence suggests a conditional acceptance: remote work is deeply valued for its practical benefits, even more so than other groups, but it is not seen as a full alternative to traditional in-presence working; not only for its relational consequences, but also for the diminished quality of ICT use. For organizations, this group points to the need for hybrid models that actively safeguard both aspects, by providing better access to technical instrumentation and offering structured opportunities for collaboration, mentoring, and informal exchange. Overall, it seems that “Core Pragmatists” may be the link between the “Enthusiastic Supporters”, possibly preferring a full-remote arrangement, and the “Cautious Adopters”, with whom they may share a stronger preference for one or two days of remote working per week.

The literature has consistently highlighted that remote work can contribute to sustainability on multiple fronts ([Abdulrahim, 2024](#)): environmentally, by reducing commuting-related emissions; economically, by lowering costs for both employees and organizations; and, most importantly, socially and psychologically, by fostering work–life balance and well-being. The results of this study add to this body of knowledge by identifying distinct profiles of attitudes toward remote work. This profiling is important not only for understanding the heterogeneity of employees’ perceptions and expectations, but also for informing organizational strategies that ensure inclusiveness and responsiveness to diverse needs. The follow-up logistic regression helped to contextualize class membership by investigating the role of supportive leadership, age, and gender as antecedents. Generational

experience with work may influence openness to remote arrangements, with younger workers seemingly framing remote work as a normative expectation. On the other hand, we found no significant association between gender and likelihood of class membership. Considering most participants were male, this result could suggest a cultural shift, as in Italy remote working has historically been associated more with women, especially concerning its role as a mitigator of work-family conflict which is still seen as a more feminine problem (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020a). On the organizational side, perception of supportive leadership emerged as a discriminator between “Cautious Adopters” and “Remote Work Skeptics”, reinforcing the role of leadership in times of organizational change. Overall, the results indicate that while attitudes towards remote work seem mainly shaped by personal preferences, there are systematic links to generational orientations and organizational contexts, both aspects that organizations should take into account to transform remote work into a practice that is not only efficient but also socially sustainable and future-oriented.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Practical Implications

Despite the limitations of the study, which will be discussed in the following section, stemming from its specific context (a single medium-sized Italian company) and the methodology employed, it nevertheless offers some general insights and implications for organizational practice. From a more general point of view, questioning staff attitudes towards remote working, especially when using streamlined survey tools such as the one adopted here (Ingusci et al., 2023), can enable organizations to obtain a concise and immediate picture of what is happening within the organization, highlighting the most and least represented profiles. In general, this initially descriptive research approach is useful for understanding how people in organizations feel about remote working and, in turn, for informing organizational policies, allowing them to be tailored more effectively to the different profiles that emerge.

The second aspect relates to the role that leadership seems to play in reducing the likelihood of skepticism about this form of work. Although this evidence requires further confirmation, it highlights the value of situated organizational studies, and, more specifically, the emerging evidence on the link between supportive leadership and a lower propensity for skepticism about remote work.

In summary, therefore, training could be geared towards further enhancing the advantages of remote working, focusing on issues such as work–life balance, effective time management, improving concentration and attention skills, and, of course, promoting the development of supportive leadership.

Given the contribution of remote work to organizational sustainability and the importance of leadership in enabling this process, small and medium companies should invest in streamlined systems for monitoring attitudes towards remote working, as well as in selection and leadership training policies that promote the development of supportive leadership (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015; Contreras et al., 2020; Petrilli et al., 2024; Spagnoli et al., 2021). Considering that, in many cases, medium-sized and especially small organizations lack the internal resources to fully implement training and organizational development initiatives in this area, the role of national and international federations of professionals and managers becomes fundamental.

6.2. Limits

While the present study offers valuable insights into employee perceptions of remote working benefits, several limitations should be acknowledged. The data were collected from a single private IT company, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Al-

though different branches across the country were involved, the overarching organizational culture, structure, and digital readiness may differ significantly from those in other industries. Notably, all employees in this organization had access to remote working arrangements. Nonetheless, case-based investigations remain valuable for advancing theoretical understanding by capturing the nuanced interplay between organizational context and employee experiences (Eisenhardt, 1989; Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Future research could build on these findings by conducting comparative studies across different organizations and countries.

The sample was predominantly male, potentially introducing a demographic bias that may limit the applicability of the findings to more gender-balanced contexts. However, this gender imbalance is broadly consistent with national data on the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, where women account for only about 15.7% of ICT specialists in Italy (Istat, 2024a).

The cross-sectional nature of the study precludes any causal inferences. Longitudinal data would be necessary to examine how latent class membership evolves over time and whether supportive leadership facilitates transitions across classes. Future research could address this limit by employing longitudinal designs.

Although the latent class model exhibited high entropy and good overall fit, relying on the most likely class membership approach may result in underestimated standard errors of the parameters.

Another limitation concerns the use of single items from the perceived benefits scale as indicators in the latent class analysis. Although the items were drawn from an established instrument and each of them captured a distinct benefit, using single indicators prevents the assessment of reliability for these dimensions; the findings should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Finally, the study primarily examined the positive aspects of remote work, whereas potential risks were not integrated into the analytical model. Future research could address this gap by adopting a more balanced approach that includes both benefits and challenges.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/7AW2C> (accessed on 16 October 2025), and <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/admsci15110414/s1>, Table S1: Correlations, means and standard deviations of the study variables; Table S2: Estimated probabilities of class membership at focal values of LMX; Table S3: Estimated probabilities of class membership at focal values of age; Figure S1: Plot of estimated probabilities of class membership as a function of LMX; Figure S2: Plot of estimated probabilities of class membership as a function of age.

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