

## BACKGROUND &amp; PROBLEM

Flexible work has produced **mixed results** in the literature. Some studies show well-being benefits; others show harm. Existing theory does not explain why.

The shift to remote and hybrid work has redistributed control over work environments — moving it from organisations to employees' homes. This alters the structural conditions under which **basic human needs** are supported or frustrated.

The dominant discourse frames flexible work as a simple binary trade-off — good or bad. However, the mechanism through which flexible work impacts employee well-being is not well explained. As work moves to the home environment, its impact on basic human needs is inherently uneven across individuals, roles, and living conditions — producing heterogeneous well-being outcomes.

## THEORETICAL GROUNDING

We build on **Being as Having, Loving and Doing (HLD)** (Martela, 2024; 2025) — an extension of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) — which proposes three fundamental domains of human need:

**Having**  
Material & security needs

**Loving**  
Social connection & belonging

**Doing**  
Agentic engagement & competence

We apply the HLD framework to flexible work by mapping each need domain — Having, Loving, and Doing — to the structural conditions that remote and hybrid arrangements reshape, explaining how each is distinctively disrupted when work migrates to home environments.

Heterogeneous outcomes are explained by *which* HLD need domain flexible work supports or frustrates — varying systematically across individuals, roles, and contexts.

## THE FOUR PATHWAYS

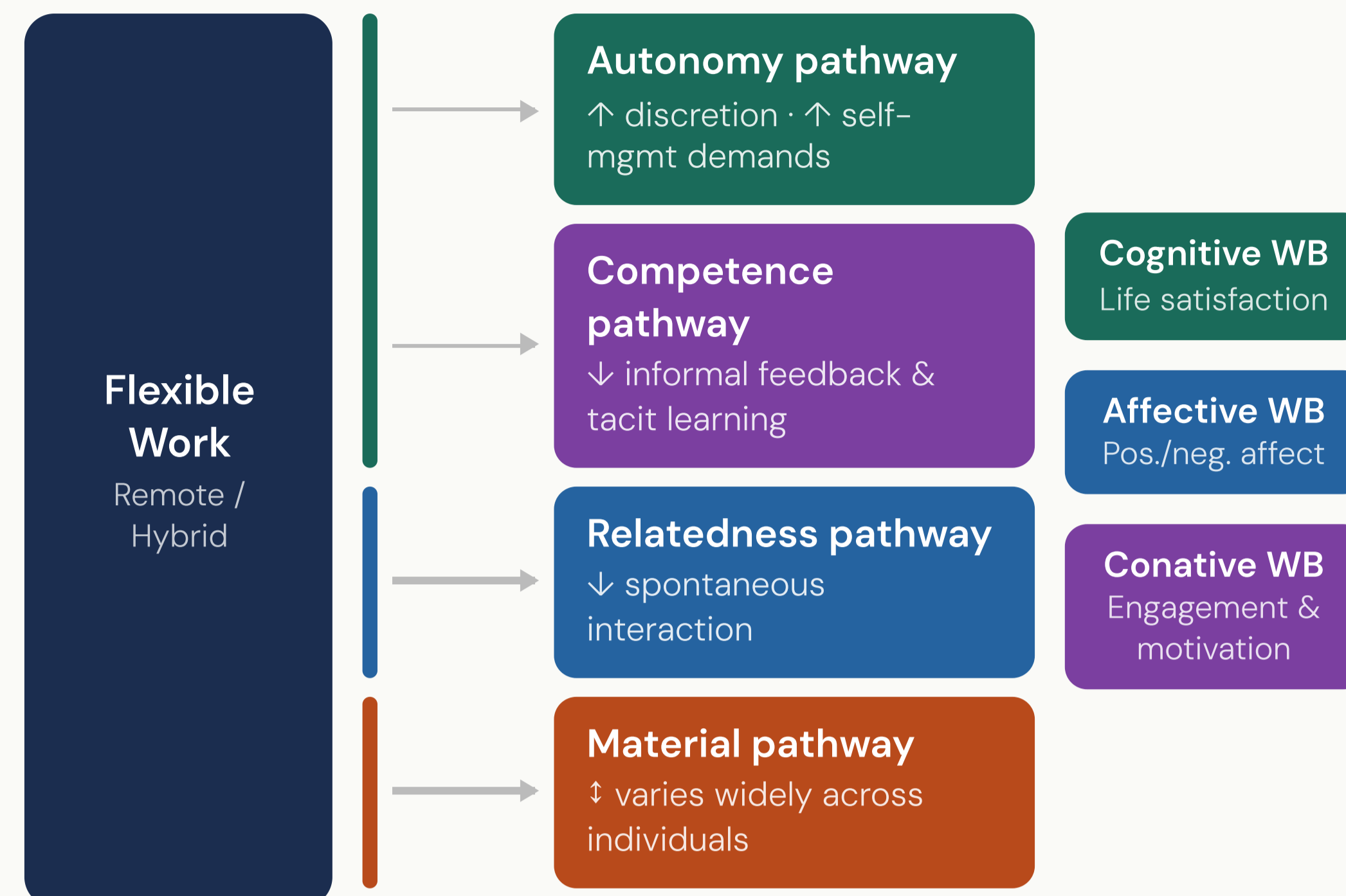
**A Autonomy (Doing)**  
Expanded discretion over when, where, and how work is performed — but heightened self-management demands and blurred work-life boundaries.

**C Competence (Doing)**  
Digital-first communication reduces informal feedback and tacit learning, impeding competence need satisfaction over time.

**R Relatedness (Loving)**  
Spontaneous interactions and shared social routines diminish, weakening the relational fabric that sustains connection at work.

**M Material Sufficiency (Having)**  
Home workspace quality, ergonomics, and digital infrastructure vary widely — creating unequal conditions under identical organisational policies.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



**Cross-domain spillover:** Material insufficiency (Having) amplifies frustration across Loving and Doing domains. The specific *configuration* of need satisfaction — not any single domain — determines well-being outcomes.

## PROPOSITIONS

- P1** Flexible work positively predicts autonomy need satisfaction, attenuated for employees with high self-regulation demands. (Doing)
- P2** Flexible work negatively predicts competence need satisfaction through reduced informal feedback and tacit learning. (Doing)
- P3** Flexible work negatively predicts relatedness need satisfaction through reduced spontaneous social interaction. (Loving)
- P4** Home environment material conditions moderate the link between flexible work intensity and overall need satisfaction. (Having)
- P5** Each need satisfaction pathway mediates the relationship between flexible work and cognitive, affective, and conative well-being outcomes.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

## C1 — RESPONSIBILITY-CONTROL ASYMMETRY

Flexible work creates a structural governance gap: organisations retain *responsibility* for employee well-being while losing *control* over the home conditions that shape it. This asymmetry — not simply work location — is the central challenge of distributed work. Thapliyal et al., under review

## C2 — HLD NEEDS AS MECHANISM FOR HETEROGENEOUS SWB

Basic human needs — Having, Loving, Doing — are the mediating mechanism that explains *why* flexible work produces divergent well-being outcomes. Different individuals experience different need profiles under the same policy, producing systematically different SWB trajectories.

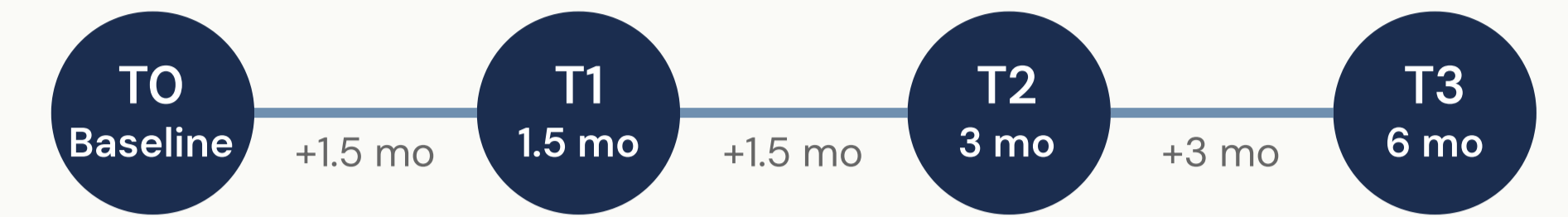
## C3 — CONFIGURATIONAL WELL-BEING

Well-being outcomes depend on the specific *configuration* of need satisfaction across Having, Loving, and Doing — not on any single domain in isolation. An intervention that improves one domain while leaving others depleted may leave overall well-being unchanged.

## PLANNED EMPIRICAL STUDY

**Design** Four-wave longitudinal panel, preregistered  
**Sample** N ≈ 800 employees, multinational organisation  
**Analysis** Longitudinal mediation

## DATA COLLECTION WAVES



## MEASURES

BPNSFS SPANE WAMI UWES-3 BAT-4  
Remote work intensity Material conditions (custom)  
Occupational insecurity

## HYPOTHESISED EFFECTS

Autonomy ↑ Enhanced  
Competence ↓ Weakened  
Relatedness ↓ Weakened  
Material ↑ Varies widely

## HLD × WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

**Having**  
Material sufficiency →

**Loving**  
Relatedness → affective well-being; belonging & positive affect

**Doing**  
Autonomy + Competence → conative well-being; engagement

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Organisations cannot delegate well-being by granting location flexibility alone — they must **actively govern need-supportive conditions** across all three HLD domains.
- **Material equity** (Having) — equipment, ergonomics, digital infrastructure — is a well-being relevant organisational issue.
- Single-domain interventions that ignore **cross-domain spillover** may not improve overall well-being — even when one need is addressed, unattended domains can offset the gains.

## THEORETICAL

Applies the HLD framework to distributed work — explaining heterogeneous SWB outcomes through differential human need satisfaction across Having, Loving, and Doing domains.

## METHODOLOGICAL

Longitudinal preregistered design moves beyond cross-sectional limitations — enabling causal inference on need-satisfaction dynamics and configurational well-being over time.

## PRACTICAL

"Governing What You Don't Control" — organisations retain responsibility for employee well-being while losing control of the conditions that shape it. This study provides the empirical test.

## KEYWORDS

Flexible Work Remote Work Having-Loving-Doing Self-Determination Theory Employee Well-Being Basic Human Needs Hybrid Work Configurational Well-Being

