The salience of remote leadership: Implications for follower self-control and work-life

balance

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Abstract

Purpose: Given the dramatic change in where and how people work post-COVID-19, the purpose of this study was to examine whether the extent to which followers work with their leaders remotely changes leaders' influence on followers' self-control and work-life balance.

Approach: Drawing on social information processing theory, we hypothesized that remote work would strengthen the relationship between leadership behavior (transformational leadership and leader incivility), follower self-control, and subsequent work-life balance (moderated mediation).

Findings: Using a three-wave survey of followers (*N*=338), we found support for our hypotheses: Working remotely intensified the mediated relationships between leadership behavior, self-control and work-life balance. This study contributes to the literature by examining remote work as an important boundary condition of the leadership-work-life balance relationship and demonstrates the importance of leader behaviors on followers' self-control and subsequent work-life balance.

Originality: Our study is the first to examine the boundary condition of remote work in relation to leadership behavior, follower self-control and work-life balance.

Keywords: transformational leadership, leader incivility, remote work, work-life balance, self-control, social information processing theory

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The benefits of healthy work-life balance (WLB), which range from increased job satisfaction to job performance, are well known and serve both employees and organizations (Gerards *et al*., 2020). WLB is even more important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as recent studies have shown that workers now cite WLB was a more attractive feature of potential jobs than salary (Aviva, 2022). Given the importance of WLB, research has sought to understand its antecedents. A main finding from this research is that leadership behaviors play a significant role in helping followers' WLB (e.g., Leslie *et al*., 2019). Leaders provide information that facilitates followers' self-control, thus allowing for WLB to be maintained (Grawitch *et al*., 2010). However, few studies have examined the boundary conditions that might support or negate the impact of leadership on followers' self-control and subsequent WLB. It is important to understand boundary conditions in this context as situational factors within an organization's control may make leadership behaviors increasingly relevant for followers' WLB.

One boundary condition that is rapidly growing in importance from both a research and practical perspective is whether leaders are interacting with followers remotely or in-person (Zhang *et al*., 2021). Due to health measures used to stop the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., social distancing, lockdowns), many workplaces adapted by transitioning to remote work (Horton and Jacobs, 2022). There is now an increased demand for remote work among employees, with 97% of survey respondents stating that they are interested in engaging in some form of remote work (Buffer, 2022). Furthermore, one of the primary concerns expressed by leaders during this shift to remote work is that they will have less influence on remote workers than in-person workers in terms of maintaining factors related to WLB, such as developing connections and employee

engagement (Sull *et al.*, 2020). As influential leaders like Elon Musk demand a return to in-person work to maintain their influence on followers (Chapman, 2022), we question whether leaders have less impact on followers' self-control resources and subsequent work-life balance when working remotely by taking a situational leadership lens and examining remote work as a boundary condition.

To address this question, we use social information processing (SIP) theory to better understand the role of remote work as a key boundary condition that changes the relationship between leadership behaviors and their influence on follower self-control and WLB. SIP theory suggests that any potential influence of a leaders' behavior relies on followers accurately understanding and processing their leaders' behavior (Eisenbeiss and van Knippenberg, 2015). As we hypothesize throughout the paper, working remotely can significantly impact followers' SIP to the extent that leader behaviors become more salient and in turn have stronger relationships with follower self-control and subsequent WLB.

The leadership behaviors of interest in this study are transformational leadership (TFL) and leader incivility. TFL is one of the most frequently studied theories in the leadership literature and is often studied in juxtaposition to negative leader behaviors (e.g., Byrne *et al.*, 2014). We chose to compare TFL behaviors with leader incivility given the frequency of incivility in the workplace (Porath and Pearson, 2013) and because it is more likely to occur in remote work than overtly destructive behaviors such as abusive supervision (Lim and Teo, 2009).

In summary, this paper will contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we contribute to WLB research by examining remote work as a key boundary condition that strengthens leaders' influence on follower self-control and WLB. Second, we contribute to SIP

perspectives on leadership by highlighting the salience of leader behaviors in a remote context. Third, we contribute to self-regulation literature by demonstrating that leaders may have an even stronger impact on followers' self-control in a remote context than in-person, and that leaders' behaviors are central to followers' self-control resources and their subsequent ability to manage their work-life demands. Finally, we address a question of practical importance posed by leaders since the COVID-19 pandemic, namely whether they are as influential in a remote context as in-person as COVID-19 forever changed the landscape of work.

The Relationship between Leadership Behavior, Self-Control and WLB

We define WLB in the context of the current study as an individual's ability to "simultaneously balance the temporal, emotional, and behavioral demands of both paid work and family responsibilities" (Uddin *et al*., 2013, p. 101). While many predictors of WLB have been explored in the literature, theory suggests WLB relies on individuals' personal resource allocation (Grawitch *et al*., 2010). This means that individuals need to 1) have valued resources in their work and home lives, and 2) be able to effectively manage where and how they expend those resources to maintain balance.

This perspective highlights that individual self-control is central to one's ability to effectively allocate resources and sustain WLB (Grawitch *et al*., 2010). Self-control is defined as the capacity to control one's thoughts, actions, and emotions (Baumeister, 2002) and allows individuals to pursue long term goals and conform to societal norms and values. To maintain WLB, self-control is needed because maintaining psychological boundaries between work and home demands requires mental effort or energy. For example, when physical boundaries between work and home cannot be maintained, Michel *et al*. (2014) suggest that self-control is required to mentally switch between one's focus on work or home. Clinton *et al*. (2020) also found that

work-life outcomes are dependent on how much self-control one exerts during the work-day, with higher exertion of self-control associated with higher work-to-family conflict. Taken together, self-control is a key explanatory factor that links organizational resources to individual WLB.

As previously suggested, central organizational resources for followers' self-control and subsequent WLB are leaders (e.g., Leslie *et al*., 2019). SIP theory explains the critical role of leaders in affecting follower WLB; this theory proposes that employees adapt to the workplace by relying heavily on social interactions to gain information and related resources and are most closely attuned to powerful people to guide their own behavior (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Within workplaces, leaders tend to be the most influential and are central to key resources that are important for employees (Yukl, 1989). In turn, leaders become a salient source of information that drive important outcomes such as self-control and WLB.

In the current study we examine positive TFL behaviors and the negative behavior of leader incivility. Considering first the positive behaviors of TFL, Bass (1985) posed four transformational dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence is characterized by acting as a consistent role model for followers. Inspirational motivation entails developing and communicating a motivational vision for followers to aspire to, and intellectual stimulation encourages followers to question current practices and to think outside the box in relation to achieving the vision. The individual consideration component of TFL entails recognizing and supporting employees' unique needs for development (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Together, these four dimensions of TFL motivate followers to aspire to and achieve positive outcomes such as individual and team performance.

From a SIP perspective, the positive information conveyed by TFL behaviors are likely to positively predict followers' self-control. Positive interactions at work, such as those with a transformational leader, can help build individual self-control resources (Zyphur *et al*., 2007). In addition, charismatic leadership, which is closely related to the visionary component of TFL, has been indirectly linked to self-control by reducing followers' workplace aggression (Hepworth and Towler, 2004). Furthermore, transformational parenting (a measure developed from TFL theory) is related to adolescent self-control (Morton *et al*., 2011). Overall, this body of research suggests that transformational leaders provide key signals that help replenish followers' self-control capacity such as clear goals, positive emotional displays, and recognition.

In turn, the self-control resources instilled by TFL behaviors should predict healthy WLB for followers. For example, Kuonath *et al*. (2017) found that daily TFL behavior enhances followers' emotional regulation the next day, which is linked closely with maintaining a healthy WLB (Michel *et al*., 2014). TFL has also been found to bolster related follower resources, including job, personal and social resources, which are known to strengthen self-control capacity and subsequent WLB (Hammond *et al*., 2015). Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a: The positive relationship between TFL and follower WLB will be

mediated by follower self-control

Conversely, leader incivility encompasses behavior that undermines follower self-control resources through negative or ambiguous information. As described by Andersson and Pearson (1999), "[w]orkplace incivility is a low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (p. 457). Incivility is often considered a covert form of mistreatment that can be difficult to pinpoint, including behaviors such as general rudeness, excluding and ignoring followers. A common way that leaders exhibit

remote workplace incivility is through rude or condescending emails, which has been found to have negative consequences on followers' emotional states and organizational commitment (Giumetti *et al.*, 2013; Lim and Teo, 2009). While TFL sends clear positive signals to employees about their work and value within the organization, incivility from leaders is detrimental in that it violates workplace norms and conveys a lack of respect and support.

The negative information portrayed through leader incivility has been shown to deplete followers' self-control leading to negative follower outcomes. Thompson *et al.* (2018) found that leader incivility can overwhelm followers resulting in social loafing as a negative affective response. Similarly, Meier and Gross (2015) found an association between leader incivility and followers' exhaustion wherein high levels of exhaustion led to retaliatory incivility from followers. Meier and Gross (2015) suggested negative follower behavior is instigated when exhaustion dampens followers' self-control. Furthermore, when leaders exhibit incivility, it has been shown to increase followers' negative emotional affect and deplete their energy resources, which can result in poor job performance (Giumetti *et al.*, 2013).

In addition, there is evidence that leaders who exhibit incivility also have a negative impact on their followers' work and personal lives (Lim and Lee, 2011). For example, leader incivility has been linked to followers' reduced psychological safety (Liu *et al.*, 2020). Giumetti *et al.* (2013) examined incivility in email exchanges and found that incivility from supervisors was related to increased negative affect and decreased energy (i.e., followers' self-control). The legitimate power that leaders hold over followers may make them more vulnerable to uncivil treatment and contribute to their psychological distress and subsequent self-control depletion (Abubakar, 2018). Lim and Lee (2011) found that leaders were more likely to display incivility

than other coworkers, and that leader incivility increased followers' work-to-family conflict. Taken together, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 1b: The negative relationship between leader incivility and follower WLB will*
>
> *be mediated by follower self-control.*

The Moderating Role of Remote Work

While the relationship between leadership behavior and WLB as mediated by self-control is clear, it is important to question whether these relationships will hold for all followers. As discussed earlier, we suggest that a crucial boundary condition to consider is the extent to which followers are working remotely with their leader. One of the appeals of remote work is that it has the potential to improve one's WLB (Tunk and Arun Kumar, 2022). Remote work appears to make it easier to manage family-life compared to in-person work, with workers stating that remote work improves how easily they can be contacted by their children (Rafnsdottir and Júlíusdóttir, 2018). Remote work can also grant workers greater temporal flexibility and mobility by removing the stress of commuting (Rafnsdottir and Júlíusdóttir, 2018; Ruppel *et al.*, 2013). However, the increased flexibility offered by remote work may not always improve WLB. Currie and Eveline (2011) reported the flexible practices of remote work can lead to work extensification and intensification. With workers able to work anywhere at anytime, many end up working longer hours, or face role overload by taking on too many duties (Dandalt, 2021; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė *et al.*, 2021; Palumbo, 2020). Overall, there are mixed findings regarding the role of remote work in improving WLB, making it likely that there are complex situational interactions to be considered (i.e., how leaders behave remotely vs. in-person).

In addition to explaining the relationship between leadership behaviors, self-control and WLB, SIP theory also suggests that situational factors can change how followers process social

information from leaders at work, such as social norms and individual differences (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Considering specifically the nature of SIP in a remote context, it could be the case that remote work will similarly intensify the impacts of leader behavior on followers' self-control and WLB. The restricted social environment may enhance the importance of communication from leaders for remote workers, since leaders may be one of the people they are most frequently in contact with and the most influential (Sull *et al*., 2020). Madlock (2012) found that remote workers could discern when leaders communicated using a fake personality and preferred authentic leadership interactions, demonstrating that workers are perceptive to online social cues from their leaders. Applying these findings to SIP theory, it is likely that followers working from home would pay more attention to the limited communication from their leader and coworkers compared to those working in-person and/or working remotely less frequently.

In addition, SIP theory counters the idea that online communication is impersonable and void of emotion, instead proposing that individuals pay greater attention to the limited cues that are available (e.g., message content, timing of responses; Walther and Parks, 2002). Walther (1992) further developed SIP theory to address how computer mediated communication reduces social and contextual cues. Supporting the effectiveness of computer mediated communication, Purvanova and Bono (2009) found that TFL was positively associated with team performance and had a stronger effect for remote teams (i.e., communicating through email or chat) than in-person teams.

Not only are followers likely paying more attention to their leaders in a remote context, but they also experience fewer work-related distractions which could promote deeper SIP of leader behaviors. For example, Methot *et al*. (2021) found that in-person small talk distracts

workers, interrupting their cognitive engagement with their work. Relating to SIP in particular, remote workers may not have the same amount of ongoing social distraction from other sources (e.g., peers, customers) as in-person workers. This makes the leader an even more central source of information about their role and how to function effectively than working in-person (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). In turn, this lack of external distractions would make the few cues that they receive more salient for forming perceptions about their leaders.

Considering leader incivility, SIP theory suggests that the information conveyed by these leader behaviors will likely have intensified effects on self-control and WLB when working remotely more frequently. For example, in a meeting where a leader acts uncivil toward a follower, an in-person context may allow a follower to find social support through colleagues, or to gain more cues from the leader that might mitigate the uncivil behavior (e.g., reading body language, debriefing post-meeting; Hinde, 2020; Sander and Bauman, 2020). In a remote context, however, there are very few cues and distractions to dilute the negative information that is being conveyed by the leader, thus strengthening the negative impacts on self-control.

Conversely, it is likely that remote work will similarly intensify the positive messages conveyed to followers through TFL. Considering a similar example of an online meeting with a transformational leader, it is likely that this context could yield even stronger positive effects given that followers are likely paying close attention to the content of what their leader is saying (e.g., communicating the importance of the team's vision) rather than on distracting factors such as the leaders' appearance or gender. Kelley and Kelloway (2012) found that TFL may be more effective in a remote context than in-person. Aside from enhancing team performance (Purvanova and Bono, 2009), TFL in a remote context has been found to increase job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and manager trust (Kelly and Kelloway, 2012). In line

with the tenets of SIP theory, it is plausible that remote communication enhances the importance of the emotional cues and messages received from transformational leaders, which consequently may have a beneficial impact on their followers' self-control resources. Taken together, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 2a: The indirect relationship between TFL on WLB through self-control will be moderated by remote work such that higher frequency of remote work will intensify the mediated relationship.*

> *Hypothesis 2b: The indirect relationship between leader incivility on WLB through self-control will be moderated by remote work such that higher frequency of remote work will intensify the mediated relationship.*

Methods

Sample and Data Collection

We recruited 1,000 individuals from Prolific to participate in a three wave time-lagged study (4 weeks apart). Participants were compensated 3.59 Great Britain Pounds for each survey they completed. Participants were required to (a) live in Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, or the United States, (b) be fluent in English, and (c) work fulltime (i.e., 35 or more hours per week). Participants initially completed a survey assessing their eligibility, demographics, and questions about their workplace/work behavior. 998 participants completed Time 2 and 848 participants completed all three time points. Because this study is part of a larger project, we performed a random split of the data (Picard and Berk, 1990). Data reported below are a subsample of the larger dataset reported above.

The dataset for this paper included 457 employees. After removing those who did not pass attention check questions, the final sample consisted of 370 participants. The average age of

participants was 38.2, *SD*= 9.8. Forty-three percent of participants identified as men, whereas 57% identified as women.

Measures

      TFL Behavior (T1) was measured using the 22-item scale (α = .91) developed by Podsakoff *et al*. (1990). An example item is "My leader communicated a desirable goal or vision to a work group member today." Participants were asked to indicate agreement as to whether their leaders engage in these behaviors at work, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.

      Incivility (T1) was measured using the 7-item (α = .92) Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina *et al*., 2001). An example item is "In the past month did your leader make demeaning or derogatory remarks about you?" Participants were asked to indicate agreement as to whether their leaders engage in these behaviors at work, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= never to 5= most of the time.

      Remote Work (T1). Participants were asked how often they work from home (1=Never, 5=Always).

      Self-Control (T2). We used Christian and Ellis' (2011) 5-item scale (α = .95) to measure participants' perceived self-control. Participants were asked their agreement to statements like "my mental energy was running low" on a 5-point scale (1= very slightly or not at all; 5= extremely).

      WLB (T3) was measured using Uddin *et al*.'s (2013) 7-item scale (α = .85). Participants indicated their agreement using a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). A sample item includes "my personal or family life has kept me distracted from doing a job as good as I could do."

Data Analysis and Results

See Table I for means, standard deviations, alphas, and correlations. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using OLS regression through Hayes' (2018) PROCESS 4.0. Specifically, Hypothesis 1 was tested using Model 4 (mediation and direct effects) and Hypothesis 2 was tested with Model 7 (moderated mediation; See Figure 1 for visual representation). Unstandardized coefficients are reported throughout. Statistical significance of the indirect effects was evaluated using bias-corrected 95% confidence interval, with analysis based upon 5,000 bootstraps resample. Following Becker et al.'s (2016) recommendation we did not include covariates in our analyses.

Insert Table I about here

Hypothesis 1a was supported as a positive relationship between TFL behaviors and follower WLB, which was mediated by follower self-control (*b*= .10, *SE*=.03, CI [.05; .15]). Hypothesis 1b was also supported as a negative relationship between leader incivility and follower WLB via follower self-control (*b*=-.10, *SE*= .02, CI [-.15; -.05]). See Tables II and III.

Insert Tables II and III about here

Hypothesis 2a suggesting TFL behavior will predict WLB via self-control and be moderated by the presence of remote work was also supported (*b*=.15 *SE*= .06, *p*<.05). The index of moderated mediation was significant [index = .04, SE = .02, CI [.01, .07]). This relationship was stronger for participants who worked remotely more frequently (*b*=.18; *SE*= .04,

CI [.10, .27]) than those with average remote work frequency (b=.10; SE= .03, CI [.06, .15]).

Finally, Hypothesis 2b was supported as the interaction between remote work and leader

incivility was significant (b=-.12, SE= .06, $p < .05$). The mediated relationship between leader

incivility and work life balance via self-control was stronger for participants with high frequency

of remote work (b= -.16, SE= .04, CI [-.24, -.08]) than those with average frequency (b= -.10,

SE= .02, CI [-.15, -.06]). The index of moderated mediation was significant [index = -.03, SE =

.01, CI [-.06, -.0004]). See Figures 2 and 3 for a visual representation of results.

Insert Tables IV, V, VI and VII about here

Discussion

We found that leadership behaviors (TFL and leader incivility) predicted employees'

WLB through employee self-control. We also found that remote work moderated this mediated

relationship; specifically, frequency of remote work strengthened the relationship between

leadership behavior, self-control, and WLB.

For followers with transformational leaders this was a positive finding, as highly remote

followers gained even more self-control resources from their leaders than followers who worked

remotely less frequently and thus, were subsequently better able to balance their work and non-

work roles. However, for followers with uncivil leaders, working remotely intensified the loss of

self-control resources and led to lower WLB than those who worked remotely less frequently.

Our study suggests that for better or worse, leader who work remotely frequently have a strong

influence on their follower's self-control and WLB.

Theoretical implications

This study brings forward several important theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to WLB theory by examining remote work as a key boundary condition of the leadership to WLB relationship. In the wake of COVID-19 and the rapid move toward remote work, there has been extensive discussion regarding WLB for remote workers (e.g., Dandalt, 2021; Horton and Jacobs, 2022). While studies have shown that WLB became difficult in the height of the pandemic (Horton and Jacobs, 2022; Palumbo, 2020), studies have also shown that for some working remotely led to greater flexibility and better WLB (Dandalt, 2021). Our study complements this research by showing that the benefits of remote work may hinge on leader behaviors. Specifically, we found that remote work strengthens leaders' effects on followers' WLB. This raises questions about whether remote work is as central to WLB issues as theory and practice would suggest. Our findings suggest that having a healthy WLB may not only depend on where work is being completed, but also on the type of leader (and their ability to build one's self-control resources).

Our study also contributes to SIP perspectives of leadership, self-control, and follower WLB. We have shown that working remotely can affect how deeply followers process their leaders' behaviors. With fewer contextual cues and distractions, followers in a remote context pay closer attention to the information conveyed by their leaders' behaviors, which has implications for their self-control resources and subsequent ability to allocate their resources effectively (i.e., balancing their work and life roles). When working remotely, followers can fully focus on positive leadership behaviors (i.e., TFL) such as positive messages from their leader. As a result, the positive influence of remote transformational leaders is enhanced compared to in-person. In contrast, remote followers who experience incivility from their leader also pay more attention than in-person followers leading to poor WLB. The remote context leads to less

ambiguity and deeper information processing of leader behavior, which can help explain why remote work can have divergent impacts on employees' WLB.

Furthermore, our study contributes self-control literature by demonstrating the explanatory role of followers' self-control resources in the relationship between leadership, remote work and WLB. While leaders have been found to be central in influencing followers' WLB, very few studies have examined the mechanisms of this relationship. Past research has shown that WLB is often the outcome of effective resource allocation between work and non-work roles, which takes a significant amount of self-regulation and cognitive effort (Grawitch *et al.*, 2010). Our study integrates these two perspectives by considering the role of leader behaviors in building or diminishing self-control capacity to the extent that it affects followers' effective allocation of resources (i.e., WLB). Thus, follower self-regulation as a mediator helps to explain the impact of leaders on WLB while also recognizing the role of followers' own self-regulatory capacity in mentally switching between work and non-work priorities.

Lastly our study contributes to understanding the positive reach of TFL. While the benefits of having a transformational leader for follower outcomes is well-known (e.g., increased well-being; Arnold, 2017), few studies have examined TFL's relationship to follower self-control, as an important mechanism explaining the relationship to positive follower outcomes. We know leaders can reduce self-control resources through negative leadership behaviors (i.e., abusive supervision; Kashif *et al.*, 2020 and incivility; Meier and Gross, 2015), but it is important to demonstrate that leader can also enhance their followers' self-control resources through TFL behaviors.

The findings of our study raise several interesting directions for future research. Future studies may want to investigate a broader range of outcomes of leadership in the context of in-

person versus remote settings, such as burnout. Past research has shown that leaders have a strong influence on well-being (Diebig *et al*., 2017), and there is some research suggesting remote work reduces burnout (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė *et al*., 2021). However, it is important to examine these effects within the context of remote work since this is likely to continue to be more common post-pandemic (Sull *et al*., 2020).

Practical implications

In addition to implications for theory, this study also brings forward implications for practitioners to consider. The landscape of work has changed significantly since the rapid shift to remote work in many industries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the push to 'return to normal' for organizational leaders to retain their influence on employees, our study shows that the key to maintain WLB may lie more directly on what leaders are doing rather than where they are doing it. Our study demonstrates that TFL has a positive relationship to followers' self-control and subsequent WLB, so a first step for organizations concerned about followers' WLB should be to increase the frequency with which their leaders are engaging TFL behaviors. Research shows that TFL training can be effective in a variety of contexts, so training leaders to be more transformational is one way to improve employees' WLB (Lacerenza *et al*., 2017). In addition, other methods of improving leadership might also be considered such as coaching and mentorship (Scandura and Williams, 2004).

Conversely, we also found that leader incivility can be negatively affecting followers' self-control and WLB, which is heightened in a remote work environment. Thus, in addition to training leaders to be more transformational, organizations should be working to minimize incivility in the workplace, particularly on behalf of leaders. In this regard, organizations could consider efforts to complement TFL training, such as implementing workplace standards around

civil behavior, training on respectful communication in the workplace, and specifically respectful online communication. In addition, research shows that incivility and other forms of mistreatment are often a symptom of deeper-rooted organizational issues such as high workload (e.g., Francis *et al.*, 2015); leaders or other employees may 'lash out' when experiencing these stressors, which can lead to incivility spirals and, ultimately, toxic workplaces (Pearson *et al.*, 2005). Thus, organizations should also consider whether there are situational factors that can be addressed (e.g., decreasing workload, stress management) that can provide a more psychologically healthy workplace overall.

Finally, we also examined the moderating role of remote work in this study which brings forward questions about whether and how WLB is maintained in a remote context. We show that organizations need to carefully consider remote work in relation to the needs of their employees and their leaders; in contexts where leaders are performing well, remote work will likely lead to increases in an already-healthy WLB, whereas in contexts where incivility is frequent, there may be a need to deal more directly with leader behaviors and consider the potential negative implications of employees working remotely in a toxic situation. Overall, we show in our study that there is a complex interaction between remote work and leadership that needs to be considered in relation to WLB.

Study Limitations

Our study had many strengths such as a large sample size and a longitudinal design (3 time points, four weeks apart), as well as limitations. While there are many advantages to using a panel service like Prolific.co, such as gaining access to a large sample of working individuals across time in a broad range of industries, there are critiques around the attentiveness and representativeness of such samples (Porter *et al.*, 2019). However, research shows that online

panels tend to be similar in representativeness (Walter *et al*., 2019) and that data quality meets or exceeds those from traditional sources (Behrend *et al*., 2011). In addition, we followed best practices outlined by Porter and colleagues (2019) including temporally separating our independent and dependent variables, use of built-in qualification features, and use of attention check questions. Overall, we found the benefits of accessing a large number of participants outweighed potential limitations of this recruitment strategy.

This study also contains some methodological limitations. All measures were self-reported, which could contribute to common method variance (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). However, we followed recommendations from Podsakoff *et al*. (2012) to address potential common method bias. We measured the study variables at different time points (i.e., the independent variable at Time 1, the mediator at Time 2, and the dependent variable at Time 3). Furthermore, we randomized question order, ensured anonymity to participants, and used well-validated scales (Podsakoff *et al*., 2012). As well, the presence of significant moderating outcomes also lessens this concern (Lyubykh *et al*., 2022).

Conclusion

It is important for organizations to strive to help employees maintain a healthy WLB. Our research provides insight into how leader behaviors (TFL and leader incivility) predict self-control and WLB, in addition to the importance of considering remote work as a boundary condition of these relationships. Given the desire to "return to work as normal" post-pandemic, our study suggests that organizations need to consider not just the physical working arrangement, but how the leaders within their organizations may be impacting their followers' ability to self-regulate and subsequently maintain WLB. This research suggests that leaders are even more

impactful in a remote setting than in-person, and that it is important to ensure that leaders are

well trained on positive leadership behaviors to maintain followers' WLB.

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Table I – Correlations

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Measures	*M*	*SD*	α	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational Leadership Behaviors (T1)	3.59	.73	.94				
2. Leader Incivility (T1)	1.57	.78	.92	-.64**			
3. Self-Control (T2)	3.31	1.18	.95	.23**	-.26**		
4. Work-Life Balance (T3)	3.60	.81	.85	.28**	-.32**	.43**	
5. Remote Work (T1)	2.97	1.44	-	.16**	-.13*	.09	.20**

Note: *N*=338

**correlation is significant at .01 (2-tailed);

*correlation is significant at .05 (2-tailed)

Table II – Direct and indirect effects model coefficients for effects of transformational leadership on self-control and work-life balance.

	Consequent									
	Self-Control, T2 (M)					Work-Life Balance, T3 (Y)				
Antecedent	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
TFLT1 (X)	.38	.09	<.001	.21	.54	.23	.05	<.001	.12	.33
Self-Control T2 (M)	-	-	-	-	-	.26	.03	<.001	.19	.33
Indirect effect of X on Y	-	-	-	-	-	.10	.03	-	.05	.15
	$R^2 = .05$					$R^2 = .22$				
	$F_{(1, 336)} = 19.49, p < .001$					$F_{(2, 335)} = 48.46, p < .001$				

Note: X = independent variable (Transformational Leadership Behaviors T1); Y = outcome (Work-Life Balance T3); M = mediator (Self-control T2); LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

Table III – Direct and indirect effects model coefficients for effects of incivility on self-control and work-life balance.

	Consequent									
	Self-Control, T2 (M)					Work-Life Balance, T3 (Y)				
Antecedent	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Incivility T1 (X)	-.39	.08	<.001	-.54	-.24	-.25	.05	<.001	-.35	-.15
Self-Control T2 (M)	-	-	-	-	-	.25	.03	<.001	.18	.31
Indirect effect of X on Y	-	-	-	-	-	-.10	.02	-	-.15	-.05
	$R^2 = .07$					$R^2 = .24$				
	$F_{(1, 336)} = 24.82, p < .001$					$F_{(2, 335)} = 53.07, p < .001$				

Note: X = independent variable (Leader incivility T1); Y = outcome (Work-Life Balance T3); M = mediator (Self-control T2); LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

Table IV – Regression results of transformational leadership and work-life balance (moderated mediation)

	Self-Control, T2 (M)					Work-Life Balance, T3 (Y)				
Antecedent	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
TFL T1 (X)	-.07	.19	.73	-.44	.31	.23	.05	<.001	.12	.33
Remote Work T1 (W)	-.51	.22	.02	-.95	-.07	-	-	-	-	-
TFL x Remote Work	.15	.06	.01	.03	.27	-	-	-	-	-
Self-Control T2 (M)	-	-	-	-	-	.259	.03	<.001	.19	.33

Consequent (header spanning both outcome blocks)

$R^2 = .07$ $R^2 = .22$

$F(3, 334) = 8.94, p = .000$ $F(2, 335) = 48.46, p = .000$

Note: X = independent variable (Transformational Leadership Behaviors T1); Y = outcome (Work-Life Balance T3); M = mediator (Self-control T2); LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

Table V – Regression results of incivility and work-life balance (moderated mediation)

	Consequent									
	Self-Control, T2 (M)					Work-Life Balance, T3 (Y)				
Antecedent	Coeff	*SE*	*P*	LLCI	ULCI	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Incivility T1 (X)	-.05	.19	.81	-.41	.32	-.25	.05	<.001	-.35	-.15
Remote Work T1 (W)	.22	.10	.03	.02	.42	-	-	-	-	-
Incivility x Remote Work	-.12	.06	<.05	-.23	-.0004	-	-	-	-	-
Self-Control T2 (M)	-	-	-	-	-	.25	.03	<.001	.18	.31
	$R^2 = .08$					$R^2 = .24$				
	$F_{(3, 334)} = 9.97, p < .001$					$F_{(2, 335)} = 53.07, p < .001$				

Note: X = independent variable (Incivility T1); Y = outcome (Work-Life Balance T3); M = mediator (Self-control T2); LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

Table VI – Conditional indirect effects of transformational leadership behaviors on work-life balance (moderated mediation)

	Consequent: Work-Life Balance			
	Mediator: Self-control			
	Indirect effect	*SE*	LLCI	UCLI
Low Remote Work	.02	.04	-.05	.10
Average Remote Work	.10	.03	.06	.15
High Remote Work	.18	.04	.10	.27

Note: LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

Table VII – Conditional indirect effects of leader incivility on work-life balance (moderated mediation)

	Consequent: Work-Life Balance			
	Mediator: Self-control			
	Indirect effect	*SE*	LLCI	UCLI
Low Remote Work	-.04	.04	-.12	.22
Average Remote Work	-.10	.02	-.15	-.06
High Remote Work	-.16	.04	-.24	.08

Note: LLCI = lower level of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

Figure 1

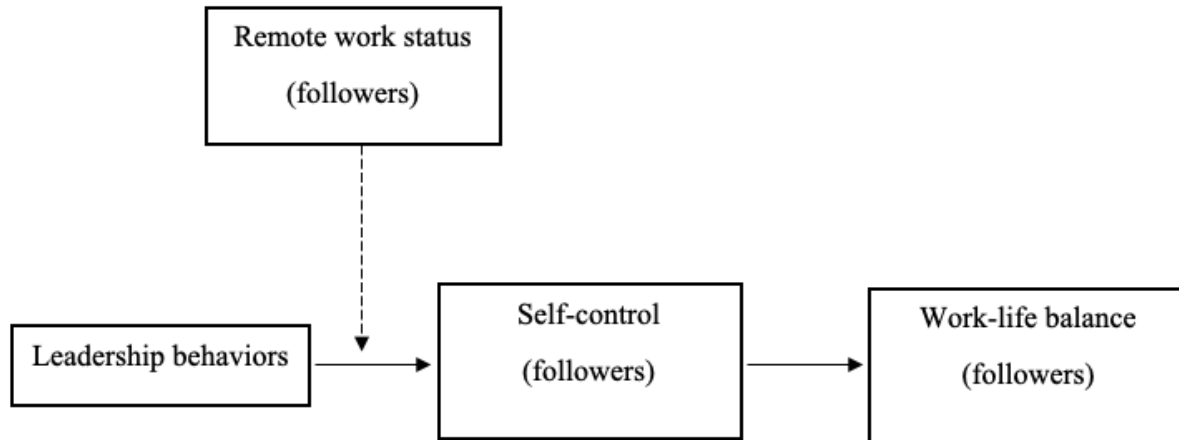Visual representation of hypotheses (moderated mediation)

Figure 2

Plot of the interaction between transformational leadership (TFL) and remote work in predicting
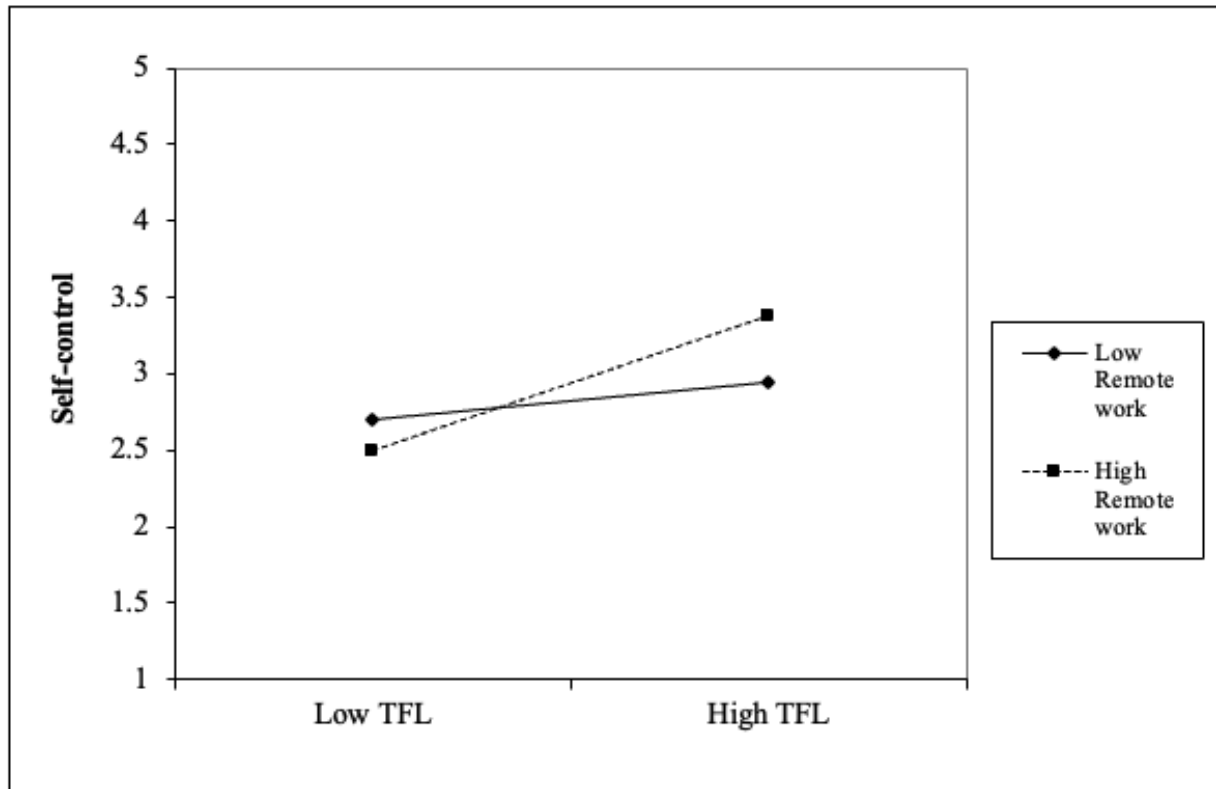
weekly self-control

Figure 3

Plot of the interaction between leader incivility and remote work in predicting weekly self-

control