

# **Flexible working arrangements, ostracism and inequality: The role of LMX and servant leadership**

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## **Abstract**

The unanticipated disruption caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic led to the extensive use of flexible working arrangements. In such a boundaryless work environment however, there are significant concerns especially around inclusivity and discrimination in hybrid and remote work settings. Given the increasing concerns, we investigated whether the extent of working in substantially flexible working arrangements relates to employees' perceived ostracism and inequality, distinguishing between working from home, in a hybrid mode or from the office. In addition, we theorized that in flexible working arrangements, high-quality leader relationships, such as LMX and servant leadership are likely to reduce perceptions of ostracism and inequality. Based on a survey of 61 professionals, who worked to varied degrees in flexible working arrangements, we found that employees who worked extensively in a hybrid mode were less likely to report experiences of ostracism and inequality in comparison to employees who worked mainly from home or in an office.

Furthermore, a moderation analysis showed that effects of LMX and servant leadership on perceptions of ostracism and inequality were much stronger for individuals who work in hybrid working arrangements than those who work at the office or from home. This research significantly improves our understanding of how different degrees of flexible working arrangements affect employees and by demonstrating the role of high-quality leader relationships in reducing perceptions of ostracism and inequality at different degrees of work flexibility.

**Keywords:** ostracism, inclusion, flexible working arrangements

## **Introduction**

Nowadays it is hard to identify the spatial and temporal boundaries of any organization.

Without doubt, as a result of the unanticipated disruption caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, millions of people work beyond the traditional spatial boundaries of their office buildings enjoying a great degree of temporal and spatial flexibility, such as working in a hybrid working arrangement, from different remote locations or from home (e.g., Ozkazanc-Pan & Pullen, 2019). In such a boundaryless work environment however, with recently readjusted views of spatial boundaries, attendance and visibility (de Vaujany et al., 2018) there are increasing concerns for a host of challenges especially around inclusivity and discrimination in hybrid work settings.

Professional isolation is probably one of the biggest challenges disclosed by employees in flexible working arrangements (e.g., Illegems & Verbeke, 2004; Morganson et al., 2010). According to Kurland and Bailey (1999) remote work excludes employees from the networks that operate in face-to-face working arrangements. Remote workers perceive reduced opportunities for development in relation to their office-based colleagues (Redman et al., 2009) and fear that being out of sight may decrease their chances for promotion and increased wages (Kurland & Bailey, 1999). Leslie and colleagues (2012) suggest that when managers assume that employees choose remote work for work-life balance reasons, they tend to perceive them in a negative way and attribute employees' use of flexible work arrangements to better manage their personal life, are more likely to view them negatively and offer poor career development opportunities and rewards.

Social and professional isolation, disconnection from social interactions (Twenge et al., 2002), feeling "out of the loop" (Jones et al., 2009), and ostracism may become a serious problem in hybrid working arrangements. Organizational research has not paid enough attention to ostracism, as a distinctive experience in organizational life (Ferris et al., 2008;

Robinson et al., 2013). However, as Robinson et al. (2013) emphasize in their review, feeling ostracism at work, a space where employees pursue the development of camaraderie, companionship, social ties, and inclusion with others, is quite harmful for most employees. Geographical dispersion especially in the case of virtual or telework may attenuate perceptions of ostracism as it can become easier to unintentionally ignore coworkers (Robinson et al., 2013) due to a lack of social and visual cues. To our knowledge, ostracism has received very limited attention in the context of flexible working arrangements (Robinson et al., 2013). Therefore, the first aim of the paper is to examine perceptions of ostracism in flexible working arrangements.

Being overlooked, excluded, or ignored in the workplace may be strongly linked to experiences of inequality and workplace discrimination. Beyond isolation, the new hybrid working arrangements may create perceptions of exclusion and also as Leslie et al. (2012) suggest, perpetuate and attenuate existing inequalities in the workplace. The vast majority of the literature of inequality and remote work concerns gender and parenthood. Kossek and Lee (2021) point out for instance that in academic settings women face more career harm than men when they use flexibility at work leading them to sometimes give up career advancement opportunities in order to be able to continue to balance home and work responsibilities. In this way, remote work becomes a vehicle that increases gender discrimination. The paradoxical nature of flexible work arrangements on work inequalities requires further exploration in the current literature, since they have been presented as a solution to the problems of inequality, especially as they seem to address issues of work-life balance and labour participation of under-represented employee groups. The second aim of the paper therefore is to investigate perceptions of inequality and discrimination in flexible work arrangements.

On the back of such evidence, it becomes crucial that we also investigate and analyse the antecedents of inclusive organizational behaviors in flexible working arrangements (Georgiadou et al., 2021). If ostracism and inequality are major challenges what can organizations do in order to reduce their emergence? According to Shore et al. (2011) the experiences of employees in flexible working arrangements are strongly affected by the behavior of their direct supervisors. Since direct supervisors, as major organizational agents, control to a large degree the gate for their subordinates' rewards and development prospects, it is of major importance to act in ways that establish an inclusion climate (Douglas et al., 2003). In the same vein, Wasserman et al. (2008) highlighted leaders' significant role in the creation of an inclusive organizational culture, as they develop meta-narratives that endorse and sustain cultures of inclusion. Overall, as these studies underline, exploring inclusive leadership behaviors appears to be critical for dealing with inequality and ostracism in flexible working arrangements. Accordingly, the third aim of the paper is to investigate the role of leader-member exchange and servant leadership in alleviating perceptions of inequality and ostracism in flexible working arrangements.

### **Flexible working arrangements and perceived inequality**

A large part of the literature concerns the potential paradoxical effects of teleworking on work-life balance and work-life inclusion, an issue that is particularly salient for women because of the larger shares of unpaid domestic and care work they hold in the household. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the reasons why individuals engaged in teleworking activities comprised of "pulling factors" (i.e. pulling workers to work from home) and "pushing factors" (i.e. pushing workers from the office) (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). One the main pulling factors, motivating workers to request telework, were to care for dependent children and manage family commitment (Hartig et al., 2007; Kossek & Lee, 2021). More generally, the use of telework is meant to allow workers to achieve "work-life balance"

(Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Madsen, 2003; Perrons, 2003; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001; Tremblay, 2002). In this context, the inclusion climate of an organization is an important component of achieving work-life balance. According to Kossek & Lee (2021) *“Organizational work-life inclusion occurs when work cultures and structures are generally perceived as supporting an individual’s ability to thrive authentically in family and personal life roles on and off the job, while progressing in a career.”* The authors point out that in academic settings women confront more career damage than men when they use flexibility at work, leading them to sometimes give up career advancement opportunities in order to continue to balance home and work responsibilities. These mechanisms describe how remote work paradoxically allows increased participation of women in the labour market by allowing them to remain in employment despite their care responsibilities, while at the same time being a vehicle that increases gender discrimination.

If in theory flexibility is supposed to provide employees more control over their work and potentially increase their performance (Ortega, 2009), studies also point out the existence of “flexibility stigma” which can affect both women and men. Flexibility stigma can be defined as the *“the belief that workers who use flexible working arrangements for care purposes are less productive and less committed to the workplace”* (p.521 Chung, 2020). Using data from the UK Work-Life Balance Survey (2011), Chung (2018) identifies the gendered nature of the flexibility stigma because flexible workers are more likely to be discriminated by men, while women, and mostly mothers, are more likely to experience discrimination against flexible workers. Indeed, they find that approximately a third of workers report that working flexibly (working from home and part-time work) entails more work. Moreover, one-third of workers believe that working flexibility leads to a lower chance of getting a promotion, women with children being more likely to identify with this statement. Men are more likely to state that they experience increased hardships because of their co-workers’ flexibility while

women with children are more likely to state that they experience detrimental career outcomes because of their flexible work. Note that in general, for both men and women, working from home for parent workers is associated with lower levels of happiness in comparison to non-parent workers (Song & Gao, 2020).

When COVID-19 hit, the work-life tensions faced by women were accentuated as women saw an increasing demand of both work and life responsibilities (Kossek & Lee, 2021). The pandemic has radically transformed the experience of working from home, making it more difficult, lonely and overwhelming for women who oftentimes felt like their professional and familial (maternal) roles were being compromised, as demonstrated by Couch et al. (2021) in an analysis of the authors' own experiences which draws from feminist scholarship. During this pandemic period, working from home for these Australian female scholars has been accompanied by a feeling there would be a lack of recognition and trust from the workplace when it comes to the number of hours spent working and the overall productivity. The authors posit that despite a take-up in flexible work arrangements prior to the pandemic, traditional male work and career trajectories keep structuring work, generating a disconnect between organizational policy and practice, as previously demonstrated by Chesterman and Ross-Smith (2010). This leads the individual worker to hold the responsibility of fitting into a work system and finding resources to manage the resulting conflicts. Islam (2021) shows that these dynamics are neither confined to academia nor to industrialized economies. By analysing the working arrangements of a female e-commerce worker in India, the author shows that pandemic-induced 'working from home' led to a deterioration of mental and physical health, increased tensions between household and professional responsibilities, and a feeling of vulnerability related to employer distrust and increased surveillance. Moreover, by analysing semi-directive interviews in Turkey, Çoban (2022) shows that teleworking regulations implemented during the pandemic create a risk of detaching women from

professional work, of increasing the precariousness of female labour and of consolidating women's roles as traditional housewives. This risk is related to the alienation of women from work which is fuelled by their domestic status gaining importance, leading to an increase in time and energy spending in domestic tasks and to organizations holding stereotypical views of gender and thus either assigning different tasks to married women with children or putting them on top of the list of potential layoffs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated negative emotions and stress for all employees, but some workers have also faced racial injustice. Ellsworth et al. (2020) consider this to be particularly true for Black employees in the US. They point out that while systemic racism demands systemic action (e.g., addressing unconscious bias in formal processes), individual action, namely by team leaders, plays a crucial role in supporting employees and assuring that they continue to make meaningful contributions. The authors point out the increased challenge of ensuring an adequate inclusion climate amidst COVID-19 work arrangements. Moreover, because of the segmentation of the labour market on the basis of cultural background, a disproportionate number of workers from minority groups in industrialized countries are more likely to be working in person, in occupations such as cashiers, food service, delivery, making remote work a privilege that is out of their reach (Gould & Kandra, 2021). Taking an intersectional approach, Ryan and Briggs (2019) show that the concept of inclusion and work-life balance in organizations need to consider the multiple layers that constitute workers' identities. The authors caution against stereotyping those with a particular intersected identity in the design of inclusion policies and point out the necessity of focusing on cultural values instead of ethnicity in order to move away from assumptions. They also caution against the use of a framework and language that is too general in attempting to be inclusive (e.g., colour-blind policies). Doing so can lead to a lower level of support than originally intended.



Igeltjørn and Habib (2020) review the literature on disability and telework and find that telework benefit workers with disability by reducing pain and fatigue related barriers to work. Employees with a disability and employers do not necessarily see telework as a disability-specific inclusion policy but as a work-life balance policy in general. However, telework can also increase the isolation of workers with disabilities. Schur et al. (2020) point out that the expanded utilization of telework during the pandemic has a silver lining, as it has changed the perception of working from home and has challenged employers to rethink the way in which tasks can be accomplished. These changes can potentially improve the working conditions of workers with a disability. By analysing representative data from the US, the authors find that prior to COVID-19, workers with a disability were more likely to work from home. Nevertheless, workers with a disability who worked from home and those who worked from an office setting had the same wage gap in comparison to other workers. This implies that a generalisation of working from home will not erase wage disparities between workers with a disability and other workers and will not reduce wage inequality.

For these reasons, we hypothesized the following:

H1. Employees working from home will report greater perceptions of inequality than those working a) in a hybrid working arrangement, or b) from the main office.

### **Flexible working arrangements and perceived ostracism**

Being ignored, disregarded, or excluded by co-workers is a frequent phenomenon in the workplace (Fox & Stallworth, 2005) and becomes an increasing point of concern in the hybrid or virtual workplace. Such incidents are commonly called “ostracism” (Williams, 1997). Even though at first glance, instances of workplace ostracism may appear unimportant, research evidence suggests that ostracism can be a particularly distressing and

agonizing experience; ostracism causes social pain very much like physical pain (Eisenberger, 2012). On top of that and beyond its incredibly painful character, O'Reilly and Robinson (2009) argue that the adverse consequences of being ostracized resemble those of other damaging behaviors at work such as aggression and harassment.

Ostracism revolves around the perception of a boundary between an 'inside' and an 'outside, between inclusion and exclusion that is experienced existentially. This means that this exclusion from the centre is vague and relational and its boundaries are determined existentially, with regard to how one perceives and experiences 'where the action is' and what is important to them, rather than through specific and conventional spatial arrangements. The feeling of ostracism appears when people who already fear that they are 'outsiders' cannot access resources that are deemed significant for them. According to Hafermalz (2021), such employees and especially in the case of flexible and remote working arrangements feel like they are living on the 'edge' of what is happening in organizations. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H2: Individuals working from home will report greater perceptions of ostracism than those working a) in a hybrid working arrangement, or b) from the main office.

### **Leader-member exchange and perceived inequality**

The literature on LMX and hybrid working arrangements focuses on the relationships between LMX quality, employment outcomes and degrees of virtual work. To our knowledge perceived inequality or discrimination is not explicitly addressed in the literature on LMX quality and virtual work. Nevertheless, the mechanisms described in this literature are likely to not apply to all workers similarly. Schaffer and Riordan (2013) find that employees from a national insurance company in the US who have a different race than their supervisors have

lower levels of LMX quality compared to employees who have a similar race to their supervisors. The authors conclude that visible dissimilarity is highly sensitive to outgroup bias and ingroup favouritism. Note however that the authors do not find support for the effect of gender and age dissimilarity on LMX.

In their seminal study on the relationship between LMX and employment outcomes in the context of virtual work, Golden and Veiga (2008) study the extent to which the impact of LMX quality on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and performance is moderated by the degree of working in a virtual mode. They found that employees with high quality LMX relationships have higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Employees with high quality LMX relationships have higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction when working substantially in virtual work arrangements in comparison to individuals with more restricted virtual work. Conversely, employees with low quality LMX have a lower organizational commitment when they work substantially in virtual arrangements compared to individuals with more restricted virtual arrangements. They also tested whether the degree of virtual work moderates the relationship between LMX and job performance. This hypothesis is, again, supported by the data with those working in virtual arrangements reporting higher job performance across all levels of LMX and performance being worse off than those working less in virtual arrangements. The authors highlight the crucial impact of supervisory relationships on the determination of commitment, job satisfaction and performance. If high quality LMX relationships are generally related to positive outcomes, low quality LMX create damaging effects for employees in substantially virtual working arrangements.

Similarly, Hill et al. (2014) find that the extent of electronic communication magnifies the positive impact of LMX on employee psychological empowerment, with the indirect impact of LMX on the employment outcomes through psychological empowerment being more

strongly positive at higher levels of virtual work. The authors discuss the possibility that high quality LMX can promote perceptions of collective identity resulting in a more active utilization of electronic communication. They suggest that LMX can mitigate the negative effect that a high dependence on electronic communication may have on psychological empowerment. The authors emphasize the necessity for supervisors to forge strong relationships and pursue active and frequent communication with employees. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) report a positive impact of telecommuting on the employer-employee relationship quality which might be due to a reverse causality, with supervisors being more inclined to grant the possibility of telecommuting to those who are already performing well or who are part of their inner circle. Another nuance they provide is that this relationship may alternatively be due to an omitted variable bias, with telecommuters strategically focusing on fostering a high-quality relationship as they are mindful of a possible weakening in their relationship quality. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H3: LMX is negatively related to perceived inequality.

H4: The degree of virtual work moderates the relationship between LMX and perceived inequality.

### **Leader-member exchange and perceived ostracism**

Direct supervisors could strongly affect employee experiences, especially in a diverse workgroup (Shore et al., 2018). As central organizational agents who have the power to specify rewards and development opportunities for their subordinates, direct supervisors' role and behavior is crucial for the development of a climate of inclusion (Douglas et al., 2003). Nishii and Mayer (2009) explored the relation between demographic diversity in groups and turnover under conditions of leadership inclusion. They operationalized inclusive leadership

as concerning a high group mean on LMX and low LMX differentiation. They report that turnover was low in demographically diverse groups when there was high leader inclusion. However, the highest turnover occurred in diverse groups when mean LMX was high and differentiation was high, and more specifically when only some members of diverse groups had a high-quality relationship with their direct supervisor. The authors highlight the significance of systematically developing high-quality relationships between subordinates and their direct supervisors in diverse groups.

LMX pertains to the relationships that are developed between leaders and subordinates, such that certain subordinates are regarded as in-group members while others as out-group members (Arshadi et al., 2012). Leaders develop strong socio-emotional relationships with the members of their in-group based on support, trust and belongingness, while reinforce transactional exchanges with out-group members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). High-quality LMX relationships may also indicate that social relationships are highly valued sending the signal to subordinates to refrain from ostracizing others as such behaviors might provoke their punishment from the leader. On the contrary, low-quality LMX may lead to social disconnection but also signal that social relationships are not valued making ostracism a low-risk activity. Accordingly, workplace ostracism is considered to have a negative relationship with LMX.

Considering that the organization is portrayed to employees concretely by their direct supervisors (Ogilvie, 1987) and flexible working arrangements may alienate them from their subordinates (Wiesenfeld et al., 1999), the extent at which supervisors treat their virtual workers as part of the in-group is likely to affect their perceptions of being included and not isolated or out of the loop. Consequently, we would presume that sustaining high-quality LMX relationships is extremely significant for employees in flexible working arrangements. Unlike face-to-face working arrangements, the extent to which employee work in flexible

working arrangements could modify their need to feel part of the leader's 'in-group' as a vehicle to reduce their perceived isolation. Put simply, for those who work in flexible working arrangements, high quality LMX relationships become especially instrumental to reducing their perceptions of ostracism.

Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H5: LMX is negatively related to perceived ostracism.

H6: The degree of flexible working arrangements moderates the relationship between LMX and perceived ostracism.

### **Servant leadership and perceived inequality**

Servant leadership focuses on the leader's role as a servant (Greenleaf, 1977) and more specifically on the relational, moral and emotional aspects of their relationship with their followers (Hale & Fields, 2007). Servant leadership is about empathy, awareness, commitment to followers' growth (Spears, 2004), interactional justice (Choudhary et al., 2013), humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance (van Dierendonck, 2011), emotional healing (Sun & Wang, 2009) and organizational stewardship (Beck, 2014). Above all, however, it is the aspect of servanthood and the devotion to serve others.

Diverse employees who state high-quality relationships with servant leaders report high perceptions of justice as they feel treated with respect despite their distinguishing characteristics (Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leaders promote socially responsible behaviors that encourage and advance efforts for the enhancement of equality and the confrontation of the most significant challenges of unprivileged individuals. All in all, servant leaders seem to be more respectful of differences, equitable and effective in developing practices of inclusion (Dierendonck, 2011).

Accordingly, servant leaders are willing to develop and empower their employees and, in this way, tackle their needs in a personalized way (Dierendonck, 2011). Being authentic, they behave ethically nurturing feelings of equity and justice among their employees. Moreover, the interpersonal acceptance servant leaders demonstrate towards stigmatized employees removes the significant barriers they face to career progress. Also of importance, servant leaders work effectively towards the development of a shared group identity and goals as well as the resolution of task and relationship conflicts between different social identity groups (Dierendonck, 2011).

Consistent with our previous discussion on flexible working arrangements, we expect that individuals who work with servant leaders in substantially flexible working arrangements will feel less isolated than those whose flexible work is more restricted due to the values of integrity and empathy that are fundamental in servant leadership (Washington et al., 2006). In part this may be due to the enhanced importance of high-quality leader-follower relationships in substantial flexible working arrangements that possibly reduces the prominence of other conventional contextual cues which help people understand their relationship as inclusive. Conversely, for individuals in flexible working arrangements who experience low level servant leadership behaviors, we expect that they will perceive even higher levels of inequality than employees with less flexible working arrangements. Individuals with low-quality servant leadership relationships feel less included by their supervisors, and therefore they tend to perceive higher levels of injustice fostering employees' feelings of inequality. Accordingly, in the absence of conventional cues that reduce perceptions of injustice and help people appreciate their worthiness as organizational members but also, as van Dierendonck and Sousa (2016) argue their intrinsic value as human beings, when individuals with low quality servant leadership behaviors work to a great degree in flexible working arrangements,

their feelings of equity are even lower than it is for those who work in less flexible arrangements.

Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H7: Servant leadership is negatively related to perceived inequality.

H8: The degree of flexible working arrangements moderates the relationship between servant leadership and perceived inequality.

### **Servant leadership and perceived ostracism**

Workplace ostracism can affect employees' psychological states in terms of self-esteem, sense of belonging, control and meaningful experience (Williams, 2007). Servant leaders address employees' needs for self-esteem (Spreitzer, 1995) by implementing mechanisms of empowerment followers (Laub, 1999). As they teach their followers new skill (Walumbwa et al., 2010), they socially support them (Chen and Bliese, 2002), satisfying their need for belongingness. Likewise, servant leadership relates positively to a meaningful existence (Chen et al., 2013; van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2014). Such positive attributes suggest that servant leadership develops a negative relationship to workplace ostracism (Ul Haq et al., 2021).

Employees in flexible working arrangements are more sensitive to the information transmitted by leaders. According to our previous discussion on flexible working arrangements and ostracism, we expect that individuals who work with servant leaders in substantial flexible working arrangements will feel less ostracized than those with less extensive flexible working arrangements. Conversely, for individuals in flexible working arrangements who experience low level servant leadership behaviors, we expect that they will perceive even higher levels of ostracism than those with more restrained flexible working arrangements. Individuals who experience less inclusive leadership behaviors, such as servant



leadership behaviors, tend to feel isolated, excluded and out of the loop, feelings which get attenuated in extensively flexible working arrangements.

Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H9: Servant leadership is negatively related to perceived ostracism.

H10: The degree of flexible working arrangements moderates the relationship between servant leadership and perceived ostracism.

## **Method**

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample of this study consisted of employees who were mostly working in flexible working arrangement during the pandemic. Drawing on Ditekemena et al. (2021), both convenience and snowball samples were used in this study as it was difficult, especially in the pandemic context, to identify employees in flexible working arrangements. Convenience sampling yields accurate findings (Gelman et al., 2016) especially after assessing response heterogeneity (Coppock & McClellan, 2019).

An online survey was used to collect data from different sectors operating in the Greek context, with the prevailing ones being engineering and IT (34.4%). In this study, 61 individuals participated, of whom 31.3% used to work from home, 32.8% in hybrid working arrangements and 35.9% mostly from the office. The participants came from various responsibility levels, with 46.9% being employees with managerial responsibilities.

Respondents were 65.6% female and most of them had 6-10 years of working experience (23.4%). The majority of the respondents (35.9%) were between 30 and 39 years old, and all of them were Greek nationals to eliminate cultural biases in hypothesis testing.

### *Measures*

Greek versions for all measures were created based on the commonly used translation – back translation process (Brislin, 1970). Exploratory factor analysis determined the validity of the measurement model indicating the items which were not included in the final measurement due to low factor loading. An online basis was used for recruiting the non-probability convenience sample and informants were presented with the questionnaire on various social network sites.

***Workplace ostracism.*** Workplace ostracism was measured on a 10-item self-reported scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). Sample items included “Your greetings have gone unanswered at work” and “You have noticed others would not look at you at work.” The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.738.

***Leader-member exchange.*** The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) 7-item self-reported scale (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Liden & Graen, 1980) was employed to measure the quality of exchange between supervisors and subordinates. Sample items included “How well do you feel that your immediate supervisor recognizes your potential?” and “How well do you feel that your immediate supervisor understands your problems and needs?” The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.899.

***Servant leadership.*** Employees’ perceptions of their direct supervisor as a servant leader was measure on a 28-item, seven-dimension, self-reported scale developed by Liden et al. (2008). Focusing on their direct supervisors, rather than organizational leaders in general, ensures the sufficient knowledge of the informants about this individual’s servant leadership behaviors. Sample items include, “I would seek help from my manager if I had a personal problem” and “My manager emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.” The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.973.

**Perceived Work Discrimination.** Perceived work discrimination was measured on a 12-item scale adapted from McNeilly et al. (1996) and Bobo et al. (2020). Sample items included “How often are you unfairly given the jobs that no one else wants to do?” and “How often do you feel that you are ignored by your boss?” The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.800.

**Degree of Virtual Work.** Employees’ degree of virtual work was measured, based on the method used by Morganson et al. (1999), by asking respondents to indicate a) whether they mostly worked from the office, b) whether they mostly worked in a hybrid mode, and c) whether they worked from home.

## Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations for each of the measures. Several steps were taken in order to explore possible multicollinearity problems and to ensure the discriminant validity of the measures. All variables were centered before running the regression analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). All variance inflation factors (VIF) were below 1.5, well below the cut-off point of 10 (Cohen et al., 2003). A number of steps were also taken to deal with common method variance concerns. Specifically, several post hoc tests were performed (namely, the Harman's single-factor test, confirmatory factor analyses, and bivariate correlations) (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and found no evidence of common method bias influencing our measures.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations

Variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4
Ostracism	1.64	.53		.324**	-.396**	-.322**
PWD	2.02	.60	.324		-.551**	-.575**
LMX	2.84	.62	-.396**	-.551		.809**

Servant Leader	4.13	1.39	-.322	-.575**	.809**	
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\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

One-way ANOVA models were used to assess the main effects of the degree of flexible working arrangements on perceived inequality and perceived ostracism. The residuals of each ANOVA model were inspected for normality by histograms and for heteroscedasticity with the Levene’s test and their robustness was verified. As Table 2 indicates the degree of flexible work arrangements affected individual variation in perceived inequality and ostracism, however in a way that was not totally predicted by our hypothesis 1 and 2. Employees who worked extensively in a hybrid mode were less like to report experiences of ostracism in comparison with the other two groups, those who work from home and those who work extensively in the office. The same pattern appears for perceived inequality. Employees who worked mainly in a hybrid mode perceive much less inequalities than those who work from the office or from home. Surprisingly, employees who work extensively from the office report the greater level of perceived inequalities. Therefore, the results indicate the H1 and H2 were partially supported.

Table 2. One-way ANOVA: degree of flexible working arrangements on perceived ostracism and inequality

	F	p-Value	Mean Values		
			Office	Hybrid	Home
Ostracism	3.729	<0.05	1.84	1.42	1.63

PWD	3.138	<0.05	2.14	1.75	2.15
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Hypothesis 3 predicted a negative relationship between LMX and perceived inequality and, as shown in Table 3, was supported ( $\beta = -.327, p < .05; \Delta R^2 = .118, p < .05$ ), suggesting that greater LMX is associated with lower perceived ostracism. Hypothesis 5 predicted a negative relationship between LMX and perceived ostracism, and as shown in Table 3, was supported ( $\beta = -.476^{***}, p < .01; \Delta R^2 = .184, p < .001$ ), suggesting that greater LMX is associated with lower perceived inequality. Hypothesis 7 predicted a negative relationship between servant leadership and perceived inequality and, as shown in Table 4, was supported ( $\beta = -.506, p < .01; \Delta R^2 = .215, p < .01$ ), suggesting that greater servant leadership is associated with lower perceived inequality. Hypothesis 9 predicted a negative relationship between servant leadership and perceived ostracism and, as shown in Table 4, was not supported ( $\beta = -.216, p < ns$ ), suggesting that servant leadership is not associated with perceived ostracism.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis for H3 and H5

Variables	Test of H3: Ostracism			Test of H5: PWD		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Step 1 (controls):						
Gender	-.137	.007	.048	-.322**	-.187	-.224
Age	.088	-.023	.118	.180	-.003	-.130
Report	.222	.211	.224	.181	.066	.054
Status	-.106	-.040	-.014	-.046	.035	.012

Experience	.143	.144	.025	.075	.156	.262
Step 2:						
LMX		-.327**	.259*		-.476***	-1.004***
Degree of flexibility		-.200	.989		.079	-.988*
Step 3:						
LMXx degree of flexibility			-1.393*			1.250*
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	.112	.118	.058	.166	.184	.047
R <sup>2</sup>	.112	.230*	.288*	.166	.351***	.398***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.035	.134	.185	.095	.270***	.310
F	1.459	2.388*	2.782**	2.315	4.324***	4.539***

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Note: standardized beta weights are reported

Table 4. Results of regression analysis for H7 and H9

Variables	Test of H3: Ostracism			Test of H5: PWD		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3

Step 1 (controls):						
Gender	-.137	-.047		-.322**	-.224*	-.306*
Age	.088	.061		.180	.087	-.058
Report	.222	.218		.181	.024	.008
Status	-.106	-.080		-.046	-.009	-.036
Experience	.143	.074		.075	.031	.145
Step 2:						
Servant Leader		-.216			-.506****	-1.036****
Degree of flexibility		-.195			.096	-.615
Step 3:						
Servantx degree of flexibility						.971*
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	.112	.073		.166	.215***	.049***
R <sup>2</sup>	.112	.185		.166	.382***	.431***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.035	.083		.095	.304	.348

F	1.459	1.811		2.315	4.937***	5.201***
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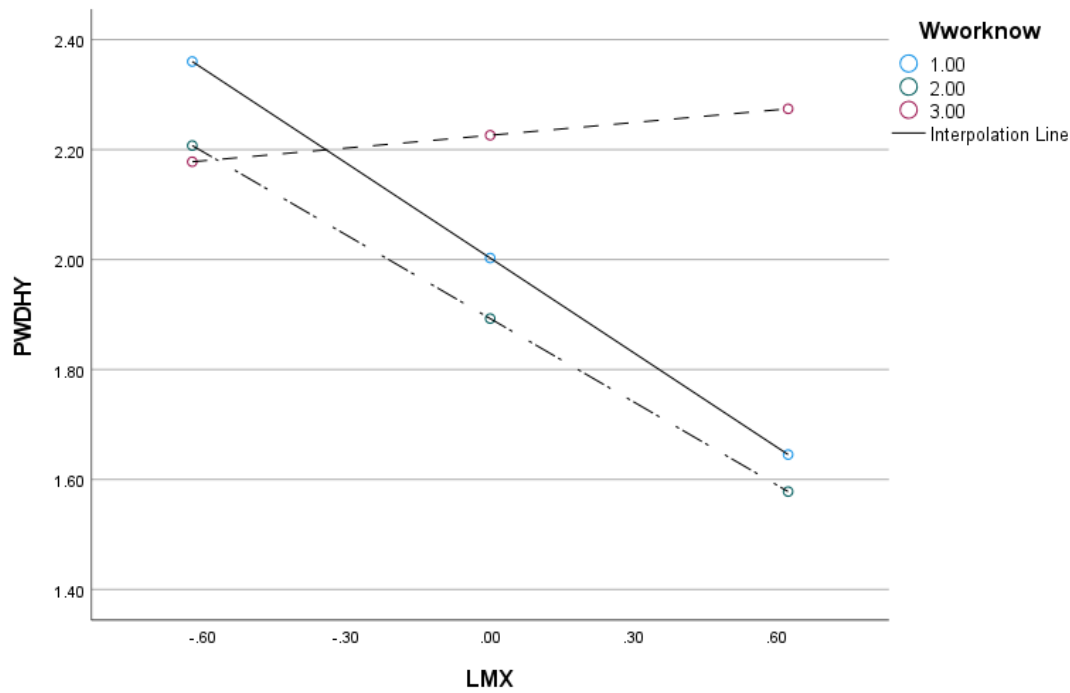
\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Note: standardized beta weights are reported

To assess our moderating hypotheses, hierarchical stepwise regression was used following the procedures suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, the control variables were entered. In step 2 LMX was entered and the degree of flexible work arrangements. Then, in step 3 the cross-product term was entered depicting the hypothesised moderation effect. Tables 3 and 4 present the changes in R-squared ( $\Delta R^2$ ) at each step and the standardized regression coefficients. As shown in Table 3, H4, which predicted that the degree of flexible work arrangements would moderate the LMX – perceived inequality relationship, was supported ( $\beta = 1.250$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). To further interpret the interaction effect, Cohen et al's (2003) procedure was followed, and as shown in Figure 1, individuals with high quality LMX relationships had lower perceived inequality when working extensively in a hybrid mode relative to those working from the office. Conversely, for individuals with low quality LMX relationships, perceived inequality was higher for those who worked in a hybrid mode home compared to those who had limited flexible working arrangements. Surprisingly, for employees who work from home, high levels of LMX are linked to slightly higher perceived inequality.

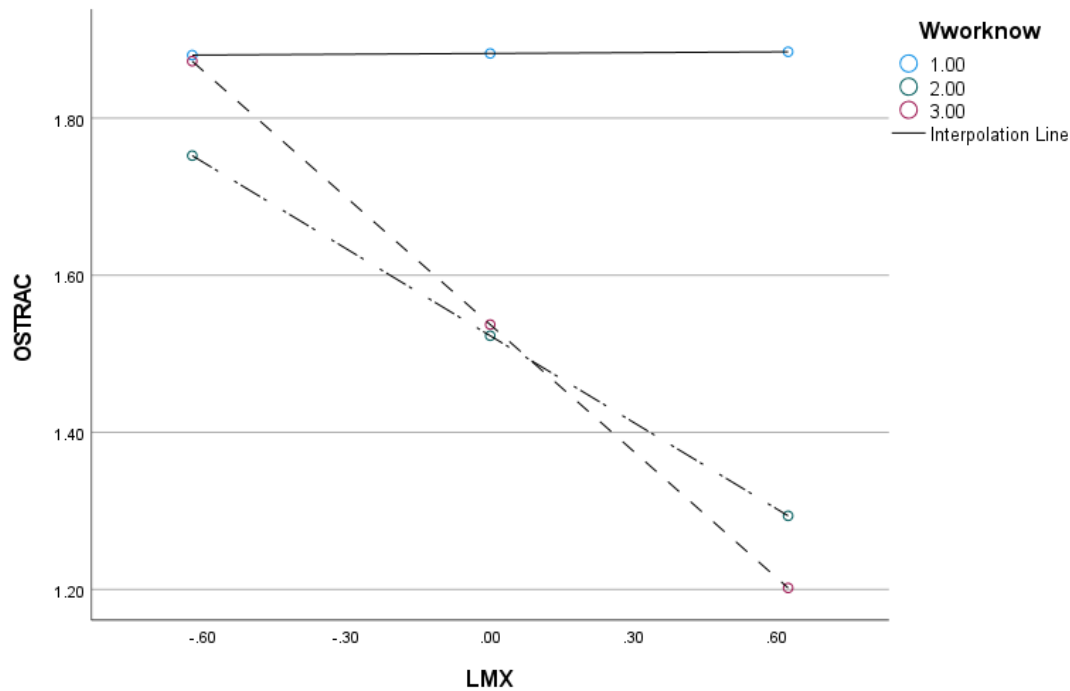
Figure 1. Moderating role of the degree of flexible working arrangements on LMX and perceived inequality





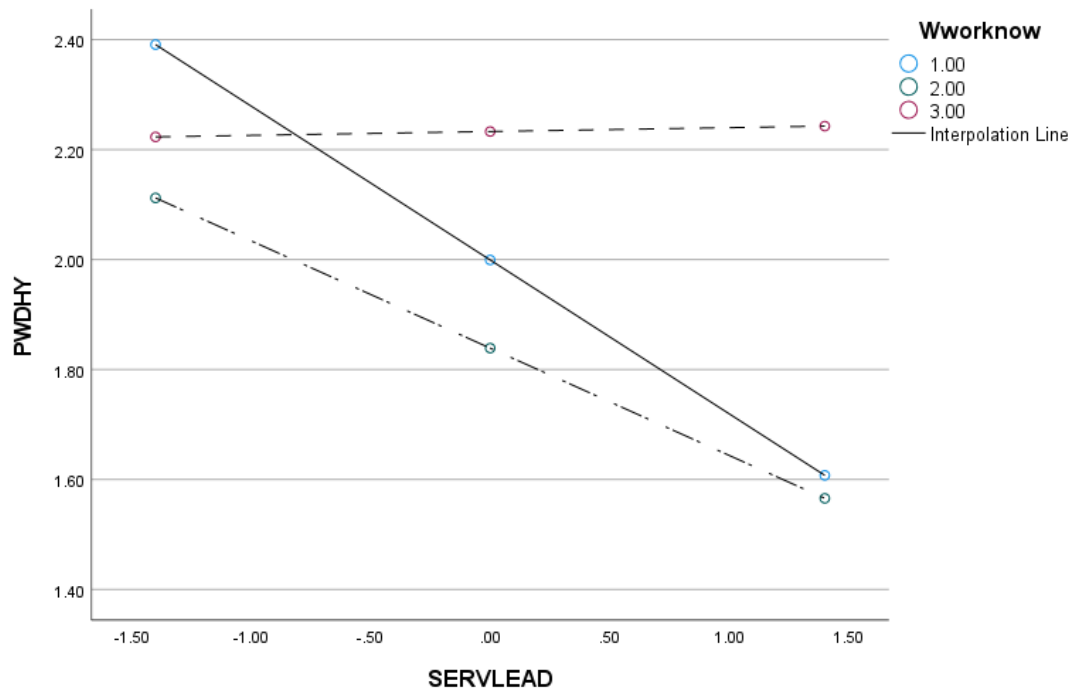
As shown in Table 3, H6, which predicted the moderation effect of flexible work arrangements on the relationship between LMX and perceived ostracism, was supported ( $\beta = 1.250, p < 0.05$ ). Further, as shown in Figure 2, individuals with high LMX relationships experienced less ostracism when working in a hybrid mode relative to those working from home. On the contrary, for employees with low quality LMX relationships, perceived ostracism was higher for people who extensively worked from home. Importantly, the extent of high-quality relationships did not affect the degree of perceived ostracism among employees who work from the office.

Figure 2. Moderating role of the degree of flexible working arrangements on LMX and perceived ostracism



In addition, H8, which predicted that the link between servant leadership and perceived inequality would be moderated by the degree of flexible work arrangements, was also supported ( $\beta = .971$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). As shown in Figure 3, individuals with high servant leadership experiences experienced less inequality when they work in a hybrid mode relative to those working from the office or from home. Conversely, for individuals who experienced low servant leadership behaviors perceived inequality was higher for those working in an office than any other flexible working arrangement. Surprisingly, for individuals who work from home, servant leadership did not have an effect on perceived inequality. Finally, servant leadership is not related to perceived ostracism for any level of flexible working arrangement.

Figure 3. Moderating role of the degree of flexible working arrangements on servant leadership and perceived inequality



## Discussion

Critical scholars have already voiced their concerns for a host of challenges especially around inclusivity and discrimination in hybrid work settings (de Vaujany et al., 2018). We replicate and extend these concerns in two important ways. First, we provide an examination of the effects of different degrees of flexible working arrangements on perceived ostracism and inequality thus extending previous work that has not used different degrees of flexible work. We found that employees who worked extensively in a hybrid mode were less like to report experiences of ostracism in comparison with the other two groups, those who work from home and those who work extensively in the office. The same pattern appears for perceived inequality. Employees who worked mainly in a hybrid mode perceive weaker inequalities than those who work from the office or from home. Surprisingly, employees who work extensively from the office report greater levels of perceived inequalities.

Furthermore, we found that LMX and servant leadership are beneficial for reducing employees' perceptions of ostracism and inequality. However, it seems that this relationship is beneficial for some but not all employees. Individuals with high quality LMX relationships had lower perceived inequality when working extensively in a hybrid mode relative to those working from the office. Conversely, for individuals with low quality LMX relationships, perceived inequality was higher for those who worked in a hybrid mode home compared to those who had limited flexible working arrangements. Surprisingly, for employees who work from home, high levels of LMX are linked to slightly higher perceived inequality.

However, a different partner of relationships was suggested for the relationship between LMX and perceived ostracism for different degrees of flexible working arrangements. Individuals with high LMX relationships experienced less ostracism when working in a hybrid mode relative to those working from home. On the contrary, for employees with low quality LMX relationships, perceived ostracism was higher for people who extensively worked from home. Importantly, the extent of high-quality relationships did not affect the degree of perceived ostracism among employees who work from the office.

A similar relationship with LMX was found also for servant leadership and perceived inequality. Individuals with high servant leadership experiences experienced less inequality when they work in a hybrid mode relative to those working from the office or from home. Conversely, for individuals who experienced low servant leadership behaviors perceived inequality was higher for those working in an office than any other flexible working arrangement. Surprisingly, for individuals who work from home, servant leadership did not have an effect on perceived inequality. Finally, servant leadership is not related to perceived ostracism for any level of flexible working arrangement.

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