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ABSTRACT

Although organizational trust (OT) and work–life balance (WLB) have been widely examined in relation to employee outcomes, less is known about how they operate in full-time remote work contexts, where physical proximity, direct supervision, spontaneous interaction, and clear work–home boundaries are reduced. This study argues that OT and perceived WLB function as key relational and boundary-management resources for sustaining psychological well-being (PWB) among remote workers. Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT), this study examines whether the satisfaction of employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness mediates these relationships.

Using data from the 2021 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the study analyses a sample of 1,493 remote employees in the European technology sector. Structural equation modelling is used to examine the direct and indirect relationships between OT, perceived WLB, and PWB through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Both OT and perceived WLB are positively associated with employees' PWB. These relationships are partially mediated by the satisfaction of competence and relatedness, whereas autonomy does not emerge as a significant mediator. This study contributes to remote work and human resource development (HRD) research by showing that OT and perceived WLB support PWB through different psychological mechanisms. In particular, the findings indicate that competence and relatedness, rather than autonomy, are the central need-satisfaction pathways linking organizational resources to well-being in remote work settings.



Remote but Connected: How Organizational Trust and Work-Life Balance Shape Well-Being in Europe's Digital Workforce

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Remote but Connected: How Organizational Trust and Work–Life Balance Shape Well-Being among Europe's Digital Workforce

Abstract

Purpose: Although organizational trust (OT) and work–life balance (WLB) have been widely examined in relation to employee outcomes, less is known about how they operate in full-time remote work contexts, where physical proximity, direct supervision, spontaneous interaction, and clear work–home boundaries are reduced. This study argues that OT and perceived WLB function as key relational and boundary-management resources for sustaining psychological well-being (PWB) among remote workers. Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT), this study examines whether the satisfaction of employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness mediates these relationships.

Design: Using data from the 2021 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the study analyses a sample of 1,493 remote employees in the European technology sector. Structural equation modelling is used to examine the direct and indirect relationships between OT, perceived WLB, and PWB through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs.

Findings: Both OT and perceived WLB are positively associated with employees' PWB. These relationships are partially mediated by the satisfaction of competence and relatedness, whereas autonomy does not emerge as a significant mediator.

Originality: This study contributes to remote work and human resource development (HRD) research by showing that OT and perceived WLB support PWB through different psychological mechanisms. In particular, the findings indicate that competence and relatedness emerge as significant need-satisfaction pathways linking organizational resources to well-being in remote work settings, whereas autonomy does not.

Employee Relations

Keywords:

Remote work; Psychological wellbeing; Organizational trust; Work–life balance; Self-determination theory.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions to work routines, making teleworking a primary means of maintaining business continuity across Europe, especially in the technology sector, where digital tools are already integral to daily operations. While remote work was not widespread prior to the pandemic, the crisis accelerated its adoption across industries, resulting in a significant shift in work structures and employee engagement (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; McDonald *et al.*, 2022).

The transition to teleworking has created both opportunities and challenges for employees and organizations. Remote work can provide greater flexibility, reduce commuting demands, and facilitate work-life balance (WLB) (Bloom et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2015). At the same time, reduced face-to-face interaction, fewer opportunities for informal learning and feedback, blurred work-home boundaries, and increased reliance on digital monitoring may undermine employees' development and PWB (Gazit et al., 2021; Steidelmuller et al., 2020; McDaniel et al., 2021; Kruyen et al., 2023). These tensions are particularly relevant from a Human Resource Development (HRD) perspective, which emphasizes developing employees' knowledge, skills, motivation, and capacity to contribute to organizational effectiveness (Swanson and Holton, 2009). They also draw attention to the conditions under which remote work supports or frustrates employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as proposed by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Importantly, the effects of teleworking on employees are not uniformly positive or negative. Remote work may facilitate the satisfaction of some psychological needs while

Employee Relations

making others more difficult to fulfil. Brunelle and Fortin (2021), for example, found that teleworking can enhance autonomy and competence while creating challenges for relatedness. Similarly, Boyraz and Gilbert (2024) showed that employees may adapt to teleworking by developing greater intrinsic motivation as their basic psychological needs are better supported, although concerns about career development may persist. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the consequences of remote work for PWB depend less on the work arrangement itself than on whether the organizational environment provides the conditions necessary to support employees' basic psychological needs.

Despite growing research on remote work and employee well-being, less is known about the psychological mechanisms through which organizational trust (OT) and perceived WLB are associated with PWB among full-time remote workers. This gap is particularly relevant because full-time telework is characterized by limited physical visibility and spontaneous interpersonal interaction, as well as reliance on digitally mediated coordination and on managing work-home boundaries (Gilson et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2015; Charalampous et al., 2019). Under these conditions, OT may reduce uncertainty and the need for direct monitoring (Breuer et al., 2016b), while perceived WLB may help employees manage the permeability between work and personal roles. SDT provides a useful framework for examining whether these resources are associated with PWB through the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Accordingly, this study examines how OT and perceived WLB are associated with PWB among full-time remote workers and whether these relationships are mediated by the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs proposed by SDT. Rather than assuming that autonomy, competence, and relatedness operate identically, we examine their distinct mediating roles. This approach allows us to assess whether and how the three psychological needs operate as distinct pathways linking relational and boundary-

management resources to well-being in a full-time remote work context. In doing so, the study connects SDT with remote work and HRD research by shifting attention from whether remote work is inherently beneficial or detrimental to the psychological mechanisms through which employees experience well-being in remote work settings.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

Self-Determination Theory and Human Resource Development

Self-determination theory (SDT) posits that human motivation and well-being are driven by the fulfilment of three psychological needs, namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for PWB, growth, and optimal functioning (Deci and Ryan, 2000). When these needs are satisfied, employees experience greater intrinsic motivation, which contributes to greater job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being in the workplace (Manganelli *et al.*, 2018; Gómez-Baya and Lucia-Casademunt, 2018). In organizational contexts, these mechanisms are closely linked to HRD goals, as HRD also aims to foster work environments where employees feel supported, motivated, and able to perform at their best.

Within the SDT framework, competence refers to the need to feel capable and effective in performing tasks and achieving desired outcomes. Supporting competence development is therefore central to employee growth, motivation, PWB, and performance (Manganelli *et al.*, 2018). Work environments that provide opportunities for skill development and constructive feedback enhance this sense of competence (Deci *et al.*, 1996; Milyavskaya and Koestner, 2011).

Employee Relations

The interplay between job demands and job control plays a crucial role in shaping employee PWB in remote work settings, underscoring the importance of competence in managing work-related stressors (Sardeshmukh *et al.*, 2012).

Autonomy refers to the ability to make independent decisions and take ownership of one's work. Experiencing autonomy enhances motivation and engagement by giving employees a sense of control over their work activities, which is especially important in remote and flexible work arrangements (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Manganelli et al., 2018).

Previous research has shown that autonomy contributes to job satisfaction and PWB, particularly when employees can exercise choice and self-direction in how they perform their work (Baard et al., 2004; Gómez-Baya et al., 2018).

Relatedness refers to the need for connection and a sense of belonging within the workplace. When employees maintain meaningful relationships with their colleagues and supervisors, they are more likely to experience commitment, engagement, and well-being (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Gagné and Deci, 2005). Conversely, environments characterized by isolation or excessive competition may reduce motivation and lead to lower morale (Manganelli et al., 2018).

The satisfaction of these three psychological needs can be understood as a key mechanism through which workplace practices support employee engagement, development, and well-being. In turn, PWB contributes to long-term career development and sustainability, particularly in rapidly evolving industries where employees must continuously adapt and maintain employability (De Vos et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2022). In remote work environments, sustaining PWB therefore becomes essential not only for individual functioning but also for maintaining alignment between employees' professional roles and personal values.

Employee Relations

Work–Life Balance, Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being

WLB is particularly relevant in remote work environments, where work and personal roles may occur within the same physical setting. In this context, perceived WLB can be understood as reflecting employees' ability to manage the permeability between work and personal roles.

Achieving WLB is particularly important in remote work settings, where the boundaries between personal and professional life often become blurred (McDonald, 2022). Previous research has shown that spillovers between work and family domains can negatively affect employees, leading to increased stress and reduced job satisfaction (Schlachter et al., 2018; Cardenas et al., 2004; McDaniel et al., 2021). For instance, Lorenz and Yi (2024) found that fully remote workers are significantly less likely to strongly agree that they can maintain a healthy balance between their work and personal responsibilities. Despite these challenges, several studies have indicated that WLB can positively influence job outcomes. Achieving a balance between work and personal responsibilities can improve job performance and reduce work-related stress (Demerouti *et al.,* 2010), thereby positively affecting PWB. Organizational policies supporting WLB can help employees establish clearer boundaries between work and family domains, reduce stress and improve well-being (Allen et al., 2013). Such policies may also enable employees to mentally detach themselves from work, reducing the risk of burnout (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Tavares, 2017). In remote work environments, WLB practices can also enhance well-being by promoting positive experiences across both work and personal life domains (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Felstead and Henseke, 2017). For example, flexible schedules and family-supportive supervisor behaviors have been shown to positively affect the engagement of remote workers (Trzebiatowski and Henle, 2023). Similarly,

Employee Relations

WLB has been identified as an important factor explaining job satisfaction in remote work contexts (Berger Ploszaj et al., 2025).

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1a: Work–life balance is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being.

From the perspective of SDT, WLB may contribute to employees' satisfaction of psychological needs. Flexible work arrangements allow individuals to exercise greater control over how and when they perform their work, thereby enhancing autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Kalliath and Brough, 2008). That is, when employees can successfully balance work and personal life, they experience greater control over how they allocate time, energy, and attention across life domains. WLB reduces the feeling that work dominates personal life and increases the perception of choice and self-direction in managing responsibilities. In turn, according to SDT, the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for autonomy is positively associated with PWB.

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1b: Work–life balance is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being through the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for autonomy.

Successfully managing both work and personal responsibilities can also reinforce employees' sense of competence, as individuals perceive themselves as capable of handling multiple roles effectively (Ilies et al., 2007; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Voydanoff, 2005). That is, when work and personal roles are balanced, employees are less overwhelmed by role conflict and resource depletion. This allows them to function more effectively in both domains, meet responsibilities successfully, and feel capable of

Employee Relations

handling demands. WLB is expected to preserve cognitive and emotional resources, enabling better performance and stronger efficacy beliefs (Berisha et al., 2025). In turn, according to SDT, the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for competence is positively associated with PWB.

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1c: Work–life balance is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being through the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for competence.

Moreover, organizational support for WLB may strengthen relatedness by fostering supportive relationships among employees, colleagues, and supervisors (Allen et al., 2000). When employees achieve WLB, they have more time, energy, and emotional availability for meaningful relationships at work and outside work. Reducing overload and conflict makes it easier to engage positively with family members, friends, colleagues, and supervisors. WLB, therefore, can support feelings of belonging, connection, and social support. In this vein, recent evidence indicates that WLB is positively associated with stronger organizational embeddedness, suggesting that employees who experience balance are better able to develop and sustain positive relational ties (Nunes and Rodrigues, 2024). In turn, according to SDT, the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for relatedness is positively associated with PWB. On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1d: Work–life balance is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being through the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for relatedness.

Organizational Trust, Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction, and PWB

In remote work settings, OT can serve as an important relational resource for coordinating work and reducing uncertainty when physical visibility and direct supervision are limited.

Employee Relations

These conditions make trust particularly relevant in telework contexts. Consistent with the previous literature, we conceptualize OT as comprising three dimensions: the perception that management in the organization trusts employees, the perception that employees generally trust management, and a collaborative work climate (Ferreira et al., 2025a; Ferreira et al., 2025b; Pinho et al., 2024). When one individual trusts another, they believe that the other will act reliably and benevolently, which is essential for establishing lasting bonds in the corporate environment. In turn, this trust fosters psychological security and enables workers to collaborate more effectively (Burrell and Brauner, 2021; Ferreira et al., 2025b). This line of literature acknowledges that trust in others and a cooperative climate are distinct constructs (trust reflects an individual-level belief in others' reliability and benevolence, whereas a cooperative climate captures shared perceptions of collaboration norms at the collective level), yet they are interrelated. A cooperative climate represents the contextual manifestation of repeated trust-based interactions and serves as an important social environment in which interpersonal trust operates. From a microfoundational perspective, interpersonal trust enables behaviors such as information sharing and mutual support, which, over time, contribute to the emergence of a cooperative climate. Moreover, a cooperative climate captures collective norms that cannot be fully explained by dyadic trust alone. Together, these elements reflect the relational climate in which employees interact and collaborate within organizations. Trust within organizations promotes cooperation and teamwork by supporting shared goals, stability, and smooth collaboration (Jones and George, 1998; McAllister, 1995; Gould-Williams, 2003).

When management trusts employees, individuals are more likely to experience autonomy and accountability in their work, which can enhance their engagement and job satisfaction (Heyns and Rothmann, 2018). Similarly, strong collaboration among colleagues contributes to positive relationships, improves communication, and reduces conflict.

Employee Relations

Employees' trust in management also contributes to a supportive organizational culture, as transparent and supportive leadership fosters a secure and motivating work environment (Ferrin and Gillespie, 2010). According to SDT, trust may influence employees' motivation and well-being by strengthening their sense of security and reducing uncertainty in social interactions (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Trust can also reduce social complexity (Luhmann, 1979). By simplifying expectations and reducing the need for constant monitoring, trust can facilitate decision-making and enhance productivity. These mechanisms may be particularly relevant in remote work contexts. When employees work with limited direct supervision, trust becomes an essential element for coordinating tasks and maintaining collaboration (Chong et al., 2020). Instead of relying on extensive monitoring, trust enables employees to perform their tasks independently while maintaining effective collaboration and performance (Blanding, 2021).

The dynamics of trust may also change in remote work environments. Stavrova et al. (2023) found that remote work may increase trust in organizations when employees perceive remote work arrangements as signals of organizational support. However, reduced face-to-face interaction may simultaneously weaken OT among colleagues. These dynamics highlight the importance of actively fostering trust and communication among remote teams.

Previous studies have also suggested that trust can help maintain motivation and engagement in remote work contexts. For example, Tang et al. (2021) reported that trust in supervisors enhances employees' psychological need satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similarly, high levels of trust can help employees remain engaged and reduce uncertainty in remote work settings where face-to-face interactions are limited (Skiba and Wildman, 2019).

Employee Relations

In teleworking contexts, research has also indicated that compared with office workers, teleworkers may experience higher levels of psychological need satisfaction, which can lead to greater job satisfaction (Brunelle and Fortin, 2021). However, because remote work may reduce opportunities for social interaction, organizations must actively promote OT and communication to mitigate isolation and maintain well-being.

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2a: Organizational trust is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being.

OT may also contribute to the satisfaction of employees' psychological needs. In a high-trust, cooperative climate, employees feel less controlled, less monitored, and less threatened by interpersonal risks. In high-trust, cooperative climates, employees are more likely to receive discretion, opportunities to voice their ideas, and latitude in how they perform their work (Ferreira et al., 2025; Li et al., 2022). Trust signals that employees are seen as capable of self-regulation rather than needing constant surveillance. When employees trust their leaders and colleagues, they may feel more autonomous in their decision-making, as they can perform their tasks with confidence and without fear of negative consequences (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Manganelli et al., 2018). These feelings of autonomy and accountability in their work can enhance engagement and job satisfaction (Heyns and Rothmann, 2018). In effect, according to SDT, when employees experience volition and choice, they feel ownership of their actions and show stronger intrinsic motivation, thereby supporting PWB.

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2b: Organizational trust is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being through the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for autonomy.

Employee Relations

Trust may also strengthen competence by signalling confidence in employees' abilities and providing the resources and support necessary to perform effectively (Deci et al., 1996). Trusting environments encourage learning, experimentation, feedback exchange, and help-seeking without fear of blame. Cooperative climates also facilitate knowledge sharing and mutual support, allowing employees to feel effective and capable of meeting job demands. A positive relationship between OT and employees' sense of competence can be grounded in the idea that supportive social environments strengthen individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform effectively. Prior research has shown that OT reinforces feelings of effectiveness and mastery, which are central to the need for competence (Tosun and Kibaroğlu, 2023). Trust-based relationships between managers and employees facilitate knowledge transfer, developmental feedback, mentoring, and a better understanding of employees' needs (Tosun and Kibaroğlu, 2023). These resources help employees build confidence in their abilities and improve their ability to meet work demands successfully.

OT creates psychologically safe contexts in which employees can learn from others, receive encouragement, experiment without excessive fear of failure, and experience support during challenging tasks. Through repeated exposure to such conditions, employees are more likely to perceive themselves as capable and effective. Because competence reflects the experience of effectiveness and confidence in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes, OT is expected to be positively associated with competence (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Tierney and Farmer, 2002; Tosun and Kibaroğlu, 2023). In turn, according to SDT, the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for competence is positively associated with PWB.

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

Employee Relations

H2c: Organizational trust is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being through the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for competence.

Finally, trust fosters cooperation and social support, which contributes to the satisfaction of the need for relatedness and enhances employees' sense of belonging (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009; Tang et al., 2021). Trust and cooperation inherently involve mutual respect, reciprocity, and positive social exchange. Such climates make employees feel accepted, connected, and valued by their colleagues and supervisors. A climate of trust fosters a psychologically safe and equitable environment. Support from peers and supervisors can contribute to organizational identification, enhance sense-making, and satisfy psychological needs related to belongingness, affiliation, and relatedness, supporting the development of positive social relationships and reducing isolation and anxiety (Schaubroeck et al., 2013). In turn, according to SDT, the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for relatedness is positively associated with PWB.

On the basis of the above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2d: Organizational trust is positively associated with employees' psychological well-being through the satisfaction of the basic psychological need for relatedness.

Methods

Sample

We use data from the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCS; Eurofound) 2021, which provides insights into working conditions and employment trends across Europe. The data are anonymized, secondary, and collected by Eurofound in compliance with EU ethical and data protection standards. After being informed about the study purpose, confidentiality, and data use, the participants in the original survey provided informed consent. No identifiable information is included in the dataset, and no

Employee Relations

additional consent was required for this secondary analysis. Given that the study involved only publicly available anonymized data, no further institutional ethics approval was needed.

While using secondary data does not allow for the inclusion of more fine-grained measures, this limitation is offset by the advantages of large-scale, cross-national, and harmonized survey data, which enhance external validity. This type of data is particularly appropriate for our purposes because it supports cross-national analysis and robust modelling. The EWCS is a widely used and methodologically robust dataset designed to ensure cross-national comparability of working conditions (Eurofound, 2017). Our operationalizations are consistent with prior research that uses EWCS variables to examine employees' well-being, OT, and WLB across different contexts (e.g., Booth and Lup, 2025; Ferreira et al., 2025a; Ferreira et al., 2025b; Nordmyr et al., 2025; Pinho et al., 2024). For example, Ferreira et al. (2025a, 2025b) and Pinho et al. (2024) conceptualized organizational/workplace trust using the trust and cooperative climate factor from the 2021 EWCS, leveraging the following three items: Q70B, "Management trusts employees to do their work well;" Q70E, "There is good cooperation between colleagues;" and Q70F, "Employees generally trust management". Nordmyr et al. (2025) captured perceived WLB using the same one-item question as we do: 'In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?'. Consistent with prior research, OT is conceptualized as employees' perceptions that management trusts employees, that managers are generally trusted by employees within the organization, and that a collaborative work climate exists. The EWCS items directly capture these relational perceptions, aligning with established definitions of trust as a subjective evaluation of social exchange relationships. At the same time, we acknowledge that mutual trust between employees and management and a cooperative climate are conceptually distinguishable constructs. Trust primarily concerns employees'

expectations regarding the intentions and reliability of organizational actors, whereas a cooperative climate reflects broader perceptions of collaboration, mutual support, and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. The EWCS operationalization captures these dimensions jointly, representing a broader relational organizational context rather than a pure measure of mutual trust alone. Consequently, the effects observed in the present study should be interpreted as reflecting the influence of this broader relational environment, in which trust and cooperation are likely to reinforce one another in shaping employees' satisfaction of psychological needs and well-being. Overall, the use of EWCS data represents a theoretically grounded and methodologically robust approach for examining workplace trust at a cross-national level, despite the inherent trade-offs associated with secondary data.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the regular face-to-face survey was replaced with computer-assisted telephone interviewing. The complete survey covered more than 70,000 employees across 36 European countries and employed a multistage, stratified random sampling design to ensure the sample was representative of the working population aged 16 years and older. We focused on employees working fully remotely in the technology sector. Our final sample comprised 1,493 full-time teleworkers in the technology sector, 63.3% of whom were male. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 77 years, with a mean age (M) of 38.83 and a standard deviation (SD) of 10.91.

Measures

To construct variables, this study focused on questions from the 2021 EWCS related to needs satisfaction, PWB, and trust and cooperation at work. Our operationalizations are consistent with prior research that uses EWCS variables to examine employees' well-being, OT, and WLB across different contexts (e.g., Booth and Lup, 2025; Ferreira et al., 2025a, 2025b; Nordmyr et al., 2025; Pinho et al., 2024). WLB was assessed using the

Employee Relations

following question: *How do your working hours generally fit with your family or social commitments outside work?* There were four response options, ranging from (1) *not at all* to (4) *very well*. Prior research, which also relied on EWCS data to analyze working conditions and job quality across countries (Greenan et al., 2014), operationalized WLB using comparable self-reported indicators (Inggamara, Pierewan, and Ayriza, 2022). For example, Nordmyr et al. (2025) used the same variable for measuring WLB. That is, WLB was measured using a concise self-reported indicator that captures individuals' perceived ability to reconcile work and personal life. While this measure does not aim to capture the full multidimensional nature of the construct, it is consistent with the conceptualization of WLB as a subjective, perceptual experience in large-scale survey research. Therefore, given the constraints of cross-national survey data, this item provides a meaningful and theoretically consistent indicator of perceived WLB.

OT was evaluated using the *trust and cooperative climate* factor from the 2021 EWCS, which comprises three items: Q70B, "Management trusts employees to do their work well"; Q70E, "There is good cooperation between colleagues"; and Q70F, "Employees generally trust management." The responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*, with a total score ranging from 3 to 15, after adding the scores of the three separate items. The internal consistency for this scale was acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .70. The scale also showed good factor validity, a CFI = .999, an SRMR = .001, and an average variance extracted = .476. Previous research has also used this EWCS factor to measure organizational/workplace trust (Ferreira et al., 2025a; Ferreira et al., 2025b; Pinho et al., 2024), conceptualized as employees' perceived trust in management and colleagues, as well as in a collaborative work climate. The EWCS items directly capture these relational perceptions, aligning with established definitions of trust as a subjective evaluation of social exchange relationships.

Employee Relations

Need satisfaction was assessed using autonomy, competence, and relatedness. All need satisfaction items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *never* to (5) *always*. Autonomy was assessed using three items related to perceived control over job tasks: Q61N, "Influence over decisions important for work"; Q61C, "Consultation before setting objectives" and Q61D, "Involvement in improving work organization/processes." The total score ranged from 3 to 15, after adding the scores in the three items. The internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$), and the factor validity was good (CFI = .998, SRMR = .001, average variance extracted = .424). Competence was measured using two items that reflected the perceived ability of employees to perform their job effectively: Q61H, the feeling of work well done, and Q61J, the feeling of doing useful work, with a total score ranging from 2 to 10 (as a result of adding the two items), with a Cronbach's alpha of .73, and good factor validity (CFI = .995, SRMR = .001). Relatedness was assessed using two items that addressed support from colleagues and managers: Q61A1, "Colleagues help and support you," and Q61B, "The manager helps and supports you," with total scores ranging from 2 to 10 (as a result of adding the two items), a Cronbach's alpha of .74, and good factor validity (CFI = .995, SRMR = .001). A factor that combined these three psychological needs was created following an exploratory factor analysis (Bartlett's test $\chi^2 = 1201.44$, $p < .001$, KMO = .68, Eigenvalue = 2.05, and variance explained = 53%), and a subsequent confirmatory analysis with good data fit, a CFI = .999, an SRMR = .001, average variance explained = .444.

Employee well-being was measured using the World Health Organization, WHO-5 Well-Being Index, which was included in the 2021 EWCS dataset. This index aggregates responses to five questions that assess well-being over the previous two weeks: Q87A, "Cheerful and in good spirits"; Q87B, "Calm and relaxed"; Q87C, "Active and vigorous"; Q87D, "Fresh and rested when waking up" and Q87E, "Daily life filled with interest." Responses were recorded using a six-point scale, which ranged from (1) *all of the time* to

Employee Relations

(6) *at no time*, and the scores were reversed before the summation (total score range: 5-30). The internal consistency of the WHO-5 scale was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of .81. A confirmatory factor analysis revealed a good fit to the data (CFI = .972, SRMR = .027, average variance extracted = .468).

Analysis Strategy

First, descriptive statistics, bivariate Pearson correlations (Table 1), and a linear regression controlling for demographics were examined (Table 2).

Second, a mediational analysis (Tables 3 and 4) was conducted to examine the mediating effects of different basic psychological needs on the relationships among WLB, OT, and PWB. Direct, total, and indirect effects were examined. Standardized coefficients and confidence intervals are reported.

Third, a factor representing the three psychological needs was created, and a mediational model was tested to examine the mediating effect of this factor on the relationship between WLB and OT with PWB. After examining the differential roles of the three basic psychological needs, we aimed to explore their joint effects through the factorial integration of needs' satisfaction and, in turn, to develop a simplified mediational model.

This approach is theoretically grounded in SDT, which conceptualizes basic psychological needs as an integrated and mutually reinforcing system rather than as entirely independent mechanisms (Ryan and Deci, 2017). While examining autonomy, competence, and relatedness separately allows their distinct roles to be identified, modelling them as a combined factor enables their overall contribution to psychological functioning to be examined. Therefore, the aggregated construct is used as a complementary specification to assess the robustness and parsimony of the mediational model rather than as an alternative derived from exploratory model testing.

Employee Relations

Maximum-likelihood robust (MLR) estimation was used in the SEM analyses to obtain parameter estimates and standard errors that are robust to departures from multivariate normality. Z scores, confidence intervals, standardized coefficients, and explained variance were reported for the mediation analyses. The descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted using SPSS 21.0, whereas the confirmatory factor and mediational analyses were conducted using JASP 0.18.3.0. Finally, a structural equation model was tested using the program EQS 6.1, including all factor variables and their respective items. Data fit was examined by calculating χ^2, CFI, SRMR, RMSEA, and 90% CI RMSEA.

Results

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the study variables, revealing high scores for basic psychological needs, WLB, and OT. Moderate mean scores were observed for employee PWB. The correlations indicated positive associations between psychological needs, OT, WLB, and PWB.

Table 1 about here

To account for individual-level differences, we first estimated a baseline model including key demographic control variables (gender and age) (see Table 2). This model allows us to assess the extent to which PWB is associated with basic individual characteristics before the main explanatory variables are introduced. The inclusion of these controls does not substantially alter the pattern of results observed in subsequent models, supporting the robustness of the findings.

The data in Table 2 show that both OT and WLB were positively associated with PWB, whereas the demographic controls were not significantly associated with PWB.

Table 2 about here

Employee Relations

Before interpreting the hypothesized relationships, we assessed the fit of the overall structural model, including all factors and their respective items. The model showed good fit to the data, $\chi^2(46) = 189.53$, $p < .001$, CFI = .960, SRMR = .056, RMSEA = .046, 90% CI [.039, .053]. Figure 3 presents the structural model, including the standardized path coefficients and factor loadings. All measurement equations were significant, supporting the model's adequacy and allowing us to proceed with interpreting the direct and indirect effects.

Mediation analyses

Figure 1 shows the model of the mediating effect of the three psychological needs on the relationships between WLB and OT (independent variables) and PWB (dependent variable), and Table 3 presents the results. Both WLB and OT had significant direct effects on PWB and significant indirect effects through competence and relatedness. In contrast, autonomy did not emerge as a significant mediator. Accordingly, these findings provide partial support for Hypotheses H1 and H2, indicating that the hypothesized mediation was supported for competence and relatedness but not for autonomy. Rather than contradicting Self-Determination Theory, this finding suggests that the mediating roles of basic psychological needs may vary across organizational contexts, with competence and relatedness emerging as significant mediating pathways in the full-time remote work setting examined here. For OT, the indirect effect through competence and relatedness was $\beta = .20$ ($p < .001$), while the direct effect on PWB remained significant ($\beta = .08$, $p = .004$), resulting in a total effect of $\beta = .27$ ($p < .001$). The estimated direct effect of WLB on PWB ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$) was numerically larger than that of OT ($\beta = .08$, $p = .004$). However, no formal statistical comparison between these coefficients was conducted; therefore, this difference should not be interpreted as evidence that one effect is significantly stronger than the other. The positive indirect effect of WLB through competence and relatedness was $\beta = .06$ ($p < .001$).

Employee Relations

Together, WLB, OT, competence, and relatedness accounted for 28% of the variance in PWB.

Table 3 about here

Figure 1 about here

We calculated a factor that incorporates the three psychological needs into a single construct to examine its mediating effect on the relationships between WLB, OT, and PWB. Figure 2 illustrates the relationships between the study variables, and Table 4 presents the results. WLB and OT were positively associated with PWB, both directly and through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. As a result, the factor of psychological needs is a partial mediator, and the indirect effects are positive and significant in the relationships between the independent variables (WLB and OT) and the dependent variable (PWB).

The indirect effect of OT through the combined psychological needs factor was $\beta = .19$ ($p < .001$), whereas the indirect effect of perceived WLB was also positive and significant. After accounting for basic psychological needs, both OT and perceived WLB retained significant direct associations with PWB. However, no formal statistical comparison between these coefficients was conducted; therefore, differences in coefficient size should be interpreted with caution. This model accounted for 27% of the variance in PWB.

Table 4 about here

Figure 2 about here

Figure 3 about here

Discussion

Employee Relations

This study examined the relationships between OT, perceived WLB, basic psychological need satisfaction, and PWB among full-time remote workers in the European technology sector. The findings show that both OT and perceived WLB are positively associated with PWB, directly and indirectly through basic psychological need satisfaction. More specifically, competence and relatedness emerged as significant mediating pathways, whereas autonomy did not. These findings are broadly consistent with SDT while also providing a more differentiated understanding of how basic psychological needs are associated with well-being in a full-time remote work context.

The distinct roles of the three psychological needs are particularly relevant. Remote work is frequently associated with flexibility and discretion, which may lead to an emphasis on autonomy as a central mechanism explaining employee outcomes. However, autonomy did not significantly mediate the relationships examined in this study. One possible explanation is that flexibility in where work is performed does not necessarily translate into greater experienced autonomy, particularly when employees remain subject to digital monitoring, standardized workflows, or technological constraints. In contrast, competence and relatedness emerged as significant mediating pathways, suggesting that employees' sense of effectiveness and their experience of social connection are important for understanding how OT and perceived WLB are associated with PWB.

These findings also help clarify the role of OT and perceived WLB in full-time remote work. In contexts characterized by limited physical visibility and fewer spontaneous interpersonal interactions, OT may reduce uncertainty and facilitate coordination without extensive direct monitoring, while perceived WLB may help employees manage the permeability of work and personal roles. The findings should not be interpreted as evidence that these relationships are unique to remote work, since the present study does not compare remote and non-remote employees. Rather, they indicate that full-time remote work provides a theoretically relevant context for examining how relational and

boundary-management conditions are associated with PWB through basic psychological need satisfaction.

Finally, perceived WLB retained a significant direct association with PWB after accounting for basic psychological needs, as did OT. Although the estimated direct association between perceived WLB and PWB was numerically larger than that of OT, no formal statistical comparison between these coefficients was conducted. Accordingly, differences in coefficient magnitude should be interpreted with caution. Overall, the findings extend remote work and HRD research by moving beyond whether remote work is beneficial or detrimental and instead identifying the psychological pathways through which relational and boundary-management conditions are associated with employee well-being.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to SDT and remote work research by showing that the three basic psychological needs do not necessarily emerge as equivalent pathways linking workplace conditions to employee well-being. While SDT identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as universal psychological needs, our findings provide a more differentiated account of their mediating roles in a full-time remote work context. In particular, competence and relatedness emerged as significant mediating pathways between OT, perceived WLB, and PWB, whereas autonomy did not. This finding does not challenge the importance of autonomy within SDT but suggests that the psychological mechanisms associated with well-being may depend on the specific organizational conditions under examination.

This distinction also contributes to the remote work literature, which has often emphasized flexibility and discretion and, consequently, the role of autonomy in explaining employee outcomes. Our findings broaden this perspective by highlighting

Employee Relations

competence and relatedness as relevant pathways through which relational and boundary-management conditions are associated with PWB. In full-time remote work, feeling effective and capable in one's work and maintaining meaningful social connections may therefore represent important dimensions of psychological need satisfaction alongside autonomy. From an HRD perspective, this extends attention beyond employee discretion to the organizational conditions that support learning, effectiveness, social connection, and sustainable well-being in digitally mediated work environments.

Practical Implications

The findings offer several actionable implications for HRD professionals and managers responsible for full-time remote teams. First, the positive association between OT and PWB suggests that organizations should translate trust into everyday management practices. Rather than relying primarily on activity monitoring or digital surveillance, managers can establish agreed deliverables, clarify responsibilities and decision rights, and evaluate employees on outcomes. Regular one-to-one developmental check-ins can be used to identify obstacles, provide feedback, and discuss support needs rather than simply monitor task completion. Transparent communication about organizational decisions and employee involvement in decisions that affect their work may further reinforce a trust-based and cooperative work environment (Wang et al., 2021; Contreras et al., 2020; Gilson et al., 2015).

Second, the significant mediating role of competence indicates that employee development should remain visible and structured when work is performed remotely. HRD professionals can establish individual development goals, provide regular developmental feedback, and ensure access to virtual mentoring, coaching, and relevant training. Managers can also incorporate discussions on skills development and career progression into periodic one-to-one meetings, giving remote employees opportunities to

Employee Relations

assess their progress and identify future development needs. Such practices can help maintain opportunities for learning and professional growth when informal workplace learning is less readily available (Carillo et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2022).

Third, the mediating role of relatedness indicates that social connection should be intentionally incorporated into remote work practices rather than left to informal interaction. Organizations can introduce onboarding buddy systems, peer mentoring, communities of practice, and protected opportunities for team interaction that are not exclusively task focused. Periodic in-person meetings may complement these practices where feasible. The objective is not to increase the number of virtual meetings, but to create regular opportunities for employees to receive social support, maintain professional relationships, and experience a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2015; Cooper and Kurland, 2002; Eurofound, 2020).

Finally, the positive association between perceived WLB and PWB highlights the importance of making boundary management operational at the team level. Managers can establish explicit expectations regarding response times and availability, avoid routine communication outside agreed working hours, periodically review workloads, and encourage employees to take breaks and use available right-to-disconnect policies. Leaders should also model these behaviors themselves, since formal policies may have limited value if employees perceive an implicit expectation of constant availability (Kossek et al., 2022; Oakman et al., 2022). Taken together, these practices suggest that supporting PWB in remote work requires an integrated approach combining trust-based management, continued skill development, deliberate opportunities for social connection, and clear work-home boundaries.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer directionality or causality between trust, need satisfaction, and PWB. Future research should employ longitudinal methods to investigate how trust develops in remote work settings and its lasting impact on employee PWB.

Second, sample specificity may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should consider broader, more diverse samples to assess whether similar patterns hold across different work arrangements. Finally, measurement constraints should be considered. More broadly, the use of secondary survey data from the EWCS imposed inherent constraints on the operationalization of constructs. Although the EWCS offers important advantages in sample size, cross-national comparability, and external validity, its measures were not specifically designed to test the theoretical framework proposed in this study. Consequently, some constructs could only be operationalized using a limited number of items, which may have attenuated the strength of certain relationships, particularly the non-significant mediating role of autonomy. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. OT was assessed as a broad relational construct encompassing employees' perceptions of mutual trust with management and a cooperative workplace climate. Although this operationalization is consistent with previous EWCS-based research and appropriate for the purposes of the present study, these dimensions are conceptually distinct and may exert different influences on employees' motivation, engagement, and PWB. Moreover, the use of single-item measures may raise concerns regarding content validity and reliability, particularly when constructs are theoretically rich and multidimensional (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012). Future research should therefore employ primary data and validated multi-item scales to examine mutual trust and cooperative climate as distinct constructs, while also capturing WLB and the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness more comprehensively. Doing so would provide a more rigorous test of the proposed

Employee Relations

theoretical model and enable a more nuanced understanding of the distinct and complementary contributions of these organizational resources to employees' PWB. Furthermore, future studies should explore the mechanisms through which autonomy operates in remote work settings, particularly in hybrid work models where employees experience varying levels of independence.

A further limitation concerns the measurement of WLB. Although the single-item indicator used in the EWCS has been employed in previous research and captures employees' perceived compatibility between working hours and personal commitments, it does not encompass the multidimensional nature of the WLB construct. Consequently, aspects such as role conflict, enrichment, boundary management, and satisfaction with the balance achieved are not directly captured. Given the central role of WLB in our theoretical model, future research should employ validated multi-item scales to examine whether the observed relationships remain robust across broader conceptualizations of the construct.

Conclusion

This study examines how OT and perceived WLB are associated with PWB among full-time remote workers in the European technology sector, considering the mediating roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The findings show that both OT and perceived WLB are positively associated with PWB and that competence and relatedness emerge as significant mediating pathways, whereas autonomy does not.

These findings contribute to a more differentiated understanding of basic psychological need satisfaction in remote work. Rather than assuming that the flexibility associated with remote work necessarily makes autonomy the principal pathway to well-being, the results highlight the relevance of employees' sense of effectiveness and social connection. For HRD, this reinforces the importance of combining trust-based management and work-life

Employee Relations

boundary support with continued opportunities for development and meaningful interpersonal connection. Overall, the study suggests that sustaining well-being in full-time remote work depends not only on where employees work but also on the organizational conditions that shape how they experience and perform their work.

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Employee Relations

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations

	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Work-life balance (WLB)	3.29(.72)	1					
2. Organizational Trust (OT)	13.16(1.86)	.23***	1				
3.Relatedness (R)	8.74(1.33)	.22***	.40***	1			
4.Autonomy (A)	11.41(2.34)	.17***	.42***	.50***	1		
5.Competence (C)	8.38(1.28)	.22***	.47***	.46***	.61***	1	
6.Psychological Well-being (PWB)	20.26(4.83)	.31***	.33***	.35***	.35***	.47***	1

Note. ***p<.001, p**<.01, and *p<.05.

Table 2: Linear regression analysis.

	F / R2 13.79 / .11	t	β	p
Gender		.29	.01	.772
Age		.64	.02	.524
Education level		-.23	-.01	.815
Country		-.28	-.01	.780
Seniority		.63	.02	.526
Work-life balance (WLB)		6.81	.24	<.001
Organizational Trust (OT)		5.87	.21	<.001

Dependent variable: Psychological Well-being.

Employee Relations

Table 3. Multiple partial mediation analysis of the three basic psychological needs

	Est.	SE	Z	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect						
WLB->PWB	.19	.02	8.33	<.001	.15	.24
OT->PWB	.08	.03	2.92	.004	.03	.13
Indirect effects						
WLB->R->PWB	.02	.01	3.44	<.001	.01	.03
WLB->C->PWB	.04	.01	4.55	<.001	.02	.05
WLB->A->PWB	.01	.01	1.32	.186	-.01	.01
OT->R->PWB	.04	.01	4.13	<.001	.02	.06
OT->C->PWB	.14	.02	9.26	<.001	.11	.17
OT->A->PWB	.02	.01	1.44	.149	-.01	.04
Total effect						
WLB->PWB	.25	.02	10.12	<.001	.20	.29
OT->PWB	.27	.02	11.21	<.001	.23	.32
Total indirect effects						
WLB->PWB	.06	.01	5.59	<.001	.04	.08
OT->PWB	.20	.02	12.48	<.001	.17	.23
Residual covariances						
R<->C	.26	.02	11.91	<.001	.22	.30
R<->A	.32	.02	14.12	<.001	.28	.37
C<->A	.40	.02	17.44	<.001	.36	.45
Path coefficients						
R->PWB	.11	.03	4.29	<.001	.06	.17
C->PWB	.31	.03	10.60	<.001	.25	.37
A->PWB	.04	.03	1.45	.148	-.02	.10
WLB->PWB	.19	.02	8.33	<.001	.15	.24
OT->PWB	.08	.03	2.91	.004	.03	.13
WLB->R	.14	.02	5.75	<.001	.09	.19
OT->R	.37	.02	15.16	<.001	.32	.41
WLB->C	.12	.02	5.03	<.001	.07	.16
OT->C	.44	.02	19.05	<.001	.40	.49
WLB->A	.08	.02	3.24	.001	.03	.13
OT->A	.40	.02	16.64	<.001	.35	.45

Notes: OT = Organizational trust; WLB = Work-life balance; BPN = Basic Psychological Needs; A = Autonomy; C = Competence; R = Relatedness; PWB = Psychological Well-being. PWB: R^2 = .28; R: R^2 = .18, C: R^2 = .23, and A: R^2 =.18.

Employee Relations

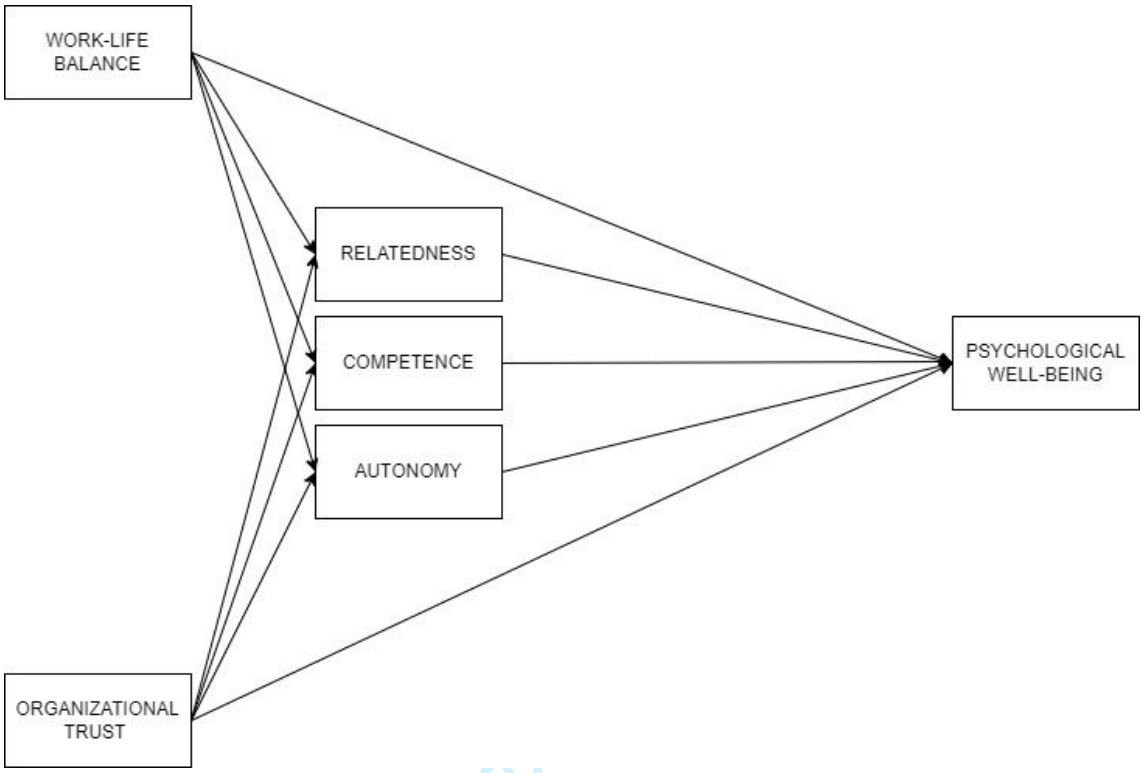
Table 4. Partial mediation analysis of the basic psychological needs factor.

	Est.	SE	Z	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect						
WLB->PWB	.20	.02	8.48	<.001	.15	.24
OT->PWB	.09	.03	3.33	<.011	.04	.14
Indirect effects						
WLB->BPN->PWB	.04	.01	5.50	<.001	.03	.07
OT->BPN->PWB	.19	.02	12.05	<.001	.16	.22
Total effect						
WLB->PWB	.25	.02	10.12	<.001	.20	.29
OT->PWB	.27	.02	11.21	<.001	.23	.32
Path coefficients						
BPN->PWB	.38	.03	14.46	<.001	.33	.43
WLB->PWB	.20	.02	8.48	<.001	.15	.24
OT->PWB	.09	.03	3.33	<.001	.04	.14
WLB->BPN	.13	.02	5.95	<.001	.09	.18
OT->BPN	.49	.02	21.77	<.001	.45	.53

Notes. OT = Organizational trust; WLB = Work-life balance; BPN = Basic Psychological Needs; A = Autonomy; C = Competence; R = Relatedness; PWB = Psychological Well-being. PWB: $R^2 = .27$, and BPN: $R^2 = .29$

Employee Relations

Figure 1: Conceptual diagram of the multiple partial mediation analysis of the three basic psychological needs.



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Figure 2: Conceptual diagram of the partial mediation analysis of the basic psychological needs factor.

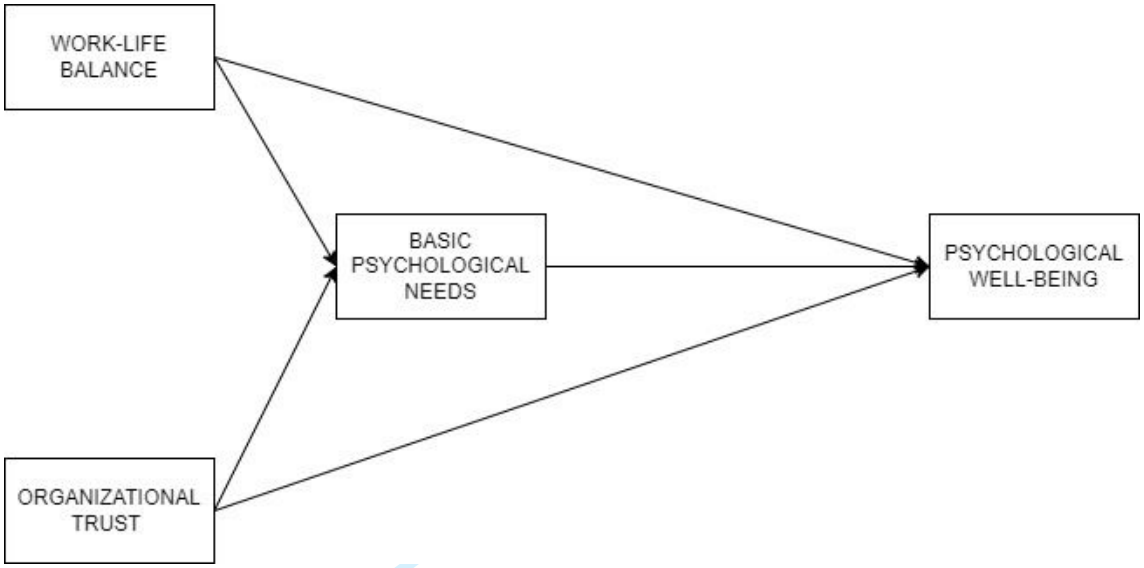
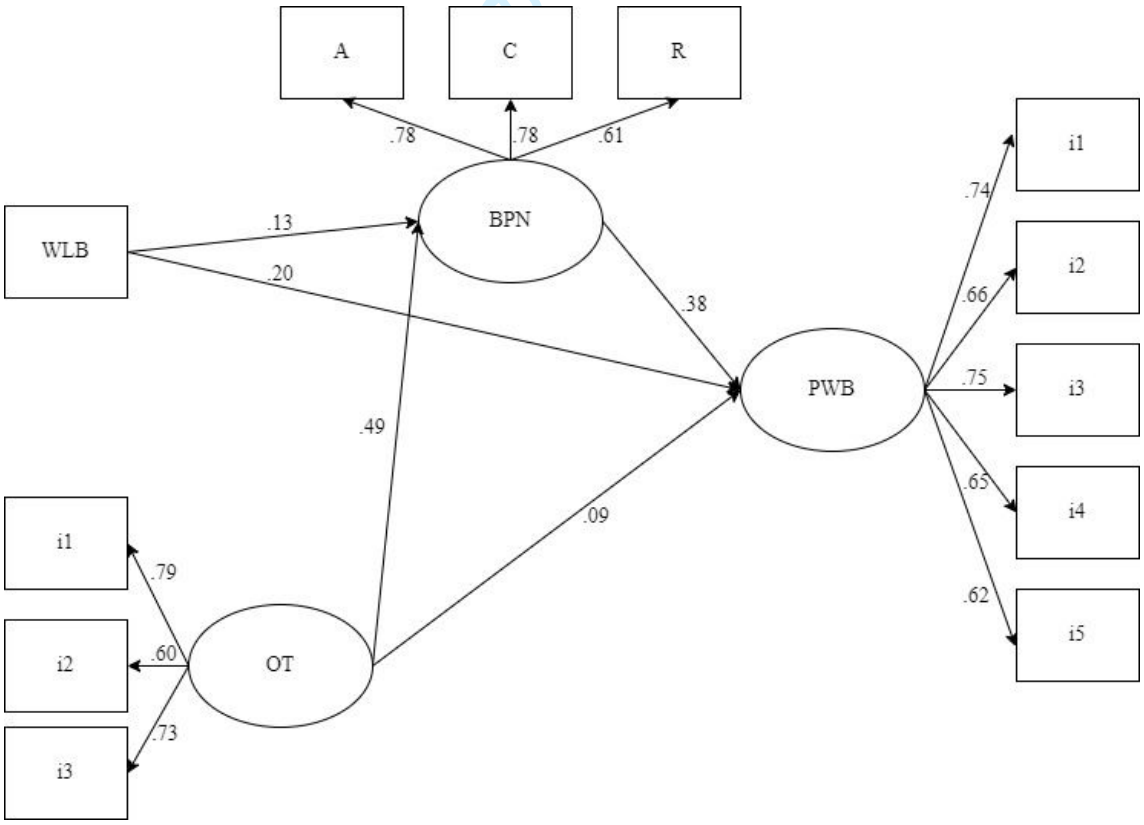


Figure 3: Structural equation model.



Notes. OT = Organizational trust; WLB = Work-life balance; BPN = Basic Psychological Needs; A = Autonomy; C = Competence; R = Relatedness; PWB = Psychological Well-being.