

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# From Pandemic to Progress: Rethinking Work Patterns in Vietnam to Improve Flexibility and Support Gender Equality

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand the characteristics of flexible work arrangements in Vietnam. First, it examines the adoption of flexible work arrangements in the aftermath of COVID-19, which had profound impacts on work-life balance, career opportunities, and workplace gender dynamics. Despite Vietnam's significance as a large emerging economy, research on flexible work arrangements among workers operating in this nation has been limited. Second, using conservation of resources theory, complemented by positive organizational behavior theory, the study identifies the resources needed for flexible work and those created during this specific time period. An online survey was utilized to collect primary data from  $n = 217$  Vietnamese workers on this phenomenon. Although women reported low levels of preparedness for remote working, beneficial aspects for both genders arose through greater flexibility, reduced commuting, increased productivity, financial savings, and more leisure time. Third, the study proposes a conceptual framework to enhance the implementation of remote working and discusses implications for organizations and governments in emerging economies like Vietnam.

## 1 | Introduction

The unpredictable impact of COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020 led to major shifts in work dynamics, compelling organizations to adopt remote work strategies due to lockdown conditions that prevented the movement of workers (de Lucas Ancillo et al. 2023; Ha et al. 2023). This sudden shift to remote working underscored the vital necessity for organizations to be nimble and adaptable, transforming traditional work practices and underscoring the value of robust and flexible work arrangements (FWAs) (Arunprasad et al. 2022). This transition to working from home/anywhere was a huge transformation for societies around the world that suddenly had to rely exclusively on virtual communication to complete collaborative tasks online (Özkazanc-Pan 2019). Through the lenses of Conservation of

Resources (COR) and Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) theories, our study examines this transitional time and provides a thorough framework for understanding how FWAs support resilience. Through the integration of these ideas, this study offers fresh perspectives on how businesses may effectively manage crises while maintaining alignment with more general societal objectives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).

The impact of the pandemic can be understood using COR (Hobfoll et al. 2018) and POB theories (Caligiuri et al. 2020). COR theory helps to explain how individuals respond to adversity in terms of protecting and investing in particular resources (such as resilience). On the other hand, POB illuminates how organizations identify opportunities and prepare for future challenges,

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## Summary

- COVID-19 triggered unprecedented changes in work patterns and a global shift toward flexible work arrangements (FWAs).
- FWAs have led to improvements in flexibility, productivity, commuting, financial savings, and family time.
- Continued FWAs could have positive impacts on work-related gender disparities in emerging economies like Vietnam.
- A proposed framework provides actionable strategies for organizations to thrive more dynamically and equitably.

uncertainties, and provide insights to achieve the UN's SDGs in terms of gender equality. Challenges or prospective resource losses include the use of technology, solo work in isolation, and social distance (Antonacopoulou and Georgiadou 2021), and a duty of care while working from home. These examples highlight the importance of resources for resilience and well-being (Zacher and Rudolph 2021).

COVID-19 led to a stronger cultivation and promotion of wellness resources to support employee performance (e.g., Muñoz et al. 2023). For instance, many organizations rolled out FWAs, which encompass flextime and flexplace (Shifrin and Michel 2022). Flextime offers control over work hours, including adjusted schedules, compressed weeks, reduced hours, and the 4-day workweek (Jahal et al. 2024), while flexplace allows work activities to occur outside the traditional workplace, typified by telecommuting and remote work (Shifrin and Michel 2022). Combining these FWAs can benefit both employees and organizations, promoting work-life balance, facilitating collaboration across locations, and ensuring safety (Sinclair et al. 2020). FWAs are also part of a modern work approach that embraces flexibility and increasingly encompasses settings such as work from home, third places, work from anywhere, and hybrid arrangements, thus signaling a dynamic shift in how we approach and define work (Moglia et al. 2021). However, during a crisis, FWAs can also create resource losses for workers, testing resilience and overall well-being (Zacher and Rudolph 2021), for example, when technological issues arise or when working in isolation and social distancing (Antonacopoulou and Georgiadou 2021).

While COVID-19 encouraged a large body of research focusing on FWA, work from home, or home-based telework, several knowledge gaps remain. For instance, Nguyen (2021a) identified a research vacuum concerning factors related to (a) the adoption frequency of home-based telework during a health crisis, and (b) preferences in the development of home-based telework after a crisis. In emerging economies, such as Vietnam, there are only limited studies that have been conducted regarding the extent to which people adjusted their work arrangements due to COVID-19 (Conesa Martinez et al. 2023). Within the socioeconomic context of this study, Anh et al. (2022) conducted an investigation into citizens' changing working conditions following COVID-19 in Vietnam and found that respondents experienced negative mental and physical changes; particularly relevant,

they found that WFH difficulties adversely impacted work effectiveness during the strict lockdown.

Another knowledge gap involves understanding the impact of these changes on gender dynamics in the workplace. Specifically, there remains a dearth of comprehensive exploration regarding differential resource losses and gains across genders. COVID-19 pandemic left a complex imprint on gender dynamics (Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen 2020), with changes in work arrangements which have not affected everyone equally (Felstead and Reuschke 2023). The experiences of men and women during this shift in work norms may differ significantly, leading to the necessity of understanding and addressing potential disparities and challenges (Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen 2020). As organizations strive for greater flexibility, it becomes imperative to explore how these changes interact with gender roles, expectations, and opportunities within the workplace.

Within the emerging economy context of Vietnam, several factors converge to make it a compelling case study. With a population exceeding 98.5 million and women constituting 47.3% of the workforce (World Bank 2023), Vietnam offers a rich context to explore how FWAs intersect with cultural and gender dynamics. There is also a lack of comprehensive research specifically addressing FWA's impact on gender dynamics within the Vietnamese context. Furthermore, Vietnam's dynamic economy, characterized by a significant increase of 54% in Foreign Direct Investment receipts compared to 2022 (Dojan 2023), a growing workforce (World Bank 2023), and a notable shift towards a knowledge-based economy (Nhan Dan 2021), positions it as an interesting case study. Examining Vietnam's response to the changing work landscape post-COVID-19 holds broader implications for emerging economies dealing with similar transitions.

Against this backdrop, the present study will investigate the following research questions (RQs):

Research Question 1. What factors prompted the adoption of FWAs in Vietnam during COVID-19?

Research Question 2. (a) What are the resource benefits or gains?

Research Question 2b. What are the resource challenges or losses of this new work model for employees?

Research Question 3. What impact has the growth of FWAs in Vietnam had on gender dynamics?

These questions are associated with three key objectives and contributions:

Objective 1. *Identify factors influencing FWA adoption.* Examine the variables impacting Vietnam's adoption of flexible work arrangements amid the COVID-19 pandemic, providing insight into the forces that prompted these changes.

This new knowledge will contribute to a broader academic understanding of FWAs by identifying the factors influencing the adoption of FWAs in emerging economies such as

Vietnam, where a significant gap exists in the current literature. Understanding these factors also contributes to management practice and assists in more successful adoption strategies for FWAs, potentially augmenting the flexibility and resilience of organizations operating in an emerging economy context.

**Objective 2. Assess the benefits and challenges of FWAs.** Provide a thorough analysis of these changing work arrangements by evaluating the advantages and difficulties that companies and employees in Vietnam perceive regarding flexible work models.

Understanding the benefits and challenges of FWAs from this national context makes a timely and significant contribution to the growing body of academic literature on this topic in emerging economies. From a practitioner perspective, the findings from this investigation contribute towards developing better work arrangements in the future, more productive and satisfied employees, and more sustainable corporate practices through the creation of well-informed policy decisions that balance the competing pressures of responding to global events and at the same time being locally responsive.

**Objective 3. Analyze the impact on gender dynamics.** Examine how work-life balance, career advancement, and gender biases in remote work environments are affected by the increased availability of FWAs in Vietnamese businesses.

The topic of gender equality in the workplace is an ongoing global challenge (e.g., Akbari et al. 2024), underlined by SDG5 and the UN's targets for ensuring women's full and effective participation in work, and equal opportunities for leadership (United Nations 2023). This research contributes new findings from an emerging field of study. Indeed, by analyzing data on the potential opportunities for women arising from the post-pandemic availability of FWAs, and by using COR and POB theory, the study contributes to investigating the impact of this phenomenon in emerging regions such as Vietnam. From a management perspective, understanding the potential implications this has for female employment and gender equality may lead to a deeper understanding of women's role and related equal opportunities in emerging economies in the future.

The study uses the framing of COR theory to understand resource losses and gains. POB is utilized to identify and develop the particular types of resources that can enhance gender equity, thereby overlaying values onto the COR framing of resource losses and gains. Most broadly, our theoretical contribution centers around COR theory being predictive of individual decisions designed to minimize resource losses or maximize gains, while we incorporate POB to understand and promote well-being, performance at work, and gender equity. The study is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a literature review, including facets of the Vietnamese economy and the theoretical framing of the study; Section 3 elucidates the data collection process and the empirical research methodology employed; Section 4 presents the research results; Section 5 transitions into the discussion, including managerial implications, and explores implications for policymakers and governments; and, finally, Section 6 offers conclusions and outlines potential avenues for future research.

## 2 | Literature Review, the Vietnamese Context, and Theoretical Framework

The survey described below involved remote work in Vietnam during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given this context, we first describe research on remote work, and then remote work during the pandemic. However, it is also expected that remote work will ultimately transition to hybrid work, which is partly remote and partly in a workplace (Hopkins and Bardoel 2023), so relevant research on hybrid work is also discussed prior to covering the Vietnamese context and the theoretical framing of the analysis.

Remote work, or work from home, was initially facilitated by technological advancements, including telecommunications and the internet (Dingel and Neiman 2020). This arrangement offers numerous benefits, including enhanced flexibility, reduced commute-related time and expenses, and an improved work-life equilibrium (Kok and Akbari 2024; Schade et al. 2021). Employees who perform their tasks from home often enjoy the freedom to set their schedules, aligning their tasks with peak productivity hours or personal commitments (Peeters et al. 2005). However, challenges accompany this mode of work, including isolation and also a sense of disconnection from colleagues and workplace culture that is not inclusive of remote employees (Stevens 2021). Furthermore, the blurring of boundaries between professional and personal life can prove challenging when both spaces occupy the same physical location (Bergefurt et al. 2023).

Remote work during the pandemic was limited to work from home, and the transition was often both fast and unexpected. Research on remote work during the pandemic in Latin America found increased levels of perceived stress (with perceived stress adversely affecting men's productivity more than women's), lower levels of work-life balance and work satisfaction, but also increased productivity and engagement (Sandoval-Reyes et al. 2020). Research on remote work in Germany over a 2-week period during the height of the pandemic found positive and improving levels of work engagement, flow, affect, and detachment. High levels of competence satisfaction were found to improve most of these variables, with some evidence that mothers of young children reported higher levels of aggression (Schade et al. 2021). A study of remote work during the pandemic for a corporate real estate office (nation not identified) found that having a dedicated office and the absence of noise reduced distraction, which may have improved productivity (Bergefurt et al. 2023). A study of 67 managers in Polish IT companies during the pandemic found concerns regarding low productivity, difficulties supervising workers and coordinating work, the need for physical presence in the workplace, and potentially adverse effects on organizational culture and climate (Błaszczyk et al. 2023). Benefits included enhanced employee flexibility and talent attraction and retention (Błaszczyk et al. 2023). On the contrary, UK research during the height of the pandemic found that work from home positively related to employee productivity and productivity improvements as employees and organizations became more adept at remote work (Felstead and Reuschke 2023). Relatedly, a study of Spanish employees revealed that wellness programs helped to support employee productivity (Muñoz et al. 2023).

Turning to gender and remote work during the pandemic, Carnevale and Hatak (2020) noted that work–family conflict was heightened during the period under study, partly because working from home was necessary, but also because schools and childcare facilities were closed. Such conflicts were arguably of greatest salience to mothers during the pandemic (Catalyst 2020). Although some evidence from the UK suggests that men working from home picked up some of the ‘slack’ in terms of housework and childcare (Chung et al. 2021), evidence from Iceland suggests that the burdens of emotional labor and mental work fell disproportionately on mothers, causing frustration and stress (Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir 2021). Similarly, a Spanish study found disproportionately adverse effects on women balancing work and family during the lockdown, effectively forcing a return to traditional gender roles (Loezar-Hernández et al. 2023). In light of these studies, it is not surprising that a study of employees who worked at home during the pandemic peak (mainly in the UK, Ireland, and the US) found that caregiving by women had the most adverse results in terms of career prospects (Stefanova et al. 2023). Most broadly, the UN (2020) found that the pandemic heightened gender inequality in terms of income, childcare, and domestic violence.

Post-pandemic peak, work arrangements might involve third places, or informal social hubs distinct from home and office settings, fostering social interaction and diversions from daily routines (Oldenburg 1997). These venues encompass coffee shops, parks, community centers, and other public spaces (Hopkins and Bardoel 2023). Third places yield numerous advantages, including community-building, alleviation of isolation, and stimulation of productivity and creativity (Goosen and Cilliers 2020). They offer a change of scenery that helps prevent burnout and enhance overall job satisfaction and well-being (Hopkins et al. 2023). Nonetheless, challenges of working in third places persist, such as noise, distractions, privacy concerns, and limited resources. Additionally, some venues lack vital amenities for remote work, such as reliable internet and suitable workspaces (Stevens 2021).

Relatedly, work arrangements in the aftermath of COVID-19 could involve working from anywhere, where employees can opt to work at diverse locations, including their own homes, co-working environments, or even cafes; technological developments such as high-speed internet enable this approach to working (Mandal et al. 2023). FWAs, therefore, provide several advantages, from increased flexibility to autonomy, thus helping improve employees’ work-life balance (Franken et al. 2021) while slashing commuting time and costs and enhancing job satisfaction. Employers, in turn, experience increased productivity and reduced overhead expenses associated with physical office spaces (Yang et al. 2022). Nevertheless, WFA presents challenges, including potential isolation and disconnection for employees, difficulties in maintaining work-life boundaries, and concerns about productivity and remote collaboration for employers (Knight et al. 2022; Jachimowicz et al. 2021). To tackle these disadvantages, organizations are required to develop clear guidelines, make investments in technology, and enable remote access to essential resources (Choudhury et al. 2021).

Hybrid working, a work arrangement that merges in-office and remote work (Moglia et al. 2021), has recently gained

more acceptance as digital communication tools have become more prominent, for instance, during COVID-19 (Hopkins and Bardoel 2023). Employees in such arrangements can work remotely part of the time and be physically present in the office at other times (Carnevale and Hatak 2020). Numerous advantages are possible with this strategy, such as more flexibility, less commuting, and possible cost reductions for businesses (Verma et al. 2023). Drawbacks are noticed as well, including sustaining work-life balance, guaranteeing fairness between office-based and remote employees (proximity bias), and maintaining team cohesiveness (Medina-Rodríguez et al. 2020). Managing remote and office teams, fostering effective communication, and maintaining productivity become critical for employers (Błaszczyk et al. 2023).

In essence, hybrid working stands as a promising modern work model, carrying both advantages and challenges for employees and employers alike (Angel and Blei 2016). Success in implementing hybrid work necessitates careful consideration of its implications and the formulation of strategies to support effective practices. More importantly, a survey of employees who worked from home during the height of the pandemic in Sydney, Australia, revealed that a solid majority expressed a preference for hybrid work in the future, with only a minority (i.e., <20%) preferring to continue with full-time remote work (Moglia et al. 2021). Similarly, Verma et al. (2023) argued that remote work will transition to hybrid work in India post pandemic, but recent research found access to hybrid work arrangements in Vietnam is currently lower than it is in other Asian countries, such as Japan (Bardoel and Hopkins 2024).

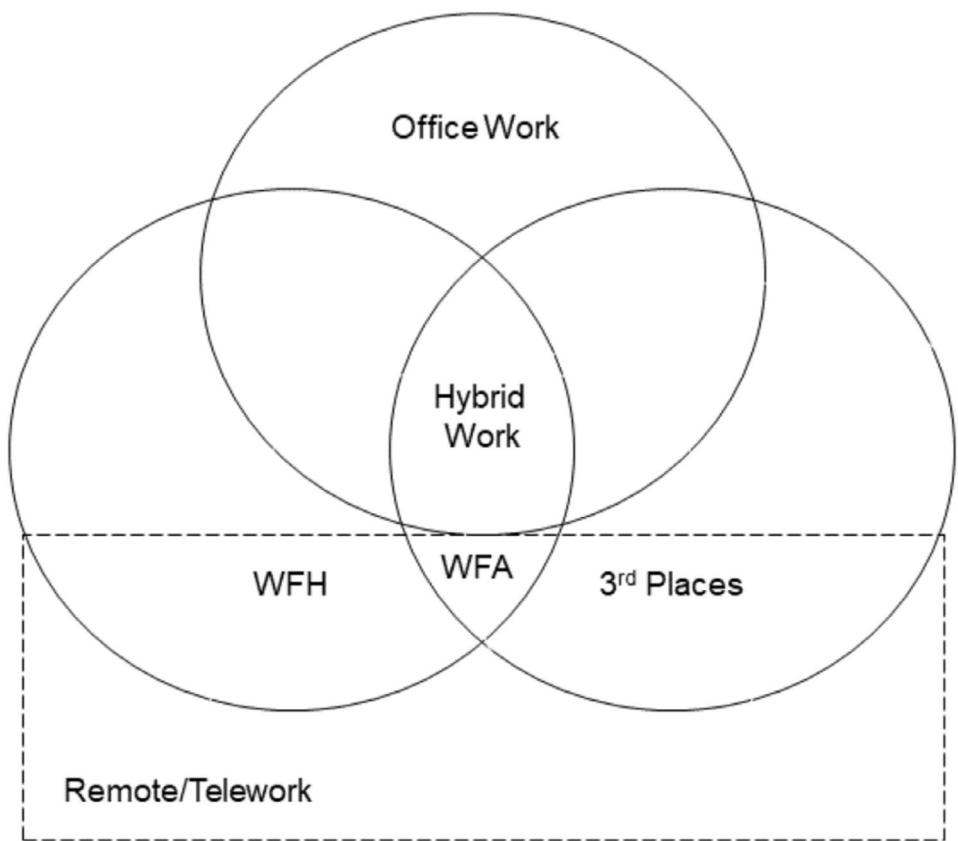
In summary, Hopkins and Bardoel (2023) recently categorized the range of FWAs currently available to workers in ‘remote-capable’ roles, with the use of Figure 1.

## 2.1 | The Vietnamese Context

Vietnam’s economy has grown impressively during the last 10 years, averaging 6%–7% annual GDP growth, with the goal of becoming a high-income country by 2035 (Akbari and Hopkins 2019; Kane et al. 2022). Notably, with an 8.02% expansion in 2022, Vietnam saw its strongest annual growth rate since 1997 (Vu 2022). Vietnam is the second-fastest expanding economy in the ASEAN after Singapore, with a youthful population (more than 70% under 35) and a 48th-place Human Capital Index (World Bank 2023).

However, beneath Vietnam’s economic growth lie persistent gender disparities. Women make up over half of the population, yet they only make up 47.3% of the labor force (ILO 2021). Gender disparities are evident, for example, in rural and developing areas where women perform unpaid work for their families, which affects their capacity to maintain a stable financial situation (Nguyen 2021c). Female-led enterprises, often small and informal, face higher vulnerability during economic crises (Nguyen 2021c). Pre-pandemic, men dominated finance and tech, while women clustered in lower-paying sectors, perpetuating the gender pay gap (Nguyen 2021c).

Turning to experiences during the pandemic peak, female-owned businesses in the Asia-Pacific region had a



**FIGURE 1** | Range of current knowledge work modes. *Source:* Hopkins and Bardoel (2023)

seven-percentage-point higher risk of failure (ILO 2021). Regarding work from home during lockdowns, a study of workers in Hanoi, Vietnam, found that the presence of more than one child in the home had an adverse effect on perceptions of working from home (Nguyen 2021a). However, consistent with the studies discussed above, the presence of children in the home was also associated with positive expectations of hybrid work post-pandemic. In terms of gender, historic equality of unemployment rates turned into a gender gap in 2020 (ILO 2021). Anh et al. (2022) examined lockdown difficulties, well-being, and work effectiveness for a sample of workers during the strictest lockdowns in Vietnam, when any activities outside the home were severely restricted. They found that lockdown difficulties adversely affected both well-being and perceived work effectiveness, but the negative effects on work effectiveness were more muted for women. The present study adds to this small body of literature on working from home in Vietnam during the pandemic.

## 2.2 | Theoretical Framework

The COR theory is a socio-psychological framework that elucidates how individuals endeavor to safeguard and maintain their personal and social resources (Hobfoll 1989). As per the COR theory, individuals possess finite resources, including time, energy, money, and social support, and they make efforts to preserve and safeguard these resources (Hobfoll et al. 2018).

The theory suggests that stress and unpleasant feelings are experienced by people when they lose resources (Hobfoll 2001). A

chain reaction of resource losses can also occur when one resource is lost and prompts the loss of further resources. Resources, on the other hand, bring about favorable effects, including lowered stress levels and elevated well-being (Halbesleben et al. 2014). As per the theory, people employ many techniques to deal with resource loss, including problem-solving, seeking social support, modifying goals, and experiencing resource gain through positive occurrences such as completing a goal or obtaining social support (Westman et al. 2004).

COR theory is relevant to the present study for several reasons. First, the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic represented an immediate loss of resources. Many employees or their family members may have experienced the loss of health and life due to the pandemic. They may also have experienced a loss of social connection and community in terms of mobility restrictions limiting opportunities for social interaction, whether at the workplace, religious observances, public entertainment and sporting venues, or other gathering places. This immediate effect clearly represented a resource loss, so it likely generated stress and negative emotions.

The switch to remote work might have also generated resource losses, whether in terms of lost connections at work, the loss of structure around daily routines and task performance, and a blurring of the lines between work and family, which may have strained effectiveness in each sphere. Simultaneously, remote work may have yielded new resources, most obviously in terms of reduced commuting time, fewer distractions while working, and flexibility regarding when specific tasks are performed. Franken et al. (2021) argued that resource losses due to remote work during

the pandemic generated stress, which, however, could be ameliorated by resource gains, such as supervisory support, enhanced autonomy, positive co-worker relationships, and technological assistance. Our survey and results were designed to identify these resource losses and gains, and specifically which losses and gains were most prevalent. Beyond the specifics, we sought to ascertain whether those engaged in remote work view the situation as involving net resource gains, such that they prefer this arrangement or something intermediate, such as hybrid work.

The POB theoretical framework is then overlayed onto COR theory. POB theory underscores the importance of psychological resources that foster positive states, such as optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, and hope (Luthans 2002). These states are crucial for achieving both individual and organizational goals, resulting in higher engagement, job satisfaction, and overall performance (Nelson and Cooper 2007). Essentially, POB focuses on how positive psychological resources enhance work performance and employee well-being and seeks to promote those outcomes (Luthans 2002). We integrate these theories in two ways. First, COR theory casts reframing and positive states of mind as of minimal importance in comparison to resource preservation and maintenance (Hobfoll 2001), and we use POB to highlight the importance of positive psychological states, which research suggests can have significant impacts on individual decision making (French and Holden 2012). Second, as Luthans and Aviolo (2009) stress, POB is purposeful or prescriptive in promoting positive well-being and work performance, and research suggests this focus of POB is useful for promoting gender equity (Warren et al. 2019); by way of contrast, COR theory is not prescriptive. By integrating POB with COR, this study enriches the COR framework by adding a layer that emphasizes the role of psychological positivity in resource management. The ideological state of the workplace and the psychological state of the individual thus become intertwined, providing a comprehensive view of how resources can be managed not only to mitigate losses but also to cultivate positive psychological states. This integration allows for a more nuanced approach to understanding and improving work patterns (SDG5) and suggests that optimism and resilience can counteract the adverse effects of resource loss while enhancing FWAs' effectiveness.

The UN's SDGs aim to achieve prosperity, well-being, and peace by 2030 (United Nations Development Program, UNDP 2022).

With 17 goals, the SDGs prioritize equity, human rights, and non-discrimination. The present study particularly focuses on SDG5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations 2020). It encompasses nine targets and 14 indicators, including eliminating gender disparities, violence against women, and early and forced marriage, and ensuring equal participation and leadership opportunities, and universal access to sexual and reproductive rights (Kumar et al. 2016).

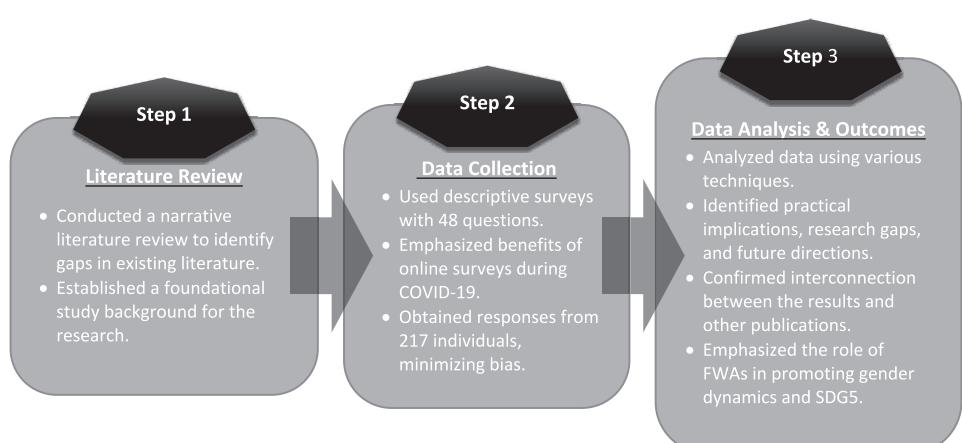
While COR theory is useful for understanding the negative and positive effects of the rapid shift to remote work, POB prescribes specific sets of resources which, operating via COR principles, will promote high performance, employee well-being, and gender equity. Stated differently, without POB, COR theory might be able to predict certain responses in terms of individuals seeking resource gains but cannot prescribe the resources that would additionally foster gender equity.

For organizations to be progressive, there is an inherent importance in fostering positive gender dynamics and implementing inclusive policies such as FWAs, equal pay, and opportunities for career advancement (Thakur et al. 2018). Nurturing diversity, fostering respect, and promoting personal and professional development, alongside cultivating positive relationships, contribute to enhancing workplace sustainability. This approach, in turn, elevates performance, engagement, and the organization's contributions to society (Luthans and Youssef 2007).

### 3 | Methodology

To investigate the impact of the pandemic on gender dynamics through the lens of flexible working, a three-step classification approach was employed (see Figure 2).

**Step 1** involved conducting a narrative literature review to develop a conceptual understanding and identify an appropriate gap in the existing literature, which is an essential aspect of an exploratory study (Rousseau et al. 2008). Narrative literature reviews are unstructured evaluations of the available literature that establish a foundational study background and provide context or justification for the research focus (Stratton 2019).



**FIGURE 2** | Review methodology and steps.

**Step 2** utilized descriptive surveys to collect data from diverse populations (Evans and Mathur 2005). These surveys enabled us to extract the opinions, attitudes, and preferences of participants, providing an instant “snapshot” of the phenomenon under investigation (Yin 2003), which can be used to draw inferences (Galliers 1990). While descriptive surveys do not establish causal relationships, they provide a useful means of studying a representative sample and gathering data regarding specific issues, which can be used to inform future planning and/or decision making (Chisnall 1993).

Online surveys are being increasingly used in this type of research, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vietnam underwent several waves of stringent lockdowns and disruptions during this period (Nguyen 2021b), making online surveys the most dependable method at the time. Other benefits of online surveys include increased reach, higher accuracy, reduced errors and costs, and greater convenience for participants (Baker et al. 2013). According to Baker et al. (2013), researchers can isolate particular participant groups who share specific traits by examining virtual cohorts and communities using online survey research. For this study, data were gathered from May to July 2020.

There were 48 questions in the online survey, and they were divided into several question categories, including

multiple-choice, matrix-table, rank-order, Likert-scale, and open-ended, requiring free-text answers (see Table 1). The questionnaire was designed to be completed in 20 min. To ensure accurate responses from participants who held neutral views, an odd-numbered 5-point Likert scale was selected for the questions (Malhotra 2006). By providing a middle option that allows participants to express ambivalence or neutrality, this type of Likert scale minimizes response bias (Fowler 2014), which can prevent participants from feeling obligated to choose one extreme or the other and, in turn, prevent any distortion of the results (Malhotra 2006).

Before distributing the questionnaire, human ethics clearance was obtained from a participating author's university. We also sought permission from the Human Resources (HR) departments of some of Vietnam's largest employers listed in the 2020 VNR500 Directory (vnr500.com.vn), and participating organizations were asked to provide a link to the online survey to their employees via company newsletters and emails. The survey was developed in English and later translated into Vietnamese, allowing participants to choose their preferred language at the start of the survey.

Out of the 500 questionnaires that were distributed to employees, a total of 217 (145 female, 72 male) complete surveys were received from diverse industries (see Figure 3, and Table 2),

TABLE 1 | Online survey summary.

Description	Theme
Demographic information	Age, gender, marital status, industry, position, education level, full-time/part-time, location/city
Commute, remote working, work from home-related questions before and after COVID-19	Time to commute, mode of transportation, remote working habits, sharing home conditions, work from home daily routine, working hours and distractions, productivity levels, technology competencies, communication satisfaction, cyber security, work from home challenges, stress- and anxiety-related, organizational policy, managerial communication and support for the well-being, benefits of WFH
Open text	For any further comments

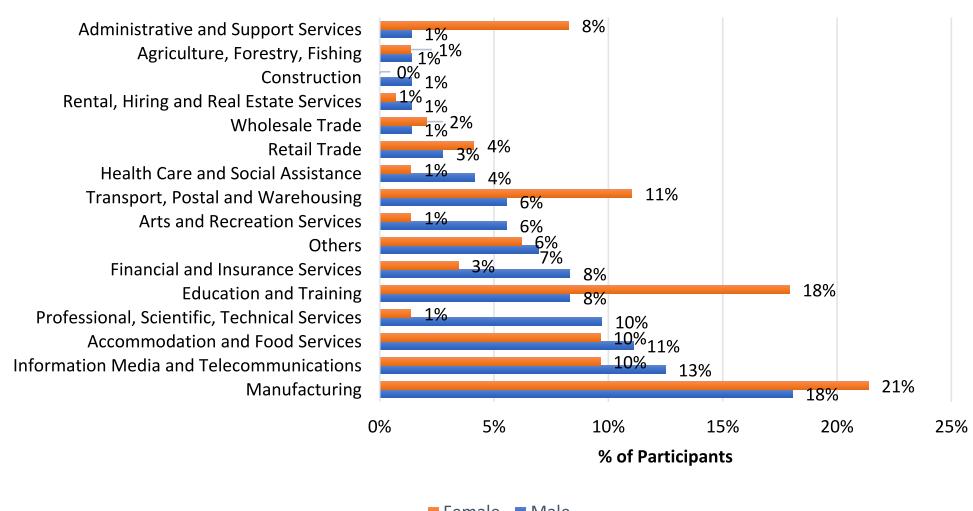


FIGURE 3 | Sectors represented in the survey.

**TABLE 2** | Demographic characteristics of participants.

Demographic	Description	Female*	Male*
Age	19–29	40%	60%
	30 and above	49%	51%
Marital status	Single, never married	59%	46%
	Married/de facto	36%	50%
	Other	5%	4%
Level of education	High school	8%	6%
	Bachelor's degree	52%	50%
	Master's degree	35%	35%
	Other (e.g., doctorate degree, college certificate)	5%	9%
Employment level	Full-time	88%	15%
	Part-time	12%	85%
City/Province	Ho Chi Minh City	44%	56%
	Hanoi City	17%	15%
	Other cities/provinces	12%	9%
Commute habits	Less than 30 min	48%	52%
	30–59 min	43%	35%
	60+ min	5%	7%
Transportation mode	Motorbike	47%	53%
	Car (single occupant)	11%	10%
	Motorbike and car taxis (e.g., Uber, Grab)	10%	13%
	Other (e.g., public transport, bicycle, walk)	12%	13%
Main professions**	Manufacturing	21%	18%
	Education and training	18%	8%
	Information media and telecommunications	10%	13%
	Accommodation and food services	10%	11%
	Transport, postal, and warehousing	6%	7%
	Financial and insurance services	3%	8%
	Professional, scientific, and technical services	1%	10%
	Administrative and support services	8%	1%
	Arts and recreation services	1%	6%
	Retail trade	4%	3%

\*Percentages were rounded off.

\*\*The displayed professions account for 82% and 85% of males and females, respectively.

resulting in a response rate of 43.4%. The number of participants aligns with that of various studies conducted in the domain of business management (e.g., Yadav et al. 2016).

**Step 3** involved analyzing all the collected data using different analytical techniques (e.g., Mean, Pearson Chi-Square, and Independent-samples *t*-test). The research substantiated the

questionnaire's reliability, demonstrating a Cronbach's Alpha test result exceeding 0.7, which holds statistical validity in those areas/sections where scale items were used (Bell et al. 2018). Data analysis involved a combination of analytical methods to explore variations in means. To ascertain potential inter-group associations and differences, Pearson's Chi-square test and Independent-samples *t*-test were used as appropriate.

## 4 | Results

Complete survey responses were received from participants in Vietnam's 13 different provinces/cities and 15 industry sectors. The participants varied in their age ranges, marital status, education levels, and employment levels, as shown in Table 2. Most participants reported commuting for less than an hour before COVID-19, and the most prevalent mode of transportation was by motorbike.

### 4.1 | Work Locations Before and During COVID-19

The results illustrate the extent to which COVID-19 changed work dynamics in Vietnam. Before COVID-19, the approach to remote work was isolated, but the pandemic prompted numerous companies to implement remote work. The availability of remote work opportunities, particularly for women, was limited, with 64% of female participants in the study stating that they had never worked remotely prior to the pandemic. This contrasts with the 25% of males who had not worked remotely before (see Figure 4).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, remote work policies were already gaining popularity among many companies around the world as a mechanism for supporting better employee work-life balance (e.g., Haigh and Hoffman 2011).

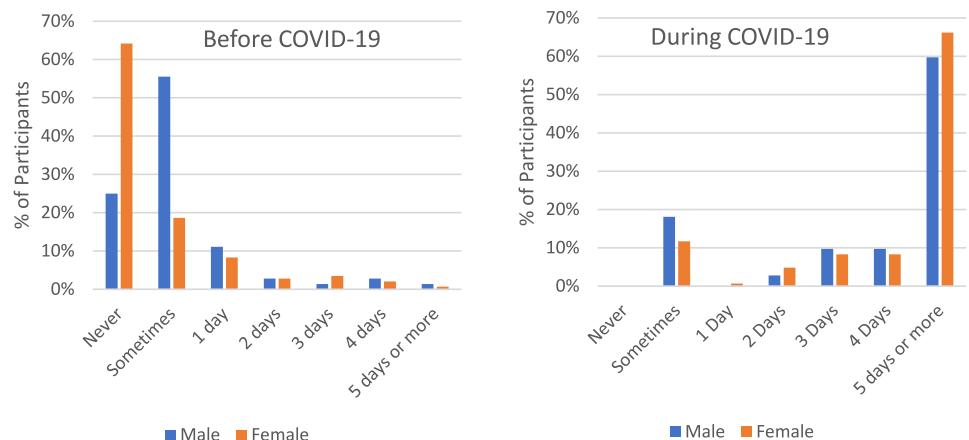


FIGURE 4 | Number of days worked remotely before and during COVID-19.

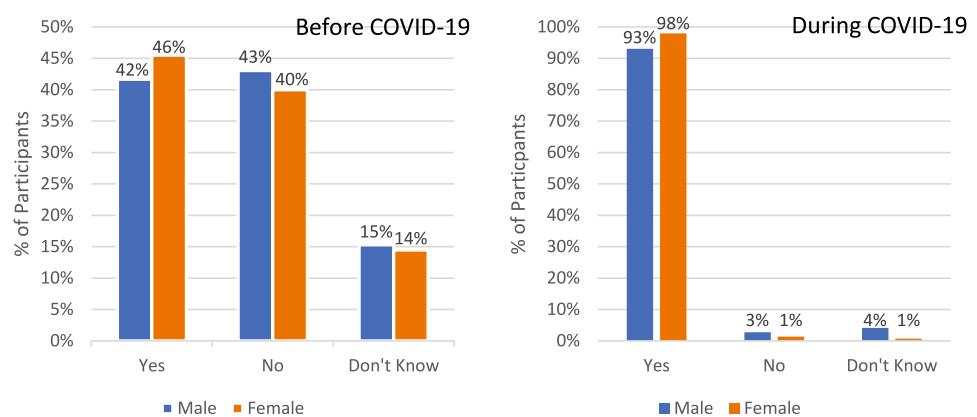


FIGURE 5 | Flexible work arrangements: Pre- versus during pandemic.

However, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of widespread remote working as a necessity to ensure business continuity and employee safety in challenging circumstances (e.g., Moglia et al. 2021).

A before-and-during comparison (Figure 4) illustrates that 66% of female participants were able to perform their work tasks from home on a full-time basis during the pandemic, with 89% of females working from home at least 2 days each week. Applying Pearson's Chi-Square test, this difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 217) = 7.148, p = 0.008$ ), illustrating that it may be possible for many females to continue to conduct their work from home, affording them greater flexibility and improved work-life balance. This expectation is borne out by near-universal expectations of FWAs in the future (Figure 5).

### 4.2 | Approaches to Working Remotely

Regarding methods of approaching remote work (see Table 3), no statistically significant variations emerged between the behaviors of men and women with regard to, for example, daily routine and taking breaks. These results highlight that while working remotely can provide individuals with more freedom, it also necessitates that they exercise self-control and initiative in handling their workload and preserving a healthy work-life

**TABLE 3** | Employees' perceptions of FWAs.\*

Factors	Description	Female	Male
Daily routines (e.g., showering and getting dressed for the day, grabbing a coffee before starting to work, or taking a short walk at lunchtime)	Mostly/always	19%	22%
	Regularly	28%	25%
	Sometimes	37%	43%
	Never	17%	10%
Daily goals that help you to build structure into your day	Mostly/always	26%	28%
	Regularly	39%	35%
	Sometimes	27%	28%
	Never	8%	10%
Taking breaks throughout the day	2 times or less	28%	28%
	3–5 times	47%	38%
	6 times or more	25%	39%
Level of competency with online communication and collaboration tools (e.g., Slack, Zoom, MS Teams, Google Hangouts) before COVID-19	Novice or zero competency	11%	14%
	Average	28%	28%
	Good/expert	43%	42%
Level of competency with online communication and collaboration tools during COVID-19	Novice or zero competency	8%	6%
	Average	18%	14%
	Good/expert	74%	79%
Set working hours and be able to stick to the time	To a small extent or less	23%	21%
	To some extent	34%	40%
	To a large/very large extent	43%	39%
Exercise for at least 30 min per day	Never	21%	11%
	Sometimes	24%	24%
	1–2 days/week	15%	14%
	3+ days/week	40%	51%

\*Under Pearson's Chi-square, there were no statistically significant results or differences.

balance. In addition, employees can adopt several strategies to support themselves in continuing to be productive and upholding a positive work-life balance.

Employees can sustain productivity and a positive work-life balance by using several strategies: establishing daily routines, such as dressing for work and taking midday walks; setting daily goals by prioritizing tasks and breaking them into manageable parts; taking regular breaks to avoid burnout; mastering online communication tools for effective collaboration; setting clear working hours to avoid overworking; and incorporating regular exercise for overall well-being. Implementing these practices helps employees flourish in flexible work environments, as shown in the participants' feedback (see Table 3). By adopting these approaches, employees could stay productive and maintain a healthy work-life balance in hybrid work environments. These approaches have been rated by the participants (see Table 3).

Further, employers need to take a proactive approach to support employees in remote work environments because it can have

a significant impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and job performance (Nelson and Cooper 2007). When employees feel supported by their employer, they are more likely to experience a sense of job security and job satisfaction (Pang et al. 2023). They are also more likely to feel motivated and engaged, which can lead to increased productivity and job performance. In the absence of statistically significant differences, it can be concluded that male and female participants perceive these approaches similarly, except that female employees reported that they engaged in communication with their managers/supervisors significantly less than their male counterparts (see Table 4).

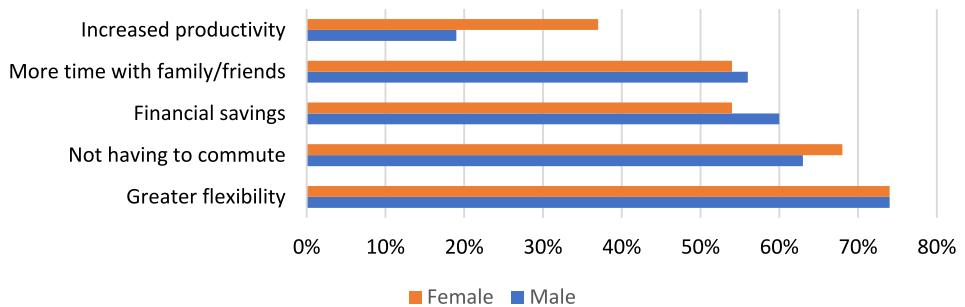
### 4.3 | Benefits and Challenges

When asked to identify the top benefits of remote working, the benefits most commonly reported by both male and female participants in Vietnam were greater flexibility and the ability to avoid commuting to work (see Figure 6; Table 5), consistent

**TABLE 4** | Employers' approaches to FWAs.

Factors	Description	Female	Male
Manager/supervisor was aware of the competing responsibilities of employees	1 = not at all; 5 = fully aware	Mean: 3.17	Mean: 3.29
Frequency of manager/supervisor communication*	Sometimes/never	29%	17%
	1–2 days/week	26%	23%
	3–4 days/week	10%	23%
	Every day	35%	37%
Clear work expectations (e.g., structure, responsibilities, precise objectives, and performance measures)	1 = Not at all; 5 = Fully comprehensive	Mean: 3.25	Mean: 3.19
Encouragement to keep to a routine and establish a space that is work-specific	1 = not at all; 5 = full encouragement	Mean: 3.01	Mean: 3.07
Guidelines on how to set up your home workspace correctly	1 = not at all; 5 = fully comprehensive	Mean: 2.70	Mean: 2.50
Regular feedback from manager/supervisor/organization	1 = not at all; 5 = fully comprehensive	Mean: 2.97	Mean: 2.82
Consideration of balancing work/home demands by manager/supervisor/organization	1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree	Mean: 3.63	Mean: 3.61

\*Under Pearson's Chi-square, a statistically significant difference emerged: ( $\chi^2 (3, n=217) = 8.334, (p=0.040)$ ).

**FIGURE 6** | Benefits of FWAs.**TABLE 5** | Benefits of FWAs.

Perceived benefits	Female	Male
Greater flexibility	74%	74%
Not having to commute	68%	63%
Financial savings	54%	60%
More time with family/friends	54%	56%
Increased productivity*	37%	19%

\*Statistically significant difference under Pearson's Chi-square: 37% females versus 19% males agree with increased productivity ( $p < 0.01$ ).

with the wider societal benefit of reducing the demand for road space during peak commuting times and less traffic congestion (Hopkins and McKay 2014). Male participants tended to report higher levels of financial savings and more time with family as key benefits of hybrid working, while female participants reported increased productivity as the biggest benefit.

These results imply that having access to FWAs and the option to work remotely at least occasionally could help

employees in several ways, including improving work-life balance, producing higher output, and lowering travel expenses. Nonetheless, companies must understand that the advantages of FWAs could differ based on a person's situation and that thorough preparation and communication will be required to guarantee the successful implementation of this kind of work arrangement.

Based on Figure 7 and Table 6, the most commonly reported challenge during the different stages of lockdowns in Vietnam was "distractions at home" for both male and female participants, followed by the blurring of boundaries between work and home. Female participants faced additional challenges related to unreliable Wi-Fi or other technological issues, which may reflect the internet disruptions that occurred during the lockdowns in Vietnam. Interestingly, female participants reported lower challenges with online collaboration compared to their male counterparts, suggesting that women tend to work more collaboratively. This finding highlights the importance of addressing technological infrastructure issues and promoting effective communication and collaboration among employees, regardless of gender, to ensure that work can be carried out efficiently and effectively during challenging

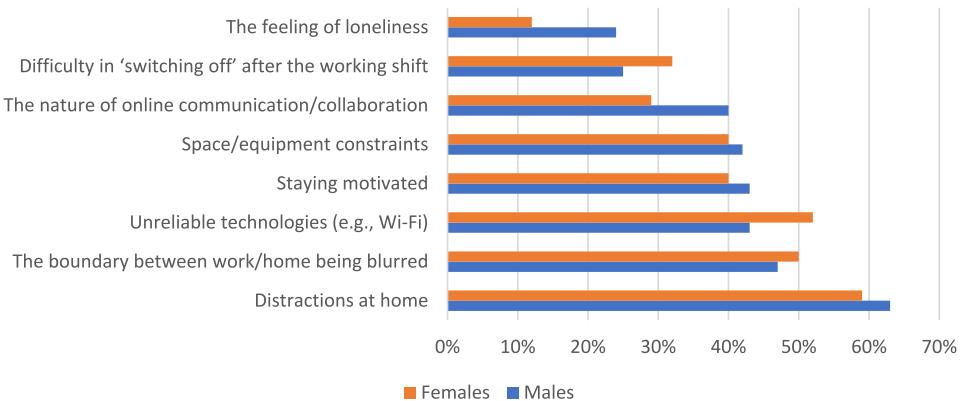


FIGURE 7 | Challenges in FWAs.

TABLE 6 | Most significant challenges of FWAs.

Perceived challenges	Females	Males
The feeling of loneliness*	12%	24%
Difficulty in 'switching off' after the working shift	32%	25%
The nature of online communication/collaboration	29%	40%
Space/equipment constraints	40%	42%
Unreliable technologies (e.g., Wi-Fi)	52%	43%
Staying motivated	40%	43%
The boundary between work/home being blurred	50%	47%
Distractions at home	59%	63%

\*Statistically significant difference—Pearson's Chi-square ( $p < 0.05$ ).

circumstances. Note also that while feelings of loneliness were least often reported, where they were it was significantly more often reported by men.

Along with answering questions on how they managed to balance work and family obligations, participants were also asked how exhausted they felt after work and how this affected their capacity to spend time with their families. The findings indicate that compared to male respondents, female respondents had more trouble focusing on their work because of their family obligations. Arguably, female employees are at the coalface of family obligations, bearing a disproportionate amount of the childcare burden, together with other caregiving responsibilities.

Additionally, all participants acknowledged feeling fatigued after completing a day of remote work, which could limit their ability to enjoy leisure activities at home (see Figure 8; Table 7). Unsurprisingly, all respondents indicated sometimes feeling tired after remote work and finding it challenging to enjoy activities at home. This experience is common among many employees, regardless of their gender or caregiving responsibilities.

#### 4.4 | Other Concerns

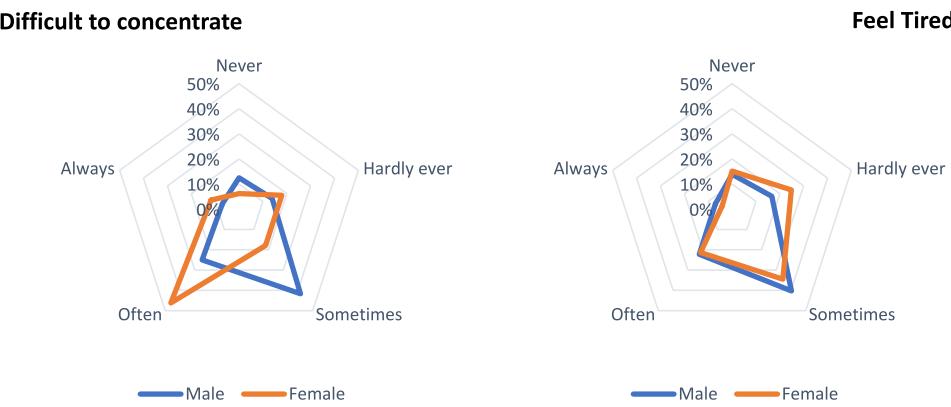
In contrast to male participants, female participants indicated “somewhat” to “moderate” degrees of fear regarding their job security during the lockdown (see Figure 9; Table 8). Differences were also noticed regarding anxiety levels, with the female cohort reporting higher levels than their male counterparts. This finding aligns with Catalyst (2020) whose report identified two key factors affecting women and their work during COVID-19—namely, that females were overrepresented in industries/occupations that were significantly affected by the crisis and that the unequal burden of unpaid care and household work increased during the crisis.

This finding is associated with factors that not only include the wage divide, occupational segregation, or caregiving duties, where often females are disproportionately affected, but that can also aggravate gender inequalities, limiting their ability to keep their employment and, with it, the financial security needed in challenging times. High anxiety levels, as illustrated among females, suggest added uncertainty and stress while confronting these challenges, together with the ensuing emotional toll of balancing family and work duties.

Additional analysis shows that females indicated increased productivity compared to males (see Figure 10; Table 9). Nevertheless, female participants also reported an increase in working hours. This could signify added work-related pressures on women, possibly compromising their personal time and well-being. Emphasizing the need to promote work-life balance and equitable work policies is crucial to enable women—all employees—to fulfill their job expectations without sacrificing their physical and mental health.

## 5 | Discussion

The aim of this study was to better understand what factors influenced the adoption of FWAs in Vietnam during COVID-19 (RQ1). Further, we sought to understand the benefits and challenges this new work model yielded for employees and employers (RQ2) and predict what impact the growth of FWAs in Vietnam will have on gender dynamics (RQ3).



**FIGURE 8** | Concentration and tiredness.

**TABLE 7** | Concentration difficulties and feeling tired.

Perceived challenges	Females	Males
Concentration difficulties		
Mostly/always	30%	26%
Sometimes	46%	42%
Never	24%	32%
Feeling tired		
Mostly/Always	41%	31%
Sometimes	33%	40%
Never	26%	29%

The key factor influencing the widespread adoption of FWAs in Vietnam was the strict travel restrictions introduced by the government as a measure to slow down the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Without this happening, it is unlikely that we would be experiencing the acceleration in FWAs we are now experiencing in either Vietnam or elsewhere (Bontrager et al. 2021; Jahal et al. 2024; Shifrin and Michel 2022).

Our results illustrate several benefits and challenges that this additional increased level of flexibility generates. In terms of benefits, a majority of respondents claimed to experience greater flexibility, not having to commute, financial savings, and more time with family/friends. These benefits are consistent with earlier research suggesting that hybrid work allows employees to have more control over the boundaries between their work and non-work activities, which can support them in balancing family needs (Chung and van der Lippe 2020) and reduces the amount of time spent commuting each week (Balbontin et al. 2024; Delventhal et al. 2022; Moglia et al. 2022). While a minority of employees reported improved productivity due to hybrid work, women were twice as likely as men to claim productivity improvements, which is the same as a finding from Latin America during the pandemic (Sandoval-Reyes et al. 2020). These resource gains are substantial, but not universal.

People should work from home more often to save traveling time and reduce traffic congestion which will result in a healthier environment.

[F67]

FWAs also present some challenges. A majority of respondents reported challenges as distractions at home, the boundary between work/home being blurred, and unreliable technologies (mainly for women), with at least 40% claiming difficulties staying motivated and space/equipment constraints. Additionally, a solid majority of respondents reported at least sometimes being very tired and having difficulties concentrating (the latter particularly for women). For both women and men, there may be difficulties in setting boundaries between work and personal life, leading to a blurring of boundaries and the risk of burnout, as also highlighted in Loezar-Hernández et al.'s (2023) study. These challenges represent resource losses which, as with benefits, are widespread but not universal.

One question implicitly addressed whether resource gains outweighed losses. The results of this question are presented in Figure 5; the majority of respondents expect to continue with hybrid work following the pandemic. In COR terms, that expectation is founded on net resource gains which employees will strive to protect in the future.

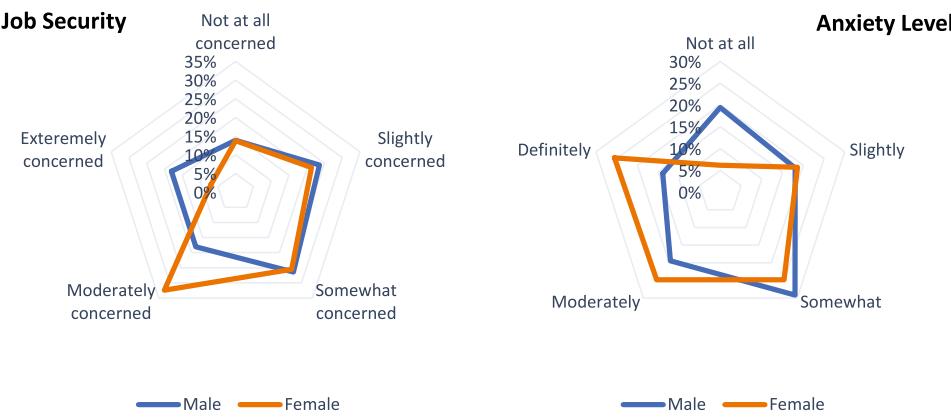
There were concerns about equitable access to resources and support or POB issues, such as reliable technology and adequate workspace. Women may also experience additional caregiving responsibilities at home, which can explain why they reported greater difficulty concentrating on work and, conversely, why men more often reported loneliness as a challenge.

Looking specifically at the impact of FWAs on gender dynamics in Vietnam, our data confirms that this impact varies significantly by gender (Chung et al. 2021; Sullivan and Lewis 2001). Women often use and are expected to use flexibility in their work to fulfill household and family responsibilities (Kurowska 2020). This gender difference is mainly attributed to societal gender norms that reinforce the idea of men as providers and women as caretakers (Knight and Brinton 2017).

The focus on gender dynamics reveals both benefits and challenges, with female participants facing additional obstacles related to technology and family responsibilities.

Remote working helped to [emphasize]... self-motivation, self-discipline, focus, and concentration.

[F6]

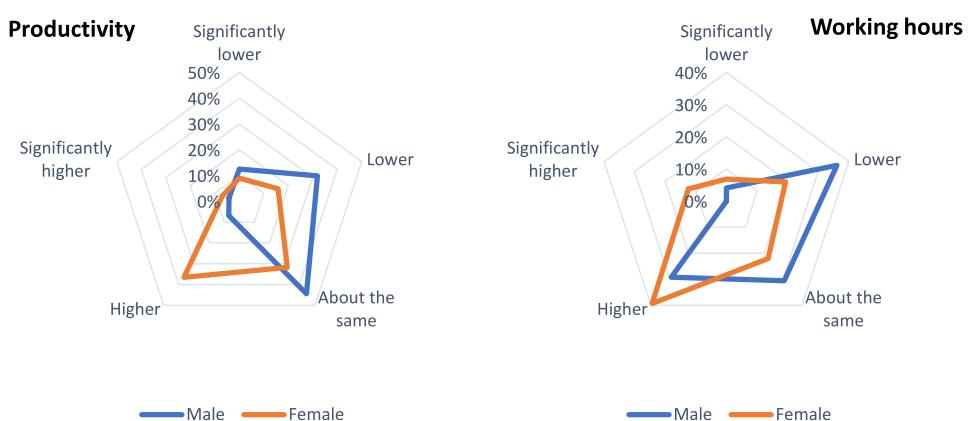


**FIGURE 9** | Job security and anxiety level concerns.

**TABLE 8** | Job security and anxiety levels.

Issues	Description	Females	Males
Concerns of job security	1 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely concerned	Mean: 2.75	Mean: 2.89
Anxiety levels*	1 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely high	Mean: 3.32	Mean: 2.90

\*A statistically significant difference emerged under the Independent-Samples *t*-test ( $p < 0.05$ ).



**FIGURE 10** | Productivity and working hours.

**TABLE 9** | Productivity and working hours levels.

Issues	Description	Females	Males
Productivity	1 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely concerned	Mean: 2.76	Mean: 2.84
Working hours*	1 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely high	Mean: 3.12	Mean: 2.71

\*A statistically significant difference emerged under the Independent-Samples *t*-test ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Remote working is extremely beneficial for employees' health and personal life, especially for those living with their family or working between jobs.

[F45]

We need to improve infrastructure for this kind of remote work.

[F5]

While female participants reported lower challenges with online collaboration, they experienced more difficulties concentrating on work due to caregiving responsibilities, mirroring the findings in Stefanova et al. (2023) study. Female participants also expressed higher levels of concern about job security and anxiety than their male counterparts. Interestingly, female respondents reported higher levels of productivity but also revealed that they work longer hours. To ensure successful outcomes when working remotely, it is essential to invest in the appropriate technologies and promote

effective communication and collaboration between workers and managers (Hopkins and Bardoel 2023).

Managers need to communicate with their team weekly to ensure they are mentally coping and feel supported.

[F139]

Employers' empathy is also required, in considering the emotional burden of having to juggle family and work duties while providing job security and equal opportunities for their workforce (Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir 2021). As F121 observed:

Employees need to be able to balance work and family responsibility as well as job security.

The impact of FWAs on gender dynamics is complex and multifaceted. For example, FWAs can offer greater flexibility (Choudhury et al. 2021), which can benefit women with caregiving responsibilities or those facing barriers to traditional office-based work. They also have the potential to increase their participation and advancement in the workforce (Kumar et al. 2023).

Overall, it is clear that FWAs are here to stay and can offer many benefits, but they can also pose challenges and impact genders differently (Stefanova et al. 2023). Therefore, it is crucial for employers to recognize and address the unique challenges and concerns that may emerge in this context and provide the necessary support to ensure that women are not inequitably affected within the workplace environment.

To sum up, the study highlights the importance of grasping the impact of FWAs on gender dynamics. A proposed comprehensive framework aims to address these complexities and assist organizations in navigating the challenges and opportunities associated with FWAs (see Figure 11).

## 5.1 | Theoretical Implications

The aims of this study were to examine the adoption of FWAs in Vietnam during the COVID-19 pandemic, assess the benefits that resulted from these FWAs, and the challenges they posed,

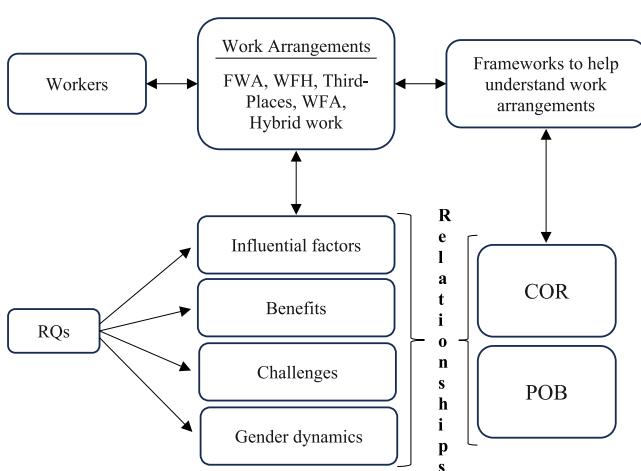


FIGURE 11 | The proposed framework.

with a particular interest in what impact they had on women in the workforce.

To understand the benefits and challenges of FWAs, COR theory was used (Hobfoll 2001), casting those benefits and challenges in terms of resource gains and losses. Multiple results reported here are consistent with the COR approach. In the survey portion of the research, it was found that more than half of respondents reported additional resources in terms of greater flexibility, reduced commuting, financial saving, and more time with family/friends. Conversely, at least one-quarter of respondents faced resource losses in terms of difficulty switching off after work, difficulties with online work, space/equipment constraints, unreliable technologies, staying motivated, a blurring of the work/home boundary, and distractions at home. Moreover, qualitative responses sometimes demonstrated COR logic, as in the employee who stated "People should work from home more often to save traveling time and reduce traffic congestion which will result in a healthier environment," or the respondent who stated "[w]e need to improve infrastructure for this kind of remote work," or "Employees need to be able to balance work and family responsibility as well as job security."

At a rudimentary level, our integration of POB with COR theory might be viewed as simply placing a special emphasis on the four psychological resources of optimism, resilience, self-esteem, and hope. But we argue that our use of POB goes beyond that special emphasis. First, as argued earlier, COR theory views reframing and positive states of mind as of minimal importance (Hobfoll 2001), while we use POB to highlight the importance of positive psychological states that have a direct impact on performance (Luthans and Aviolo 2009). Second, as Luthans and Aviolo (2009) also stress, POB is prescriptive in promoting positive well-being and work performance, while COR theory is not. Third, and most importantly, by promoting general well-being, POB can help to promote gender equity (Warren et al. 2019).

We believe this emphasis on gender equity is warranted. Note from the findings reported here that relatively few women had access to remote work pre-pandemic, while access was shared broadly across men and women during the pandemic (see Figure 4). We further suggest that absent efforts to promote POB, gender norms will likely reassert themselves with women increasingly relegated to the home and family concerns. Respondents also seemed aware of this possibility, as with the respondent who noted "remote working is extremely beneficial for employees' health and personal life, especially for those living with their family or working between jobs." Another respondent went to the heart of the POB promotion argument, noting that, "remote working helped to [emphasize]... self-motivation, self-discipline, focus, and concentration." Arguably, this is the nub of the issue: if POB promotion occurs, then women would be better able to balance work and family responsibilities, and continue with some degree of remote work while maintaining high performance levels. Specific strategies for promoting COR resources useful for successful FWAs, and POB promotion which could help facilitate gender equity in support of the UN's SDGs are discussed in the following section.

In summary, by supplementing COR theory with POB theory, this paper provides a robust framework for creating nimble, resilient workplaces that support gender equity. This integration

not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers actionable strategies for organizations to thrive in a dynamic and equitable manner.

## 5.2 | Managerial Implications

In addition to the key objectives of making a timely and meaningful contribution to academic theory, this research is also intended to make a contribution to management practice, to assist managers in developing nations with the adoption of FWAs, to provide new evidence regarding the potential productivity and employee satisfaction gains they may offer, whilst underlining the potential FWAs have for female employment and improvements in gender equality in countries like Vietnam. Therefore, this study has important ramifications for any manager or business aiming to improve their ability to leverage the benefits offered by FWAs more successfully.

Based on the theoretical frameworks previously discussed, managers hoping to maximize the benefits of FWAs need to create a work environment that supports progressive values, such as justice, equality, and equity. These are also carried out in accordance with the COR theory, which states that in order to facilitate success and goal achievement, scarce resources must be generated, distributed, or utilized (Westman et al. 2004). These issues are especially important for modern workplaces because of the growing digitalization of today's work tasks.

First, enhancing POB is crucial. Managers can foster an environment that supports individual resilience, self-efficacy, hope, and optimism—key components of POB that are essential for employees to thrive in FWAs. To achieve this, managers should:

### 5.2.1 | Offer Training and Development

Provide courses that emphasize developing POB qualities such as resilience. Employees who do this may be better equipped to manage the demands of having FWAs without sacrificing the quality of their work. Relevant educational resources to promote POB are well established at this point (see Lupsa et al. 2020).

### 5.2.2 | Create Support Systems

Provide mentorship and support programs to help employees, particularly women who could be responsible for additional caregiving, and manage the difficulties associated with working remotely. Research shows that such support systems are helpful if the positive effects of POB are to be realized for both men and women (Villanueva-Flores et al. 2020).

### 5.2.3 | Establish Recognition and Incentives

To foster a lively and encouraging work environment, create programs for praising and rewarding contributions and good deeds.

Second, effective communication and collaboration are essential for the successful implementation of FWAs. Managers should:

### 5.2.4 | Establish Clear Communication Operations

To keep everyone informed and involved, it is critical to establish and maintain clear communication processes, regardless of where team members are located.

### 5.2.5 | Leverage Technology

Utilize technology collaboration tools and platforms to help individuals who work remotely and those who work in offices communicate and collaborate more effectively.

Third, it is imperative to address operational considerations. Managers should:

### 5.2.6 | Set Clear Expectations

Establish clear objectives and expectations for remote and/or hybrid work to ensure that all employees are aware of their duties and performance metrics.

### 5.2.7 | Provide Resources and Support

Among other things, workers in flexible work settings should be trained in remote work techniques and have access to mental health services.

## 5.3 | Implications for Policymakers and Governments

The current shift towards FWAs has significant implications for policymakers and governments, particularly in the areas of labor regulations and infrastructure development. Policymakers should revamp labor regulations to align them with FWAs, addressing nuances like productivity measurement, ensuring the health and safety of remote workers, and preserving work-life balance by safeguarding the right to disconnect (Hopkins 2024).

In emerging economies such as Vietnam, infrastructure investments, particularly in digital connectivity and high-speed internet, are imperative for successful hybrid work, with a focus on bridging the digital divide to ensure inclusivity, particularly for women facing technology access challenges. To ensure that prospects for career advancement are not limited by hybrid work, policymakers should also actively strive to prevent gender stereotypes.

## 5.4 | Limitations and Future Research

While this research provides various useful insights concerning work dynamics during an unprecedented crisis, it also has several limitations. In fact, shifts may occur post-COVID-19, which alter the results. Consequently, the outcomes could differ based on prevailing circumstances, impacting the adaptability and sustainability of remote work or hybrid models.

Continuous monitoring and reassessment of these factors will be essential to understand how the workforce's preferences and organizational practices may evolve in the post-pandemic era.

Future research in the realm of hybrid working and gender dynamics should explore key facets to enhance our comprehension of the evolving work landscape. A crucial area is examining the impact of hybrid work on gender equality, focusing on whether the increased flexibility is experienced equitably across genders. Delving into potential disparities in hybrid work arrangements and opportunities for career advancement and promotion can unveil differences between women and men. Additionally, this research is limited to Vietnam, and further studies could confirm whether similar outcomes would occur in other emerging countries.

Research on FWA's influence on work-life balance should also assess gender-specific outcomes. While hybrid work may enhance balance, examining its equitable impact on women and men, considering caregiving roles, is crucial for progress in terms of gender equality. Investigating barriers hindering women's adoption of hybrid work is vital. Despite potential benefits, women may face unique challenges. Identifying and addressing these obstacles can enhance workplace inclusivity. Additionally, exploring how hybrid work challenges gender norms and contributes to reduced stereotypes warrants attention. Investigating whether hybrid work fosters an inclusive environment by challenging biases is essential for achieving workplace equity.

Lastly, exploring leadership and organizational culture's impact on gender dynamics in flexible/hybrid work settings is crucial. Future research should investigate leveraging these factors to promote gender diversity in leadership.

## 6 | Conclusion

This study examined the work behaviors of 217 Vietnamese employees both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and their opinions about flexible work arrangements. The employees hailed from various provinces, age groups, marital situations, education levels, and job situations. We learned that flexible work times are anticipated to become even more prevalent in the post-COVID period and that the pandemic drove the introduction of remote work rules to safeguard worker safety and business continuity.

The study also explored numerous strategies that Vietnamese employees may apply to enhance their productivity and preserve a healthy work-life balance in a flexible workplace. These tactics consist of establishing regular schedules, realistic goal setting, taking frequent breaks, and integrating physical activity into daily plans. The survey also included a number of suggestions for companies looking to encourage successful remote employment. These include recognizing the competing demands on employees' time, maintaining open lines of communication, outlining expectations precisely, promoting consistency, giving guidance on how to organize a productive home office, offering frequent support and feedback, and emphasizing the need to find a balance between work and home obligations.

In addition, this study has advanced our knowledge of how flexible work arrangements impact employees' conduct and productivity in emerging economies like Vietnam. It emphasizes the necessity for businesses to modify their management practices to promote and support workforces that are increasingly adaptable and resilient. Employers may be able to develop a more engaged and productive workforce that is agile enough to navigate the changing nature of work in the post-pandemic era by implementing the recommended measures.

This study underlines the need to combine human-centric and operational strategies to attain a sustainable balance between work and non-work spheres, thereby optimizing the full potential of FWAs in emerging economies like Vietnam, from both an employer and employee perspectives.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.