

“Flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior: The role of work–life balance among female employees in an emerging economy”

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ARTICLE INFO	Layla Hafni, Surya Safari and Latifathun Kasanah (2026). Flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior: The role of work–life balance among female employees in an emerging economy. <i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i> , 24(3), 357–372. doi: 10.21511/ppm.24(3).2026.23
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.24(3).2026.23
RELEASED ON	Wednesday, 19 August 2026
RECEIVED ON	Sunday, 04 January 2026
ACCEPTED ON	Tuesday, 14 July 2026
LICENSE	 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
JOURNAL	"Problems and Perspectives in Management"
ISSN PRINT	1727-7051
ISSN ONLINE	1810-5467
PUBLISHER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”
FOUNDER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

44



NUMBER OF FIGURES

2



NUMBER OF TABLES

7

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine
www.businessperspectives.org

Type of the article: Research Article

Received on: 4th of January, 2026

Accepted on: 14th of July, 2026

Published on: 19th of August, 2026

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Conflict of interest statement:

Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

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FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR: THE ROLE OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE AMONG FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY

Abstract

This study investigates how flexible work arrangements influence innovative work behavior, focusing on work–life balance and leader–member exchange among female employees in the formal sector. Using boundary theory and the theory of planned behavior, this study involved 135 female employees from the emerging formal economic sector in Riau, Indonesia. Female employees were selected as research subjects because they generally face greater challenges balancing work and family responsibilities than male employees. Data were collected via a survey. This study used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that flexible work arrangements have a positive and significant effect on work–life balance ($\beta = 0.500, p < 0.000$). Work–life balance has a positive and significant effect on innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.325, p < 0.048$). Flexible work arrangements have a positive and significant effect on innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.427, p < 0.000$). However, leader–member exchange has no significant effect on innovative work behavior ($\beta = -0.111, p < 0.448$). This study confirms that work–life balance does not mediate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.162, p < 0.097$). These results indicate that flexible work arrangements drive innovative work behavior. This study contributes to the literature on innovation and human resource management by explaining how flexible work arrangements shape innovative work behavior in formal organizations through work–life balance.

Keywords

innovative work behavior, flexible working arrangement, work-life balance, leader-member exchange

JEL Classification

D23, J24, O31

INTRODUCTION

Innovation climate is widely recognized as a prerequisite for organizational survival in volatile, competitive environments. Firms that invest systematically in innovation report tangible performance gains, and empirical research consistently demonstrates that employees' innovative work behavior is positively associated with firm performance (Yang & Wu, 2021). Yet, while the performance consequences of IWB are well established, its organizational antecedents, particularly under structurally constrained conditions, remain insufficiently theorized.

Innovative work behavior is defined as the intentional exploration, generation, and implementation of novel ideas to improve performance (de Jong & den Hartog, 2008) and constitutes a critical microfoundation of organizational renewal. Innovation outcomes ultimately depend on employees' willingness and capacity to engage in discretionary idea-driven behavior (Ergun et al., 2025; Hock-Doeppen

et al., 2025). Prior studies emphasize the role of human capital quality (Hafni et al., 2020), flexible environments (Hafni et al., 2023) and entrepreneurial orientation in fostering innovation. However, this literature implicitly assumes that supportive structures uniformly translate into innovative engagement, overlooking how institutional rigidity and role constraints may condition such effects.

Flexible working arrangements are often proposed as a corrective mechanism. Empirical studies indicate that flexibility enhances work–life balance and may stimulate innovative outcomes (Astriani & Muafi, 2023; Gasic & Berber, 2025; Indradewa & Prasetyo, 2023; Ming, 2024). However, the underlying mechanism remains theoretically ambiguous. One dominant assumption is that flexibility promotes innovation indirectly by improving work–life balance. An alternative explanation is that flexibility directly enhances innovative intention by signaling autonomy and increasing perceived behavioral control, independent of balance effects. The relative validity of these competing pathways has not been rigorously examined, particularly within highly regulated formal-sector contexts.

Indonesia provides a theoretically relevant boundary-testing environment. As an emerging economy characterized by strong institutional norms and structured formal-sector systems, it represents a context where flexibility operates within, rather than outside, bureaucratic rigidity. National data indicate substantial workload pressures: 55,554,456 individuals aged 15 and above worked beyond legally regulated hours, and official reports document declining performance among female formal-sector employees during 2019–2021 (Central Bureau of Statistics Indonesia, 2021). Such conditions heighten the likelihood that structural constraints shape innovative intention and engagement. Examining flexibility within this context, therefore, allows for a more stringent test of whether autonomy-enhancing policies can override institutional rigidity in fostering innovative behavior.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

According to the theory of planned behavior, a person's actions are influenced by their intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Individual behavior analysis often uses this model (Prabandari et al., 2026). Boundary theory provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals and groups navigate the complexities of overlapping domains, roles, and identities. Its applications span work–life balance, cultural identity negotiation, and organizational dynamics, offering valuable insights into managing boundaries in diverse contexts (Cousins & Robey, 2015). This paper argues that work–life balance is a crucial mechanism connecting flexible work schedules to creative work behavior, drawing on boundary theory and the theory of planned behavior. While the theory of planned behavior emphasizes that conduct is determined by people's intentions, shaped by perceived control and contextual support, boundary theory proposes that people actively regulate boundaries between professional and personal domains to achieve balance (Douglas et al., 2024). Accordingly, flexible work schedules may improve workers' sense of control

over their work–life boundaries, enhancing their ability and desire to act creatively.

Flexible work arrangements have become increasingly important human resource management strategies designed to help employees balance professional responsibilities with personal and family roles (Buick et al., 2024). By allowing employees greater control over when and where work is performed, flexible work systems enable individuals to manage competing demands across life domains more effectively (Boccoli et al., 2024). Previous research suggests that effective work–life balance management contributes significantly to individual well-being, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Brega et al., 2023). Consequently, organizations have begun to view flexible work practices not only as welfare-oriented policies but also as strategic tools for improving employee engagement and performance.

Implementing a flexible work system allows employees to maintain a balance between work tasks and personal needs, while providing greater satisfaction through a more balanced division of roles both inside and outside the workplace (Varsha &

Rao, 2025). Effective work–life balance management contributes to overall individual well-being (Bjärntoft et al., 2020; Brega et al., 2023).

Female employees often face unique challenges in maintaining innovative behavior due to conflicting work and non-work demands (John, 2023). In many formal organizations, rigid work structures and fixed work schedules exacerbate the tension between work and personal life, potentially limiting the cognitive and emotional resources employees need to innovate. As a result, flexible work arrangements have emerged as a strategic human resource practice aimed at supporting employees' work–life balance while maintaining performance outcomes (Yede & Sharma, 2026). Although the adoption of flexible work policies is increasing, empirical evidence regarding their role in promoting innovative work behavior remains fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped (Gašić et al., 2024; Gasic & Berber, 2025).

Maintaining a work-life balance is crucial to retaining female employees. When female employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are more likely to continue collaborating with the company, thereby reducing recruitment costs and turnover. Flexible work arrangements can help female employees better balance their work and family obligations. If company policies support this flexibility, female employees are more likely to share their expertise over the long term (Ming, 2024; Jamunarani & Syeed, 2025).

Scarce research examines the impact of flexible work arrangements on work–life balance, the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance on job satisfaction among female employees in the formal sector of an emerging economy, as well as the mediating effect of work-life balance as a critical factor related to both flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior. Therefore, it is important to study these issues to better understand the intricate dynamics among flexible work arrangements, work–life balance, and innovative work behavior, particularly among female employees in the formal sector. By tailoring organizational policies and practices to support the well-being and innovative behavior of female employees, we can contribute to a more equitable and fulfilling work environment (Ming, 2024).

This limitation becomes particularly salient in gendered organizational contexts. Research frequently reports that men exhibit higher levels of innovative behavior than women in formal-sector environments (Amoukhteh et al., 2025; Tiwari et al., 2025; Yuan & Ma, 2022). However, counterevidence demonstrates that women entrepreneurs intensified innovative engagement during crisis conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These conflicting findings suggest that gender disparities in innovative work behavior are unlikely to be inherent; rather, they may be structurally contingent. What remains underexplored is how formal organizational systems characterized by standardized procedures, fixed schedules, and hierarchical control shape women's innovative intention and behavioral enactment.

Innovation in the workplace is not solely determined by structural policies but also influenced by individual and relational factors. In particular, innovative work behavior among female employees may be shaped by several organizational conditions, including flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, and leader–member exchange relationships. Prior studies indicate that these factors are associated with employees' capacity to engage in creative processes and contribute new ideas to organizational improvement (Astriani & Muafi, 2023; Indradewa & Prasetyo, 2023; Tanaka & Ishiyama, 2023; Widiastuti & Kusmaryani, 2020).

Drawing on the theory of planned behavior, which posits that behavior is driven by intention and perceived behavioral control (Zhang et al., 2021), innovative engagement can be understood as an intention-based process constrained or enabled by structural conditions. Simultaneously, boundary theory suggests that individuals must actively manage competing role demands to preserve psychological resources. For female employees navigating dual professional and domestic responsibilities, rigid work structures may undermine perceived control and deplete the cognitive capacity needed for innovative action.

Maintaining a balance between work demands and personal life is a significant challenge for employees seeking a higher quality of life (Astriani & Muafi, 2023; Puspitawati et al., 2025). In such situations, balance can be achieved when work

and personal life are in harmony (Lomas, 2021). In line with boundary theory, which states that every individual needs to set and manage boundaries between various domains of their life, such as work and personal life (Douglas et al., 2024). Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the issue of work-life balance has gained significant attention (Putri & Amran, 2021). Many studies have highlighted that work-life initiatives offer a balanced situation for both employees and companies. Although there are still differences in research results, most conclude that work-life balance affects innovative work behavior and the performance of organizational members (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023).

Leader-member exchange is another factor that can strengthen innovative behavior among employees, with a focus on subordinates. A study by Hapsari et al. (2019) (at one of the largest Telkom companies in Indonesia) concluded that a work environment supported by managers and colleagues who accept employees' ideas, as well as leaders who are open to feedback from subordinates, will increase employees' interest in innovative achievements. Other studies have shown similar results (Saeed et al., 2019). In automotive manufacturing companies, leaders are urged to prioritize building high-quality leader-member exchange relationships. Positive interactions between leaders and subordinates can increase employee participation in creative processes, encouraging them to be more proactive in innovative behavior. Therefore, leaders need to build quality exchange relationships with their subordinates to strengthen innovation in the workplace. Unlike the findings of Stoffers et al. (2014), leader-member exchange does not directly influence work innovation behavior; rather, it does so through the moderating effect of employability.

Existing studies primarily examine flexible work arrangements as welfare-oriented policies that enhance job satisfaction or reduce work-family conflict. However, such approaches often overlook the behavioral mechanisms underlying how flexibility translates into innovative outcomes. In particular, prior research tends to focus on direct relationships between flexible work arrangements and innovative behavior, offering limited insight into how employees cognitively and behaviorally

respond to flexibility in structured organizational contexts. This leaves a theoretical gap in understanding *why* and *how* flexible work practices encourage employees to engage in innovation.

To address this theoretical gap, the present study investigates the relationship between flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior among female employees in the formal sector, with particular attention to the mediating role of work-life balance. Using empirical evidence from an emerging economy context characterized by relatively rigid organizational structures, this study seeks to clarify how flexible work practices operate as a strategic mechanism rather than merely an employee benefit. By doing so, the study advances current debates on innovation-oriented human resource practices and provides insights into how organizations can better support innovative contributions from female employees.

This study makes three contributions. First, it challenges the prevailing assumption that flexibility enhances innovation primarily through work-life balance by empirically testing competing direct and indirect mechanisms. Second, it reconceptualizes flexible working arrangements as autonomy signals that shape perceived behavioral control and innovative intention in the face of institutional rigidity. Third, it extends gender-sensitive innovation research by demonstrating how formal organizational design shapes women's innovative engagement in emerging economies.

In summary, previous studies indicate that flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, and leader-member exchange are important organizational factors influencing employees' innovative behavior. However, empirical evidence explaining how We kindly request the Editor's assistance in ensuring that the term "Flexible Work Arrangement" is consistently changed to "Flexible Working Arrangement" throughout the manuscript, in accordance with the research variable. stimulate innovative behavior through work-life balance mechanisms, particularly among female employees in formal organizational contexts, remains limited.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between flexible work arrange-

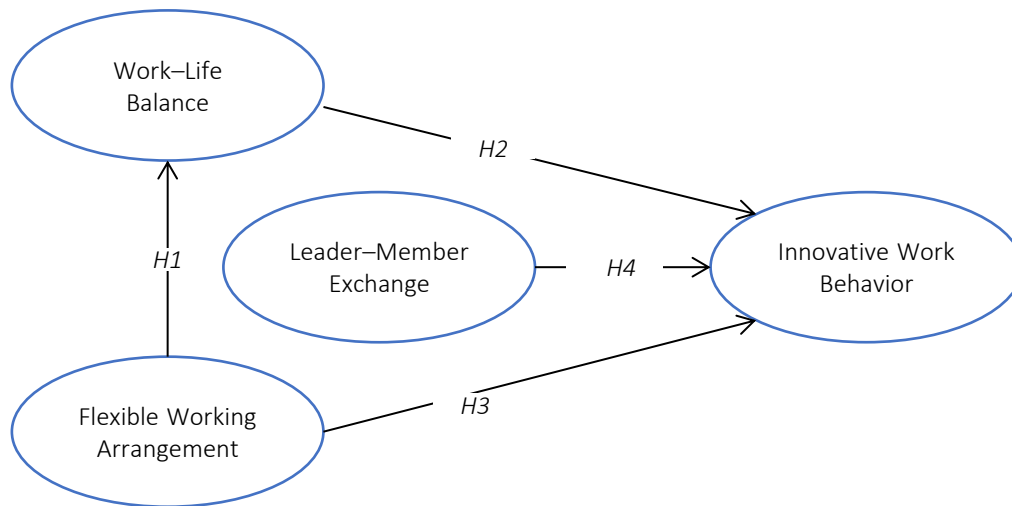


Figure 1. Research framework

ments and innovative work behavior among female employees, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of work-life balance and the influence of leader-member exchange.

From the research model framework in Figure 1, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Flexible working arrangements have a significant positive effect on work-life balance..*
- H2: Work-life balance has a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior.*
- H3: Flexible working arrangements have a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior.*
- H4: Leader-member exchange has a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior.*

2. METHOD

2.1. Population and sample

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among flexible working arrangements, work-life balance, leader-member exchange, and innovative work behavior among female employees in the formal sector in Riau, Indonesia.

The population consists of female employees working in formal organizations across various

employment sectors in Riau, including education, government, private companies, health-care, and financial institutions. Riau was chosen as the research location because it is one of Indonesia's economically developing provinces, with a diverse composition of formal employment sectors, thereby enabling an investigation of flexible work arrangements in various organizational contexts.

Female employees were deliberately chosen as research subjects because they generally face greater challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities than male employees. Therefore, they provide an appropriate context for examining how flexible work arrangements contribute to work-life balance, which in turn fosters more innovative work behavior.

The target population consisted of female employees working in formal-sector organizations who met the following criteria: (1) holding at least a bachelor's degree, and (2) having a minimum of one year of work experience. These criteria were applied to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient organizational exposure to evaluate workplace policies and leadership dynamics.

Data were collected between January and March 2025 through a structured online questionnaire distributed via professional networks and organizational contacts. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only respondents meeting the specified criteria were included in the analy-

sis. A total of 148 responses were received; after screening for completeness and eligibility, 135 valid responses were retained for analysis.

The adequacy of the sample size was assessed based on the 10-times rule commonly applied in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017), which recommends that the minimum sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at any construct in the model. In this study, there are four constructs (flexible working arrangement, work-life balance, innovative work behavior, and leader-member exchange), so the calculation used is $4 \times 10 = 40$. Given the model specification, the required minimum sample size was below the final sample of 135 respondents, indicating that the sample was sufficient for the proposed analysis.

2.2. Respondent characteristics

The analysis of respondent characteristics includes variables such as age, gender, education, work experience, and income level (Table 1).

Most respondents were aged between 46–55 years (43.7%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (19.3%). In terms of marital status, 74.8% were married, while 25.2% were single. Regarding educational background, 63% held a bachelor's degree, 31.8% held a master's degree, and 5.2% possessed a doctoral degree. In terms of employment period, the largest proportion of respondents had more than 5 years of experience (70.4%), followed by 2–5 years (12.6%), 1–2 years (8.1%), and less than 1 year (8.9%). Concerning income level, 46.7% earned between IDR 5–10 million per month, 41.5% earned IDR 2–5 million, 8.15% earned IDR 10–15 million, and 3.6% earned more than IDR 15 million. The largest sector among the respondents in this study was education (49.63%), followed by women working in the government sector (26.7%), the private sector (13.33%), health (7.4%), and finance, at only 3%.

Although respondents represented several formal employment sectors, the education sector accounted for the largest proportion of the sample, followed by government institutions, private or-

Table 1. Demographics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Age	25–35 years old	25	18.5%
	36–45 years old	26	19.3%
	46–55 years old	59	43.7%
	>55 years old	25	18.5%
	Total	135	100%
Marital status	Single	34	25.2%
	Married	101	74.8%
	Total	135	100%
Education	Bachelor's degree	85	63.0%
	Master's degree	43	31.8%
	Doctoral degree	7	5.2%
	Total	135	100%
Employment period	< 1 year	12	8.9%
	1–2 years	11	8.1%
	2–5 years	17	12.6%
	> 5 years	95	70.4%
	Total	135	100%
Income	Rp2 jt – Rp5 jt	56	41.5%
	Rp5 jt – Rp10 jt	63	46.7%
	Rp10jt – Rp15jt	11	8.2%
	> Rp15jt	5	3.6%
	Total	135	100%
Sector	Governmental	36	26.7%
	Private	18	13.3%
	Finance	4	3.0%
	Education	67	49.6%
	Health	10	7.4%
	Total	135	100%

ganizations, healthcare institutions, and financial institutions. Therefore, while the findings provide valuable insights into female employees working in formal organizations, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to all occupational sectors or broader national contexts. The relatively small proportion of respondents from the finance sector should be considered when interpreting sector-specific generalizability.

2.3. Data analysis

The proposed hypotheses were tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected for several reasons. First, the study adopts a prediction-oriented approach to examine complex relationships among multiple constructs. Second, PLS-SEM is suitable for models with relatively small sample sizes and does not require strict normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2017).

Hair et al. (2014) explain that PLS-SEM is appropriate when data are abnormal, samples are small, or formative indicators are used. The partial least squares (PLS) method is effective because it does not require many assumptions: data do not need to be normal, various types of indicators can be combined, and sample sizes do not need to be large.

PLS-SEM was used in this study to evaluate and measure the direct and mediating relationships

among work–life balance, flexible work arrangements, innovative work behavior, and leader–member exchange..

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated to assess reliability and validity. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with a threshold of 0.50. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Second, the structural model (inner model) was assessed by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance. The significance of the structural relationships was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

To test the mediating effect of work–life balance, indirect effects were examined using bootstrapping procedures. The significance of mediation was determined based on confidence intervals and the significance of indirect path coefficients.

The operational variables of this study are explained in Appendix A.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The convergent validity of the measurement model with reflective indicators was examined through the

Table 2. Outer loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE)

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	Result	Composite Reliability	AVE
IWB	IWB1	0.914	Fit	0.954	0.856
	IWB2	0.912	Fit		
	IWB3	0.953	Fit		
	IWB4	0.920	Fit		
FWA	FWA1	0.866	Fit	0.845	0.696
	FWA2	0.866	Fit		
	FWA3	0.767	Fit		
WLB	WLB1	0.939	Fit	0.918	0.831
	WLB2	0.898	Fit		
	WLB3	0.897	Fit		
LMX	LME1	0.970	Fit	0.992	0.951
	LME2	0.984	Fit		
	LME3	0.980	Fit		
	LME4	0.968	Fit		

Note: IWB = innovative work behavior; FWA = flexible work arrangements; WLB = work–life balance; LMX leader–member exchange.

correlation of item scores or components generated by SmartPLS. Indicators were considered adequate if the factor loading was ≥ 0.7 . In this study, all loading values met this criterion, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that, for exogenous variables, LME2 (reflective) is the strongest measure compared to other variables, with the highest external loading value (0.984).

Discriminant validity was assessed to ensure that each latent variable represented a distinct concept. The model was considered good if the indicator loading on the latent variable was higher than that on other latent variables. Table 2 shows that all variables had $AVE > 0.50$, and the AVE root was greater than the inter-variable correlation coefficient, indicating that the data showed good discriminant validity.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker matrix – Discriminant validity

Variable	FWA	IWB	LME	WLB
FWA	0.834			
IWB	0.552	0.925		
LME	0.341	0.248	0.975	
WLB	0.500	0.466	0.656	0.912

Note: IWB = innovative work behavior; FWA = flexible work arrangements; WLB = work–life balance; LMX leader–member exchange.

Discriminant validity (Table 3) was also assessed based on the results of the Fornell–Larcker criterion; all constructs (FWA = 0.834; IWB = 0.925; LME = 0.975; WLB = 0.912) had a higher root mean square error of approximation ($\sqrt{AVE}$) than their correlations with other constructs. Thus, the discriminant validity of the measurement model has been met, indicating that each construct is better able to explain its own variable than to explain other constructs.

Table 4. Inner VIF for CMB

Structural Relationship	VIF
Flexible Working Arrangement → Innovative Work Behavior	1.334
Flexible Working Arrangement → Work–Life Balance	1.000
Leader–Member Exchange → Innovative Work Behavior	1.758
Work–Life Balance → Innovative Work Behavior	2.071

The validity and reliability of variables were assessed using composite reliability and AVE. Variables were considered reliable if composite reliability > 0.70 and AVE > 0.50 . Table 3 shows that all variables met these criteria, indicating that data reliability was fulfilled.

The evaluation results in Table 3 show that the indicators used to measure latent variables are valid and reliable, based on convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability.

Structural model testing was conducted to assess the relationship between variables, significance, and R -squared. The evaluation included inner VIF for CMB (common method bias/common method variance), R -squared, t -tests on dependent variables, and path coefficient significance, with R -squared checks as the first step.

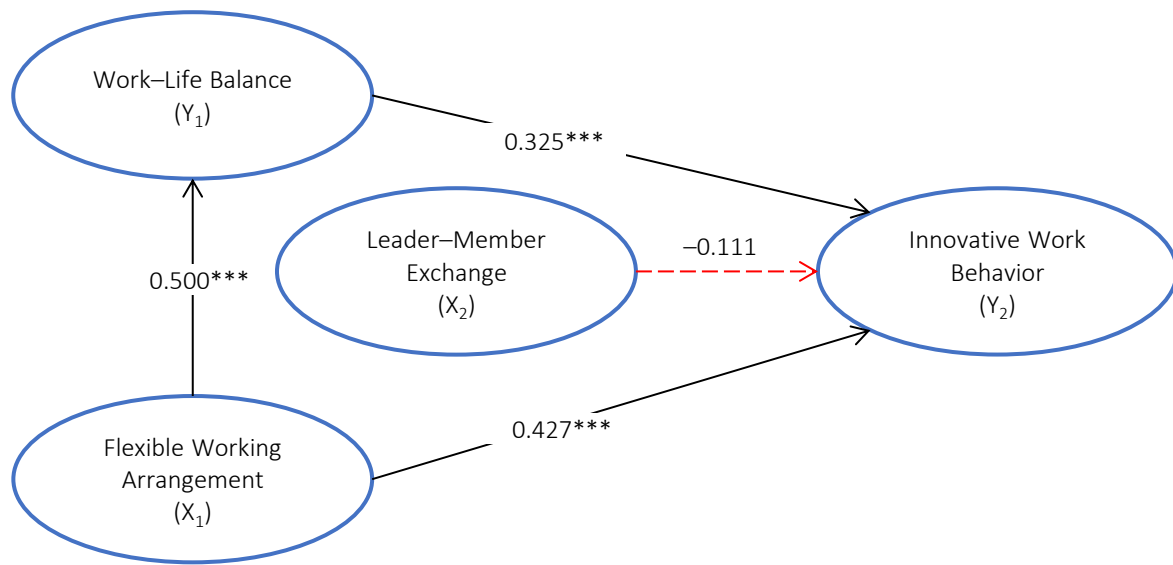
To assess potential common method bias, the full collinearity assessment approach was employed. The results (Table 4) indicate that all inner VIF values are below the conservative threshold of 3.3, ranging from 1.000 to 2.071. These findings suggest that common method variance is unlikely to threaten the study's validity and that the observed relationships among constructs are not substantially affected by common method bias.

Table 5. R -squared value

Variable	R -squared	R -squared adjusted
IWB	0.359	0.339
WLB	0.250	0.242

Note: IWB = innovative work behavior; WLB = work–life balance.

The combined R -squared of work–life balance and flexible work arrangements on innovative work behavior is 0.359, with an adjusted R -squared of 0.339, indicating an influence of 33.9% (Table 5). Since this value is above 33% but below 67%, the influence of exogenous constructs on the dependent variable is categorized as moderate (Sarstedt et al., 2020).



Note: *** means Sig < 0.005; black line = significant; red line = not significant.

Figure 2. Final model

Table 6. Path analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Conclusion
H1	FWA → WLB	0.500	6.380	0.000	Significantly Influential
H2	WLB → IWB	0.325	1.977	0.048	Significantly Influential
H3	FWA → IWB	0.427	3.993	0.000	Significantly Influential
H4	LME → IWB	-0.111	0.758	0.448	Not Significantly Influential

Note: IWB = innovative work behavior; FWA = flexible work arrangements; WLB = work-life balance; LMX leader-member exchange.

The *R*-squared value of FWA on work-life balance is 0.250. Therefore, the influence of flexible work arrangements is 0.250, or 25%. Because the adjusted *R*-squared is 33%, the influence of flexible work arrangements, *X*₁, *X*₂, and *Y* on work-life balance is weak.

The results of the SEM-PLS hypothesis testing based on the proposed model are shown in Table 6 and Figure 2.

Hypotheses 1–3, which state that flexible work arrangements affect work-life balance and innovative work behavior and that work-life balance positively and significantly affects innovative work behavior, are accepted. Conversely, Hypothesis 4, which states that leader-member exchange has a positive effect on innovative work behavior, is rejected because the coefficient is -0.111 and the *P* value is 0.448.

This study examined how flexible working arrangements influence innovative work behavior among female employees in the formal sector, with work-life balance as a mediating mechanism and leader-member exchange as a relational predictor. The findings provide several important insights into the structural and behavioral drivers of innovation in institutionalized organizational contexts.

First, the positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance confirms that structural flexibility functions as a critical resource for female employees managing dual professional and domestic responsibilities. In line with boundary theory, greater temporal and spatial flexibility enhances individuals' ability to regulate boundaries between work and non-work domains, thereby reducing role conflict and increasing perceived control. Within formal-sector organizations characterized by rigid scheduling systems, flexibility

appears to restore equilibrium by enabling employees to align work demands with personal obligations.

The finding that flexible working arrangements have a positive impact on work–life balance is consistent with previous research (Brega et al., 2023; Ming, 2024), which shows that workplace flexibility enables employees to better integrate their professional and family responsibilities. Similar to these studies, our findings indicate that greater flexibility enhances employees' ability to manage competing work and non-work demands that must be prioritized. However, this study expands on previous evidence by showing that the positive role of flexibility remains evident among female employees working in formal organizations of developing economies, where rigid institutional regulations and work structures can hinder work–life balance.

Second, work–life balance significantly enhances innovative work behavior. This finding suggests that balance is not merely a well-being outcome but also a behavioral antecedent of innovation. Drawing on the theory of planned behavior, a balanced work context may strengthen employees' behavioral intentions to engage in innovative activities by lowering psychological strain and freeing cognitive resources. When employees perceive harmony between work and personal roles, they are more likely to invest effort in opportunity exploration, idea generation, and implementation. Thus, work–life balance operates as both a stabilizing mechanism and a catalyst for innovative engagement. The positive relationship between work–life balance and innovative work behavior supports previous evidence (Astriani & Muafi, 2023; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021), which indicated that employees who experience a better work–life balance tend to be more active in creative and innovative activities. Our findings reinforce this argument by showing that work–life balance generates psychological resources that enable female employees to exert greater cognitive effort in engaging in innovative activities. Compared to previous studies conducted on a more general employee population, this study shows that work–life balance remains an important predictor of innovative behavior, particularly among female employees in the formal sector.

Third, flexible working arrangements exert a direct positive effect on innovative work behavior, indicating that flexibility stimulates innovation beyond

its indirect influence through work–life balance. Flexible scheduling and location independence may enhance autonomy, discretion, and task ownership factors closely associated with creative problem solving. These findings position flexibility as a structural empowerment mechanism that fosters innovative capacity. This significant direct effect of flexible working arrangements on innovative work behavior is consistent with previous empirical evidence (Gasic & Berber, 2025; Astriani & Muafi, 2023), which found that workplace flexibility encourages employees to generate and implement innovative ideas. However, unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized work–life balance or job satisfaction as the main mechanisms linking flexibility to innovation, the current findings indicate that flexibility also has a direct effect on innovative behavior. This suggests that employees may view flexible working arrangements as a sign of the organization's trust in them and as providing them with the autonomy to manage their work, thereby independently strengthening innovative work behavior.

Interestingly, leader–member exchange was not found to significantly influence innovative work behavior. In formal organizational systems characterized by standardized procedures and hierarchical norms, structural policies may exert stronger influence on behavior than relational exchange quality. It is plausible that in institutional contexts where rules and systems dominate daily operations, innovation is driven more by structural discretion than by interpersonal leadership dynamics. This finding highlights the contextual boundary conditions of leader–member exchange in predicting innovative behavior.

In contrast to previous studies (Saeed et al., 2019; Tanaka & Ishiyama, 2023), which reported a significant positive relationship between leader–member exchange and innovative work behavior, this study found no significant direct effect. Saeed et al. (2019) demonstrated that high-quality leader–member relationships encourage employees to engage in innovative behavior through greater involvement in the creative process. In contrast, Tanaka and Ishiyama (2023) found that professional and emotional support from supervisors reinforces innovative work behavior in Japanese talent management practices. However, our findings are consistent with Stoffers et al. (2014), who argue that the effect of leader–member exchange on innovative work behavior is not always

direct but depends on additional mediating or moderating mechanisms. This suggests that the effectiveness of leader–member exchange may vary across different organizational contexts and depend on other organizational or individual factors. In the context of Indonesia's formal sector examined in this study, standardized procedures, institutional policies, and structural work systems may exert a stronger influence on employees' innovative behavior than interpersonal relationships between leaders and subordinates. Therefore, structural organizational support (particularly flexible work arrangements) appears to be a more prominent driver of innovative work behavior than relational leadership in highly institutionalized organizations.

3.1. Implications

3.1.1. Theoretical implications

This study offers three theoretical contributions. First, it extends boundary theory by demonstrating that structural flexibility not only reduces work–family conflict but also enables innovation-oriented behaviors. Flexibility increases boundary control, which in turn enhances employees' capacity to allocate cognitive and emotional resources toward innovative tasks.

Second, by integrating the theory of planned behavior, this paper clarifies the psychological pathway through which work–life balance translates into innovative behavior. A balanced environment strengthens behavioral intention and perceived behavioral control, thereby facilitating engagement in opportunity exploration and idea implementation. This linkage advances understanding of how contextual conditions shape innovation at the individual level.

Third, the non-significant effect of leader–member exchange suggests that structural enablers may out-

weigh relational predictors in formal and institutionally regulated settings. This finding refines the boundary conditions of relational leadership theories in explaining innovation outcomes, particularly among female employees in structured work environments.

3.1.2. Practical implications

The findings offer actionable guidance for managers and policymakers in formal-sector organizations. First, organizations should design flexible working systems that allow adjustable schedules and partial location independence for tasks that do not require direct physical presence. Structured flexibility policies, rather than ad hoc arrangements, can enhance employees' ability to manage dual responsibilities without compromising performance targets.

Second, organizations should actively support work–life balance initiatives, such as reasonable workload distribution, protected non-working hours, and access to health and relaxation programs. Providing employees with clear boundaries that protect personal time can indirectly stimulate innovative engagement.

Third, while leadership quality remains important, managers should recognize that innovation among female employees may depend more heavily on structural empowerment than solely on relational closeness. Therefore, institutionalizing flexibility through formal HR policies may yield more sustainable innovation outcomes than relying exclusively on leadership style.

Overall, this study suggests that flexible working arrangements function as strategic organizational mechanisms that promote both balance and innovation, particularly in formal-sector contexts where structural rigidity traditionally constrains discretionary behavior.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the impact of flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior among female employees, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of work–life balance and the influence of leader–member exchange. The findings indicate that flexible work arrangements play a significant role in improving employees' work-life balance and innovative work behavior. These results suggest that providing greater flexibility in work schedules and locations can help female employees

manage their professional and personal responsibilities more effectively while fostering creativity and innovation in the workplace. However, this study also shows that work–life balance does not act as a mediating variable in the relationship between flexible work arrangements and innovative work behavior. These findings suggest that the positive effect of flexible work arrangements on innovation may occur through mechanisms other than work–life balance. Furthermore, leader–member exchange did not have a significant effect on innovative work behavior, suggesting that a supportive leader–subordinate relationship alone may not be sufficient to stimulate innovation among female employees in this study.

Implementing work–life balance policies within an institution is crucial for fostering innovative work behavior, particularly for women who juggle dual roles. This study addresses the empirical gap in previous findings by providing evidence that flexible working arrangements and work–life balance significantly affect the innovative work behavior of female employees.

Leaders' desire to be respected in specific ways makes female employees in the formal sector feel uncomfortable. Respect will come naturally to leaders if they are competent in their work and can provide appropriate, wise solutions whenever employees encounter problems. Female employees in the formal sector require leaders who are approachable and open to collaboration to achieve their goals.

The finding that flexible work arrangements have no significant effect on innovative work behavior through work–life balance indicates that flexibility in time and place alone does not automatically trigger creativity in the workplace. This is likely because the blurred boundaries between professional and domestic affairs actually risk increasing the cognitive load and fatigue (burnout) of female workers, so that their energy is used to manage dual role conflicts rather than being channeled into innovative ideas. Therefore, the practical implication for organizations is not simply to provide flexible schedules, but also to develop structured flexibility policies such as the right to disconnect (the right not to be contacted outside of working hours) and clear output-based targets supported by childcare facilities at the workplace (corporate daycare). In this way, female workers not only achieve a true work–life balance without feeling guilty, but also have enough mental space to remain productive, responsible, and innovative in their work.

This study advances theoretical understanding by integrating boundary theory and the theory of planned behavior to conceptualize innovative work behavior as both boundary-managed and intention-driven. From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the need to design flexible work policies that support employees' work–life balance while also fostering proactive and innovative contributions, especially among female employees in structured organizational settings.

However, this study has limitations, as it focuses only on female employees in the formal sector. Therefore, further research should expand the sample to a broader area (i.e., the informal sector, rather than focusing only on female employees).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our gratitude to the Pelita Indonesia Business and Technology Institute for providing research funding through an Institutional Research Grant, which has enabled this research to be carried out successfully and will continue in the years to come. This research publication was funded by the Indonesian Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Directorate General of Research and Development, based on Decree No. 0488/C/DT.06.01/2025 dated December 11, 2025.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Operational variables

Variable	Indicators	Statement	Source	Scale
Innovative Work Behavior	Idea Exploration	Able to analyze work programs. Able to find solutions when encountering obstacles in implementing work programs and activities.	Tran et al. (2020)	Interval
	Idea Generation	Able to propose activities. Able to provide creative ideas for an activity.		
	Idea Championing	Actively participate with coworkers in determining activities. Actively collaborate with partners to design the implementation of a program.		
	Idea Implementation	Actively collaborate with colleagues in developing work program activities. Actively test new product ideas, processes, and services to ensure they are effective for the activities carried out.		
Flexible Working Arrangements	Time Flexibility	Work can be done outside of working hours. There is sufficient break time.	Albion (2004), Brega et al. (2023), and Carlson et al. (2010)	Interval
	Timing Flexibility	Work schedules can be adjusted to suit personal commitments. Activity schedules can be easily rescheduled.		
	Place Flexibility	Work can be done in other, more pleasant places. Work does not have to be completed at the workplace.		
Work–Life Balance	Time balance	The organization ensures harmony between work responsibilities and personal life. The organization provides time for regular exercise or relaxation activities. Work can be completed during the work week and does not require the use of weekend time.	Putri and Amran (2021)	Interval
	Involvement Balance	Involved in decision-making. Involved in organizational activities. Involved in discussions about work schedule arrangements.		
	Satisfaction balance	Feeling satisfied with the balance between work and personal life. Holidays can be enjoyed without guilt.		
Leader–Member Exchange	Loyalty	Leaders inspire loyalty to the organization. Leaders' attention inspires loyalty to the leaders.	Saeed et al. (2019)	Interval
	Reflecting	1. Leaders always set an example. 2. Leaders' behavior reflects the values of the organization.		
	Trust	Leaders are trustworthy. Leaders can uphold their responsibilities. Leaders can be a place for sharing and discussion.		
	Respect	Leaders are respected for their competence. Leaders are pleasant individuals to work with in completing tasks.		