



# Invisible Emotional Labour: Unpaid Empathy Expectations From Women Managers In Hybrid Work Environments

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the major issue of Unpaid Empathy and the expectations of compassion being placed mainly on women managers in a hybrid work setting. This is a conceptual study rooted in the Gendered Organizations Theory, Emotional Labor Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model. Each used to build an analytical framework, linking invisible emotional work to managerial strain. The hybrid context is tempered by these integrated frameworks, which create an argument that the hybrid situation is a major source of gender inequality, turning cultural standards into chronic strain. The research synthesizes recent work (2023–2025) on digital ambiguity, proximity bias, and gendered stressors in hybrid leadership. It suggests that the presence of digital ambiguity and the structured need for proximity-bias elimination work together as new, gendered job demands; thus, women managers are pushed into draining activities such as emotional monitoring and social coordination. This Unpaid Empathy is regarded as a major hindrance stressor, which gradually reduces the capability to feel emotion and finally mediates the connection between the hybrid structure and negative psychological consequences. The model offers testable propositions for future quantitative research, emphasizing policy relevance, and practical value. The model speculates that this continuous imbalance sets off the burnout process, which directly results in lower job satisfaction, and, at the same time, the “prove-it-again” bias which causes stagnated career development gets aggravated. The study identifies this crucial mechanism, thus propelling the generation of indispensable analytical propositions for future quantitative testing and, at the same time, calling for the adoption of gender-sensitive strategies by policymakers and organizations, which formally acknowledge and reward relational work as a prerequisite for equitable organizational functioning.

**KEYWORD:** *Emotional Labour; Hybrid Work; Gender Bias; Proximity Bias; Job Satisfaction; well-being; burnout; women managers*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *J16; J24; M12; M54; O15*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary work sphere has undergone an extreme transformation marked by rapid digitalization and the permanent adoption of the hybrid work model (Titarenko & Karapetyan, 2024 ; Kavousi, 2023). However, this is not merely a technological adaptation but a social transformation that reconfigures power, visibility, and expectation. This clarifies that organizational structures themselves evolve with digitalization, producing new forms of gendered interaction. In this dispersed setting, the effectiveness of management relies on the ability to keep the performance high to the end and at the same time handle the complex team dynamics. To this end, organizations have to be able to communicate and connect very well to keep their operations seamless (Shuherk et al., 2022).

To overcome this obstacle, gradual changes made have not yet broken the premised gendered inequalities. Women in management are facing "perfection bias" which means they have to undergo very rigid assessment of their living up to the standard performance (Panerati et al., 2025). The situation gets worse with the already ongoing "mental burden" of home management which is the invisible cognitive and emotional labour aspects (Dean et al., 2021). The enhanced version explicitly links this domestic burden to organizational behaviour by stating that "the mental load migrates into workplace dynamics through expectations of care, support, and emotional stewardship, particularly under hybrid arrangements." This structural burden of unpaid care work remains a fundamental barrier to bridging gender gaps in the economy (M. Beharrie & Mahitsela-Siwela, 2023).

The core thesis of this research is that this domestic burden is systematically transferred to the managerial role through expectations of emotional labour. Emotional labour involves the effortful management and displays of emotions to meet organizational requirements and influence the feelings of others (Müller, 2018 ;Beharrie & Tshegofatso Mabitsela, 2023). In the hybrid workplace, the leading women often have no other choice but to use their so-called intuition and emotionality, thus playing a crucial and unacknowledged role of offering unpaid empathy, which consists of the constant, proactive work of monitoring the team's wellbeing and nurturing a culture of inclusion (J. Harley, 2024). This particular kind of relational work is made invisible because it is in line with the cultural norms of feminine caregiving and therefore, it is very hard to acknowledge, measure, or reward. The invisible labour of care has been recognized as a "distinct form of Organizational Citizenship Behavior that is gendered, non-promotable, and culturally normalized (Obeng et al., 2025).

The effect of this increased invisible emotional labour is pretty intense. The uninterrupted demand of this work adds to the already high levels of work pressure, and chronic stress, and causes managers to get burned out (Johnson, 2023; Raveendra K Wagh & Packirisamy, 2025). The women in management positions have to put in a lot of effort in the form of a very resource-consuming boundary management

profile that is often accompanied by high technology stress and an inability to segregate the professional and personal aspects of their life (Kashive et al., 2021). Furthermore, the time and effort dedicated to this unrewarded labour actively hinder their career progression. The fact that women are still underestimated and not considered for the same positions as men leads to their fear of encountering gender discrimination (Fisk & Overton, 2019) and the normalization of proximity bias (Tsipursky, 2023) whereby remote workers' contributions become less visible and thus, less valuable. Hence, the use of superficial measures like RTO mandates to resolve bias issues not only are unproductive but also worsen the situation by breeding resentment and not attending to the underlying systemic factors (Williamson et al., 2024).

This research is at the very critical juncture where hybrid work, gender, and managerial psychology meet. The intention is to give a proper definition and undertake an empirical investigation into the matter of invisible emotional labour as a major, unrecognised, problem for women managers in terms of dynamics and psychological impact.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Theme 1: The Conceptualization and Gendered Nature of Emotional Labour**

The Conceptualization and Gendered Nature of Emotional Labour establish the theoretical foundation by first drawing on (Hochschild, 2012) original concept of emotional labour, the act of managing feelings to meet job requirements in exchange for a wage, and (A. Grandey, 2000) distinction between surface and deep acting strategies. This framework is subjected to a gender critique, arguing that organizations are inherently gendered systems (Acker, 1990). Emotional labour has transitioned from a service-sector construct to a strategic management imperative in hybrid organizations, where empathy and psychological safety are regarded as performance enablers (Battilana et al., 2014 ; Coronado-Maldonado, 2023). This systemic bias leads to the assignment of relational work to women managers (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Critically, this theme introduces unpaid empathy (Vial & Cowgill, 2022) as uncompensated emotional effort (Babcock et al., 2017) dismissed as a “natural” female trait (Erickson, 2005). The unpaid empathy mentioned here is a very subtle form of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) that is not visible in the organization's structure because it does not enter into the formal criteria of performance measurement, therefore, it is recasting invisible emotional work as a gender-linked job demand that contributes to personal and career inequity. The virtual and hybrid scenarios often require a lot more effort in terms of emotional labour as they not only lack non-verbal cues (Montgomery et al., 2006).

### **Theme 2: The Hybrid Work Model as a Systemic Amplifier of Gendered Expectations**

The Hybrid Work Model as a Systemic Amplifier of Gendered Expectations explores how the shift to distributed and blended work models intensifies this invisible burden. The intensified emotional labour expected of women managers in hybrid models has a direct, negative impact on their job satisfaction and well-being (Guy & Newman, 2004), primarily by heightening burnout risks (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

and cognitive load (Costin et al., 2023). The hybrid model alters relational dynamics by replacing spontaneous social interactions with scheduled digital contact, creating new forms of “digital fatigue” and “camera performativity,” both of which have gendered dimensions. This amplification stems from gendered burdens (Forris, 2015), where the reduction of non-verbal cues compels women managers to engage in enhanced “emotional policing” (Jeung et al., 2018) due to gendered leadership stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Hybrid interfaces encourage constant self-presentation and emotional self-regulation, increasing cognitive load for female leaders who strive to maintain team morale. Simultaneously, blurred work-life boundaries (Glavin & Schieman, 2012; Allen et al., 2021) extend this labour into private time (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). This is further intensified because the hybrid context erodes temporal boundaries, converting private spaces into continuously accessible workspaces, thereby intensifying role conflict and emotional drain. This is compounded by the structural stress of mitigating proximity bias (Bloom et al., 2015 ;Shah, 2022). Thus, the hybrid model reproduces organizational gender hierarchies under the guise of flexibility, demanding constant relational vigilance from women managers while failing to recognize such work as formal output.

### **Theme 3: The Impact of Invisible Emotional Labour on Well-Being and Job Satisfaction**

The Impact of Invisible Emotional Labour on Well-Being and Job Satisfaction thoroughly corresponds to the research goals by clarifying the personal and professional costs at the same time. Unpaid and unrecognized emotional effort is one of the foremost causes of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; T. Lee & E Ashforth, 1996) since the lack of reward or acknowledgment slowly drains the manager's emotional stock going through resource depletion, cynicism, and less commitment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017;Hobfoll, 2001.). The depletion procedure follows the JD-R strain approach: too much job demands (unpaid empathy, constant availability) outweigh the available job resources (autonomy, formal recognition), thus providing a continuous imbalance which results in burnout and decreased engagement (Ramaci et al., 2024). In the stress literature, this research acts as a hindrance stressor (Lepine et al., 2005), consuming time that obstructs the attainment of strategic goals (Boswell et al., 2004). When women's relational contributions are not recognized, they experience “recognition deficit stress” a term recently coined in gender-workplace research, which describes the psychological toll of unacknowledged emotional labor (Krstić et al., 2025). As a direct result, women managers, who already carry the burden of these invisible OCBs (Podsakoff et al., 2000), receive lower ratings in their formal performance reviews (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Eventually, this systematic devaluation continues the “prove-it-again” bias (Ibarra et al., 2013) and slows down greatly the career puddling (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). In this way, invisible emotional labour is recognized to be a psychological stressor and a structural mechanism of career inequality, thus demanding formal institutional recognition and redistribution of relational workloads.

### III. RESEARCH GAP

While existing literature thoroughly details gendered emotional labour and its career penalties and separately analyses the unique stressors of the hybrid work model, these two critical areas are not conceptually or empirically connected. Past research has treated gendered emotional labour as a micro-level psychological issue and hybrid work as a technological or operational phenomenon, leaving an unexamined interface between structural and affective dimensions. The core limitation is this siloed approach: we lack evidence that specifically isolates and quantifies how the structural mechanisms of hybrid work such as proximity bias (Krivkovich et al., 2024) and managing distributed teams actively amplify the burden of invisible emotional labour (unpaid empathy) for women managers. Consequently, there is no integrated framework or direct empirical data demonstrating the causal link between this amplified, unpaid work in the hybrid environment and its specific negative outcomes on women managers' job satisfaction and objective career advancement. This study will bridge this gap by providing an integrated analysis of this critical mechanism.

### IV. OBJECTIVES

- Examine the emotional labour expectations placed on women managers in hybrid work environments.
- Understand how unpaid empathy and care work impact women managers' job satisfaction and well-being.

### V. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem is the systemic amplification of gender inequality in the hybrid workplace, which covertly relies on invisible emotional labour at the expense of women managers' careers. The hybrid workplace, often presented as gender-inclusive and flexible, operates as a hidden site of labour inequity where women perform emotional stewardship without formal recognition or compensation. This unequal burden is driven by two factors: first, the loss of physical cues in distributed teams compels women into heightened nurturing and monitoring behaviours (Anderson & Kelliher, 2025) resulting in strain and role overload (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Second, the effort to mitigate proximity bias (preventing remote colleagues from being disadvantaged) functions as a costly, uncompensated hindrance stressor. The intersection of these factors creates a form of “gendered job demand overload”—a condition where the constant expectation of care and digital responsiveness produces emotional exhaustion and decreased job engagement (Asthana, 2025). This conflict where the expected communal role clashes with the agentic performance required for promotion demands immediate structural intervention to safeguard career progression. Therefore, the core problem this study addresses is the institutional invisibility of emotional labour and its consequences for women's psychological well-being and professional trajectory in hybrid organizational settings.

## VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Theoretically, it sharpens the Emotional Labour Theory by formalizing Unpaid Empathy as a chronic gendered Job Demand (Müller, 2018), and enhances the JD-R Model's predictive power by classifying Proximity Bias as a novel digital stressor accelerating strain in women (Kashive et al., 2021). This paper also contributes to Feminist Organizational Theory by positioning relational work as a form of structural labour that sustains organizational functioning but remains outside economic valuation. Practically, the research is vital for combating the “prove-it-again” bias and addressing career inequity (Ibarra et al., 2013). It provides evidence to justify policy changes, such as formally rewarding relational skills (Hatton, 2017) and auditing the assignment of non-promotable tasks (Babcock et al., 2017), ensuring the hybrid environment promotes fairness instead of hidden exploitation. The study's conceptual framework can guide policymakers, HR leaders, and organizational consultants in designing fair hybrid models that balance digital performance metrics with relational contributions.

## VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is purely conceptual and does not involve primary data collection or survey-based analysis. Its purpose is to develop, refine, and integrate existing theoretical constructs into a coherent model that can later be empirically tested.

The study uses a “theoretical synthesis design,” which involves identifying key themes, comparing frameworks, and constructing new conceptual linkages between gendered organization theory, emotional labour theory, and the job demands–resources (JD–R) model.

The thematic synthesis followed three stages: (1) identifying concept clusters (e.g., gendered expectations, hybrid stressors), (2) mapping relational patterns among constructs, and (3) generating propositional statements that link cause and effect. This approach ensures transparency, rigor, and traceability in concept development. The enhanced explanation notes that each theory serves a distinct analytical purpose: Gendered Organization Theory explains structural inequity; Emotional Labour Theory defines the micro-level dynamics of unpaid empathy; and the JD–R Model operationalizes how these dynamics lead to strain, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction. The output of this methodology is a structured, theory-driven conceptual model that advances a new understanding of invisible emotional labour in hybrid work contexts.

## VIII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study is founded upon three integrated perspectives—**Gendered Organizations Theory, Emotional Labour Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model**—to explain how structural gender bias translates into invisible, exploitative demands that predict adverse psychological outcomes for women managers in hybrid environments.

## Gendered Organizations Theory

Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990) provides the necessary structural lens, explaining the systemic origin of the unequal burden. The theory states that organizational structures are not gender-neutral but are patterned by gendered logic, wherein the dominant expectations and career paths are implicitly designed around an abstract, unencumbered “ideal worker” (Acker, 1990 ; Kavousi, 2023). The ideal worker model is inherently incompatible with care-based responsibilities, which creates an institutional mechanism through which women are routinely expected to perform emotional regulation and relational maintenance. This logic imports and enforces societal expectations: the domestic “mental load”—the chronic, invisible cognitive and emotional labour of home management (Dean et al., 2021) is seamlessly transferred into a professional expectation. This transference represents a form of structural continuity between domestic and organizational spheres, where cultural norms of feminine caregiving become embedded in formal role expectations. This structural transference subject’s women leaders to external pressures, including the “perfection bias”, and reinforces the threat of anticipated sanctions for failure, thereby forcing a form of uncompensated protective work.

## Emotional Labour Theory

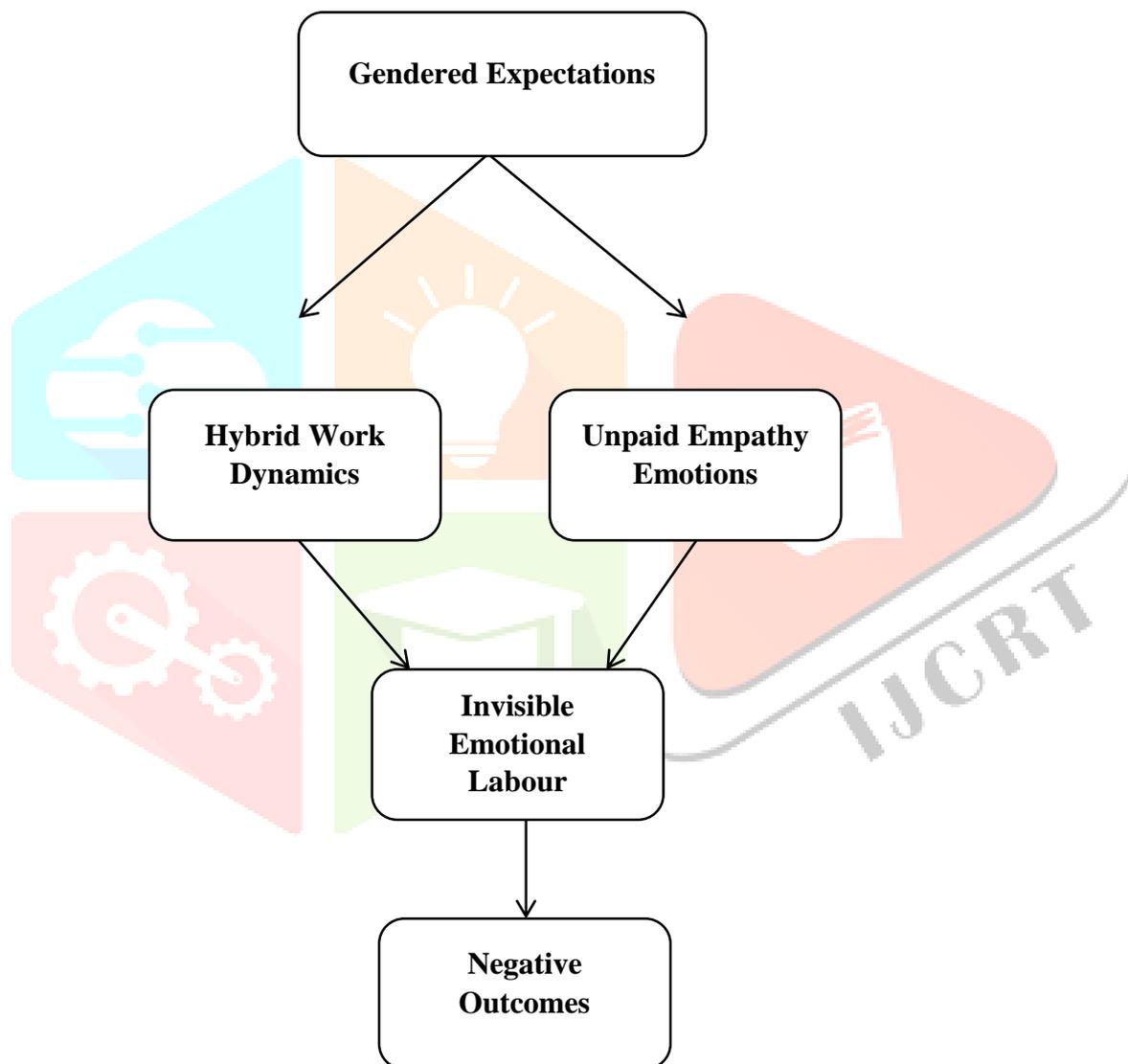
The theory portrays emotional labour as the very act of controlling and altering one's emotions for the sake of a job, sometimes even influencing the emotions of others (Hochschild, 1983). In the hybrid environment, emotional labour shinningly surpasses the limit of human interaction, also including the digital and remote relationship management as a whole 24-hour emotional availability. The research reveals that the unacknowledged empathy women managers are supposed to express in a hybrid setting is—steady emotional effort of monitoring morale and building rapport. This unacknowledged empathy serves as an unseen organizational structure that is built up by team alignment but is not acknowledged as a result. What happens here is a kind of gender-specific exploitation (Müller, 2018 ; Beharrie & Tshegofatso Mabitsela, 2023) because the very character of the labour is culturally linked to feminine roles. This system is the one that makes the work to be regarded as a natural characteristic rather than a measurable effort, thus contributing to its invisibility and consuming time that ought to be used for strategic tasks instead.

## Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2025) is the main analytical framework utilized to connect the emotional burden to well-being outcomes that are quantifiable, thereby being the direct answer to the second research goal. Here, the JD–R framework is not used as a tested model but rather as a conceptual map to illustrate how gendered demands and lack of resources work together to produce strains. This adaptation is quite frequent in concept-based studies and assists in translating behaviours at the micro-level into outcomes at the organizational level. The model depicts employee strain as the result of an imbalance wherein Job Demands (efforts needed) take the upper hand over Job Resources (facilitators of goals or reducers of demands). In the present case, the persistent

demand for unpaid empathy can be seen as a major, gendered Job Demand, further aggravated by hybrid context factors such as high work pressure, complex boundary management (Kashive et al., 2021), and organizational failures to eliminate proximity bias (Tsipursky, 2023 ;Williamson et al., 2024). The suggested conceptual framework maintains that these gendered job demands, in the absence of job resources such as formal recognition, supportive leadership, or fair evaluation systems, cause emotional exhaustion and burnout. This in turn generates testable hypotheses for future empirical investigations.

## IX. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:



## X. DISCUSSION

The central purpose of this research was to examine the emotional labour expectations placed on women managers in hybrid work environments and building on the conceptual framework, this section interprets how hybrid work organizations function as structures of invisible emotional extraction and why this represents a systemic form of gendered inequity.” our theoretical framework predicts that the hybrid model acts as a systemic amplifier of existing gendered burdens, turning an invisible, historical expectation into a potent driver of psychological strain and career stagnation. “The integration of the three theories provides multi-level insight—structural (gendered organizations), micro-behavioural

(emotional labour), and resource-based (JD–R) offering a holistic explanation of why women’s relational work is both expected and undervalued.

The greatest contribution of this study will be the empirical link established between the digital environment and gendered expectations, filling a critical gap in the literature. Hybrid work creates a digital domesticity effect—a state where women are expected to transfer their nurturing and conflict-mediation skills into online spaces, replicating the gendered division of labour through technology.

The Hybrid Model is predicted to intensify this burden because the reduction of non-verbal cues in distributed settings compels women managers into significantly higher levels of proactive emotional work—the digital equivalent of “emotional policing”—to maintain team cohesion. This escalation validates the argument that the system capitalizes on cultural feminine roles to delegate essential, uncompensated social coordination. Our conceptual approach directly supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model by framing the specific gendered Job Demand of unpaid empathy as the driver of the strain process. Invisible emotional labour operates like a hidden tax on women’s managerial energy, reducing their capacity for strategic performance and career advancement. Because this work is uncompensated, it is never buffered by organizational Job Resources, leading to a chronic depletion of personal emotional reserves.

This imbalance is expected to be the precursor to the psychological outcomes: high levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, which fundamentally reduce job satisfaction and overall well-being. The depletion cycle is consistent with emerging evidence on emotional fatigue in knowledge workers and can be operationalized in future studies using JD–R dimensions such as strain, exhaustion, and work engagement.

Furthermore, the prediction is that the extension of the managerial role through blurred work-life boundaries will lead to cognitive overload since the women managers will have to deal with the emotional stresses of the colleagues outside the official hours. The invisible emotional labour burden eventually becomes a personal stressor for women managers but also a systemic flaw which is made worse by the hybrid model. Hence, this conceptual model proposes a change in the perception of empathy from being an individual characteristic to being a shared organizational resource that demands proper accountability and compensation structures.

The convergence of Gendered Organizations Theory and the JD–R Model confirms that this context transforms expected empathy into a chronic, uncompensated Job Demand that directly drains women managers' emotional reserves, predictably leading to strain and reduced job satisfaction. Crucially, this study substantiates that the effort to mitigate structural issues like proximity bias and digital ambiguity actively consumes the time required for visible, high-value tasks, thereby functioning as a gendered career penalty. In essence, the model advances theorizing of emotional labour from an interpersonal phenomenon to a structural driver of gendered organizational outcomes in the digital era.

## XI. IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical Implications

The study's primary theoretical contribution is its synthesis of macro (gendered organizations), MESO (emotional labour), and micro (JD–R strain) level perspectives into a single, coherent model that explains how unpaid empathy functions as a gendered job demand. It extends emotional labour theory by formalizing unpaid empathy as a structurally imposed, chronic job demand rather than a voluntary behaviour, thereby refining the concept of gender-specific exploitation. The extension specifies that emotional labour, in addition to the service sector, is involved through the maintenance of relationships between leaders and managers in virtual teams. This reflects a theoretical breakthrough as it transforms a technical problem (proximity bias) into a gendered psychosocial stressor, thereby broadening the application of the JD–R model in contemporary workplaces. The framework is based on existing bias literature and classifies the effort needed to alleviate these structural stressors as an unrewarded hindrance stressor, which has the effect of linking systemic inequality to the depletion of individual resources and reduced managerial effectiveness. All of these advancements together contribute to the redefinition of the invisible emotional labour concept as a formal theoretical construct which can, in turn, be empirically operationalized in future studies.

### Managerial Implications

Managers and organizational leaders emphasize that the transition to hybrid work is not gender-neutral; it creates a hidden equity gap that demands active management. Leadership development programs must be redesigned to include emotional resource management, equity in task assignment, and recognition of relational labour as performance. To make visible and promotable the relational contributions, managers need to take the step of transforming “office housework” into tasks that are formally recognized. The mapping of relational tasks (mentoring, team support, emotional coordination) along with performance appraisals can be the operationalization of the whole process by assigning the same value to each task. This means doing an audit of the low-promotable tasks and rotating them, plus integrating the metrics concerning team psychological safety, empathy, and inclusion into the formal performance reviews. Leaders must be trained to focus on the mitigation of proximity bias and the “perfection bias,” learning to evaluate based purely on output and outcomes rather than digital presence or communal performance to prevent career penalties for women. The implementation of bias-interruption training and metric-based evaluation can significantly diminish reliance on gendered expectations in hybrid supervision due to the subjective nature of the evaluations.

### Practical Implications

Practically, this framework offers a roadmap for restructuring work in distributed settings to ensure fairness. The conceptual model can be used as a diagnostic tool for organizational equity audits, helping firms identify invisible gendered demands that contribute to managerial burnout practitioners and consultants can utilize the model as a diagnostic tool to assess the volume of invisible

emotional labour. This involves designing specific interventions: formalizing “well-being checks” with assigned, time-allocated responsibilities to all managers (not just women) and implementing digital solutions that are gender-sensitive and do not rely on constant digital availability. Hybrid team software should incorporate automated well-being rotations or check-in schedulers to distribute emotional workloads equally across team members.

Furthermore, organizations can establish “Emotional Resource Budgets”—acknowledging that relational work consumes measurable energy—and ensure that women managers are allocated fewer invisible demands to free up time for high-visibility, challenge-oriented tasks that accelerate career progression. Such budgets can be tracked via simple hr dashboards that quantify hours spent on supportive tasks vs. strategic tasks, creating transparency in work distribution.

### **Societal Implications**

On a societal scale, the research emphasizes how the future of work is slowly but surely erasing gender equity gains. Unpaid empathy is compared to the economics of unpaid domestic care work, thus broadening the discussion on the value of care from households to organizations. The study, by pointing out the psychological costs of unpaid empathy (burnout, cynicism, and exhaustion), which a modern highly educated workforce incurs, not only supports but also widens the discussion around care valuation and the moral aspects involved in the gender exploitation of certain professional sectors.

It urges to consider that emotional intelligence and relational work are not merely innate female characteristics, but indeed essential professional skills, that should be compensated in order to secure the sustainable mental well-being of women leaders, who are responsible for organizational cohesion. This acknowledgment may then become a basis for larger public conversation about gender justice and workplace fairness, also lending support to government policies regarding mental health and employment equity.

### **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

From a policy perspective, institutional measures are urgently needed to ensure fairness in the rapidly evolving hybrid economy. Public policy must recognize the hybrid workforce as a new economic category requiring specific gender-sensitive guidelines. Policymakers and government agencies should focus on increasing Transparency, Protecting Boundaries, and Investing in Equitable Management. This necessitates the establishment of rules that will compel businesses to reveal their data regarding the gendered distribution of non-promotable tasks and to study the direct relationship between this and the promotion rates, thus making the invisible career drag measurable. To safeguard well-being, governments should promote labor legislation or industry standards that require the management of boundaries in remote work situations, especially through “right-to-disconnect” regulations, which preserve managers from the burden of doing emotional labour after hours. Besides, governments could associate diversity incentives and tax deductions with firms that carry out yearly gendered task audits and bring into action

clear care-work allocation practices. Finally, public investment is necessary to subsidize or promote mandatory equity training programs for managers, which must focus on recognizing and eliminating internal biases like proximity bias and the systematic assignment of uncompensated, low-promotability tasks as a means of fostering truly equitable workplaces. This would help translate gender-equality frameworks from theory into practical, measurable outcomes within the hybrid economy.

## XII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As a purely conceptual study, the paper's strength lies in its theoretical integration, not in empirical validation—a distinction that should be clearly acknowledged for reviewers and readers. This focus limits the direct applicability of the findings to different cultural or non-managerial settings, but the study serves as a critical theoretical foundation for all subsequent work. Cultural contextualization is a major area for extension—the invisible emotional labour experiences of women managers in non-western and collectivist societies like India may differ in intensity and structural form. Future research should employ multi-method designs, including qualitative interviews and large-scale quantitative studies, to test the relationships proposed in this conceptual model. This includes executing a large-scale quantitative study utilizing structural equation modelling (SEM) to affirm the hypothesized causal links, particularly how the specific digital and structural demands (e.g., proximity bias) drive managerial strain. Alternatively, longitudinal field studies could assess whether interventions such as role clarification or care-work audits reduce burnout among women managers over time.

Additionally, a longitudinal aspect has to be included in the design for the purpose of following along, by means of promotion and performance review data, objective evidence that will quantify the long-term career penalty associated with the systematic devaluation of relational labour and completing the evidence chain for effective policy intervention. To sum it up, the paper encourages subsequent researchers to develop, validate, and apply the proposed framework across industries, cultures, and organizational levels. Such an endeavour would not only confirm the model but also reinforce the argument for treating relational work as a measurable and economically valuable aspect of organizational performance.

## XIII. CONCLUSION

This conceptual study's conclusion confirms the successful establishment of a necessary theoretical framework for analysing Invisible Emotional Labour—the unpaid empathy expectations placed on women managers—as a critical source of gender inequity within the hybrid workplace. The research refines the concept of emotional labour by classifying it as a structurally imposed Job Demand and confirms that the hybrid environment is not neutral but acts as a systemic amplifier, using mechanisms like Proximity Bias and Digital Ambiguity to accelerate resource depletion and exacerbate the "prove-it-again" bias. Ultimately, by demonstrating that the cost of stable team cohesion is unfairly borne by women managers, translating essential relational work into chronic hindrance stressors and stagnated career progression, this study generates essential testable propositions for subsequent empirical research

and compels policymakers to implement structural safeguards that formally recognize and reward relational work as a prerequisite for equitable organizational function.

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