Gen Z at Work in Central and Eastern Europe

Socioeconomic, Technological and Cultural Contexts

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Chapter 7

Shaping Tomorrow's Workforce

Advanced Statistical Analysis of Survey Results on Generation Z's Work Preferences in Poland, Czechia, and Estonia

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7 Shaping Tomorrow's Workforce

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7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a human-centred, cross-national analysis of Generation Z students' preferences regarding the future of work, based on survey data from Poland, the Czech Republic, and Estonia. It examines how psychological traits, socio-cultural contexts, and core work values influence choices among work models: office-based, hybrid, remote, and work-from-anywhere (WFA). As the first fully digital-native cohort entering the labour market, Generation Z exhibits distinct expectations and behavioural patterns shaped by their upbringing in a technologically saturated environment. Drawing on multidisciplinary literature, the chapter formulates and tests hypotheses to identify the individual and contextual factors that drive preferences for different work arrangements.

Rather than presenting a detached statistical overview, the analysis seeks to clarify the reasoning, habits, and aspirations that shape these preferences, with particular attention to the intersection of national and personal contexts.

To guide this inquiry, we adopt a structured yet narrative analytical framework. The selection of the four work models – office, hybrid, remote, and WFA reflects their growing relevance in contemporary labour markets. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for rethinking conventional work environments, prompting widespread experimentation with remote and hybrid formats. As digital infrastructure advanced and organisations adapted to distributed teams, the feasibility of remote and WFA models expanded significantly. At the same time, traditional office-based work has remained prevalent, particularly in sectors or cultures that prioritise face-to-face interaction and hierarchical oversight. The hybrid model has emerged as a pragmatic middle ground, while WFA represents the aspirations of a digitally fluent, globally mobile generation. Each model embodies a distinct set of values, constraints, and cultural assumptions, making them ideal reference points for examining generational work preferences in Central and Eastern Europe.

The analysis proceeds by systematically exploring the predictors of each work model preference, beginning with office-based arrangements and progressing through hybrid and remote models, before concluding with the WFA approach. Within each section, we examine three interrelated dimensions: individual work values (e.g., the importance of flexibility or job security), attitudinal and

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psychological indicators (such as concerns about competence or social isolation), and personality traits, particularly those captured by the Big Five model. We also attend to cross-country differences, especially where cultural or infrastructural factors appear to influence attitudes. In doing so, we aim not only to identify what Generation Z prefers – but to understand why.

The chapter begins with an analysis of office work preferences and the social-emotional needs that sustain them. We then turn to hybrid models, followed by fully remote and finally nomadic WFA arrangements, always attentive to the personal narratives and contextual factors embedded in these choices.

7.2 Review of literature and development of research hypotheses

Numerous studies have found that job security remains a key concern for Generation Z, despite their digital fluency and exposure to flexible work models. According to Barhate and Dirani (2022), Generation Z demonstrates a pragmatic approach to career development, frequently prioritising stability, structure, and financial safety in early career stages. One possible explanation is that today's youth have grown up during a period of economic uncertainty, global pandemics, and geopolitical unpredictability. Most people believe that working in an office provides more institutional support, oversight, and predictability, all of which are in line with a desire for security.

However, this emphasis on security may also reflect a generational ambivalence. While Generation Z values innovation, they may simultaneously seek the psychological safety of traditional structures. This duality is underexplored in current literature.

Workplace flexibility, understood as the ability to choose when, where, and how work is conducted, has also become a defining value for Generation Z. Numerous global and regional studies consistently rank flexibility among the top expectations of this generation. Hackney et al. (2022) suggest that the appeal of flexible work environments is driven not only by technological advancements but also by a generational emphasis on autonomy, balance, and self-regulation. Lee et al. (2024) suggest that flexibility influences employee engagement in multifaceted ways. For example, workspace flexibility and functional flexibility positively correlate with increased engagement, while working time flexibility and operational flexibility show less or no significant impact. This differentiation challenges the assumption that all forms of flexibility are equally valued or effective. It also raises the question of whether flexibility is a stable preference or context-dependent. Few studies have examined how flexibility interacts with other values, such as collaboration or career progression.

While flexibility is valued, Generation Z does not seek full detachment from others. Opportunities for collaboration remain essential, especially for early-career employees who rely on interpersonal learning and mentoring. In consequence, social connectivity remains a critical concern – particularly in fully remote settings. Studies by Hackney et al. (2022) note that the absence of face-to-face interaction can generate feelings of detachment, anxiety, and professional invisibility,

especially for younger employees still building their identity within an organisation. Pew Research Center (Parker et al., 2022) found that younger generations expressed greater concern than older cohorts about missing opportunities for socialisation and learning in fully remote contexts. Therefore, it is plausible that those most concerned about social isolation would avoid fully remote models. This aligns with prior observations that Generation Z prefers digital tools that still allow for collaboration and mentorship (Leslie et al., 2021). Yet, the literature remains divided on whether hybrid models truly mitigate these concerns or merely postpone them. Some scholars argue that hybrid work may create new inequalities in visibility and access to informal learning (Gratton, 2021), a point often overlooked in optimistic accounts.

Studies by Leslie et al. (2021) suggest that hybrid work formats offer an optimal balance, providing digital autonomy while preserving the benefits of in-person interaction. Therefore, individuals who place a high value on teamwork and collaboration are likely to prefer arrangements that preserve social contact. However, this conclusion may be overly generalised. The effectiveness of hybrid models likely depends on organisational culture, leadership style, and the quality of digital infrastructure, factors that are rarely controlled for in comparative studies.

Closely related to the notion of flexibility is the desire for autonomy in decision-making. Individuals who value control over their daily responsibilities, task prioritisation, and project choices tend to prefer remote or independent work arrangements (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Autonomy is strongly associated with intrinsic motivation, fostering a sense of ownership, self-direction, and perceived competence. These factors have been shown to significantly influence the adoption of self-managed work styles. Nonetheless, autonomy may also lead to role ambiguity and decision fatigue, particularly in early-career stages. The literature often assumes that autonomy is universally empowering, but this may not hold for individuals with lower self-efficacy or limited organisational experience.

Beyond the desire for autonomy, personality traits, particularly those outlined in the Big Five model, also play a meaningful role in shaping preferences for different work arrangements. Extraverted individuals are generally more inclined towards work models that offer regular social interaction, such as office-based or hybrid work (Leslie et al., 2021). In contrast, those high in openness to experience often favour more novel and unconventional formats, including WFA (de Almeida et al., 2023; Gavoille & Hazans, 2022). Emotional stability, related to lower levels of neuroticism, has similarly been linked to a greater ease in navigating autonomous roles, where less structure is limited and higher uncertainty is more prevalent (Gavoille & Hazans, 2022; Gratton, 2021). These personality-driven tendencies underscore the importance of aligning work environments with individual psychological profiles to support both performance and well-being. However, most studies treat personality traits as static predictors, without considering how they interact with contextual variables such as national culture or digital maturity. This study addresses that gap by testing trait-value interactions and cross-national differences.

In addition to individual psychological traits, contextual moderators such as gender and place of residence also shape preferences for different work models. Research suggests that gender may influence how flexibility is interpreted – women often associate it with improved work-life balance, while men are more likely to view it through the lens of autonomy and control (Almer et al., 2022). Furthermore, geographical context plays a role – residents of rural areas may encounter infrastructural limitations or cultural expectations that reduce both the appeal and feasibility of remote work arrangements (Galdiero et al., 2024). Yet, these findings are often based on national-level aggregates. There is a lack of micro-level, student-focused studies that explore how these contextual factors operate within younger populations.

National context also plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards flexible work arrangements. For example, Estonia's long-standing investment in digital public services and educational technologies has fostered a culture of technological readiness, which may enhance receptivity to models such as WFA (Choudhury et al., 2020). Cultural dimensions, as outlined in Hofstede's framework, such as levels of individualism, uncertainty avoidance, or power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010), further influence how work is structured and experienced across countries. These cross-national differences provide a compelling rationale for incorporating country-level comparison into the research hypothesis framework. International cross-cultural analysis helps to explain why students in Central and Eastern Europe could act differently and lean more toward office work models in certain nations when stability is given top priority. However, Hofstede's framework has been criticised for its static and essentialist view of culture. This study contributes by examining how national context interacts with individual-level psychological and value-based predictors, offering a more dynamic and generationally sensitive perspective.

To move beyond preference and better understand behavioural intentions, it is useful to draw on decision-making theories. The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) offers a well-established model for examining how individuals' intentions to adopt specific work modes, including WFA, are formed. According to this theory, intention is shaped by three interrelated components: (1) attitude towards the behaviour (e.g., perceived benefits of remote work), (2) subjective norms (e.g., perceived social expectations), and (3) perceived behavioural control (e.g., confidence in one's ability to work effectively in a remote setting). This framework is particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose digital fluency and evolving work values may influence how they evaluate and commit to emerging work models.

Grounded in these conceptual foundations, we propose a set of testable hypotheses, detailed in the following section.

H1. A higher value placed on job security is positively associated with a preference for structured, office-based work arrangements.

H2. A higher value placed on workplace flexibility is positively associated with a preference for remote or location-independent work models.

H3. A higher value placed on interpersonal collaboration is positively associated with a preference for hybrid work arrangements.
H4. A higher value placed on decision-making autonomy is positively associated with a preference for remote work.
H5. Greater concern about social isolation is negatively associated with a preference for fully remote work models.
H6. Higher levels of extraversion are positively associated with a preference for work arrangements that involve regular in-person contact.
H7. Higher levels of openness to experience are positively associated with a preference for work from anywhere (WFA) models.
H8. Higher levels of emotional stability are positively associated with a preference for less structured and more autonomous work models.
H9. Gender moderates the relationship between the value placed on work-life balance and preference for hybrid work.
H10. Place of residence (urban vs rural) moderates the relationship between the value placed on flexibility and preference for remote work.
H11. National context (Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia) is associated with differences in preferences for work models.
H12. The relationship between openness to experience and preference for WFA is moderated by the value placed on flexibility.
H13. The relationship between emotional stability and preference for remote work is moderated by the value placed on autonomy.
H14. Positive attitudes towards work from anywhere (WFA) are positively associated with the behavioural intention to adopt WFA.
H15. Greater perceived ease of adoption is positively associated with the behavioural intention to adopt WFA.
H16. Stronger subjective norms are positively associated with the behavioural intention to adopt WFA.

These hypotheses provide the analytical structure for examining how Generation Z understands the opportunities and constraints of contemporary work and how they envision their future roles in a digitally evolving labour market.

7.3 Methodology

The empirical data were gathered via an online questionnaire distributed between March and June 2024. The questionnaire comprised a total of 21 items – 15 thematic questions and 6 demographic questions. All items were closed-ended, including several statements rated on a seven-point Likert scale, which enabled a structured and quantitative assessment of participants' views, preferences, and attitudes.

The survey was directed at students in economics and business-related disciplines at universities located in the capital cities of Poland, Czechia, and Estonia. The final dataset comprised 213 fully completed responses.

In terms of national representation, most participants were from Poland (n = 126; 59.2%), followed by Estonia (n = 44; 20.7%) and Czechia (n = 43; 20.2%).

Gender distribution within the sample was relatively balanced, with 93 respondents identifying as male (43.7%), 115 as female (54.0%), and 5 individuals (2.3%) selecting the "other" category.

Participants also reported diverse backgrounds in terms of their place of living. A small portion of the sample (8.5%) came from rural areas, while 14.1% originated from small towns with populations up to 20,000. Medium-sized urban areas (between 20,000 and 500,000 inhabitants) accounted for 31.9% of the responses. Additionally, 6.6% of respondents reported living in metropolitan areas with populations ranging from 500,000 to 1 million, and the largest group (39.0%) indicated they were from large metropolitan centres exceeding 1 million residents.

This demographic diversity allowed for the creation and analysis of the constructs under investigation, including perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and social influence. The data were processed with SPSS version 29.2 using correlations, regressions, ANOVA, t-test, and factor analysis.

7.4 Work model preferences

7.4.1 Determinants of preferences for office-based work

For many observers, the office represents a relic of the pre-pandemic world – a space that once symbolised order, hierarchy, and routine. And yet, among Generation Z students surveyed in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Estonia, office-based work has not been entirely referred to the past. On the contrary, a substantial segment of respondents continues to express a clear preference for work attached to a physical location. This section explains why.

The analytical model exploring predictors of preference for office-based work includes a wide array of variables. These range from core work-related values to more latent psychological traits and demographic indicators. The intention is not only to identify who prefers the office, but also to interpret these preferences through the lens of meaning – what does the office represent to young people, and why might it still feel like a secure or desirable space?

At a glance, office-based preferences correlate most strongly with values such as job security and opportunities for collaboration. In statistical terms, both variables were positive and statistically significant predictors. Job security emerged as a consistent anchor. Respondents who indicated that employment stability was a central concern were significantly more likely to choose traditional office models ($\beta = 0.206$, $p = 0.006$). Collaboration opportunities followed a similar trend ($\beta = 0.156$, $p = 0.047$), suggesting that the presence of colleagues, mentoring possibilities, and a structured team environment all contribute to the perceived value of office settings.

What becomes apparent from Table 7.1 is that office work is not necessarily favoured by those seeking balance or freedom. Flexibility, so often positioned as the gold standard of modern employment, had a statistically significant negative relationship with office preference ($\beta = -0.233$, $p = 0.001$). This supports the view that young people who prioritise autonomy in managing their time and location

Table 7.1 Workplace values as predictors of preference for office-based work

Predictor	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
Job Security	0.240	0.086	0.206	0.006
Collaboration Opportunities	0.182	0.091	0.156	0.047
Flexibility	−0.332	0.103	−0.233	0.001
Work-life Balance	−0.297	0.095	−0.233	0.002
Career Advancement	0.067	0.112	0.047	0.553

Source: Authors' own elaboration

are less inclined to bind themselves to the office. It looks that office-based mode is also negatively associated with desire of work-life balance ($\beta = -0.233$, $p = 0.002$). Instead, the office appears to appeal more to those seeking structure, predictability, job security, and interpersonal embeddedness.

This interpretation was confronted with the individual concerns. The regression analysis presented in Table 7.2 investigates the extent to which anticipated work-related values predict a preference for working exclusively in an office-based setting. Notably, none of the predictors reached statistical significance (all p-values > 0.05), indicating that individual expectations regarding future experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness do not exert a meaningful influence on the preference for office-only work within this sample. Although certain variables – such as the expectation of feeling connected with colleagues ($\beta = 0.143$) and

Table 7.2 Attitudinal predictors of preference for office-based work

Predictor	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
I am concerned that I might not feel competent in my future job role	−0.085	0.082	−0.089	0.301
I expect to have a sense of choice and freedom in deciding how to do my future work	−0.154	0.123	−0.101	0.212
In my future job, I anticipate being able to make decisions about my work methods and tasks	−0.144	0.130	−0.094	0.267
I worry that my future job might pressure me to act in ways that conflict with my preferences	−0.066	0.077	−0.069	0.390
I expect to feel confident in my ability to perform well in my future job	−0.090	0.131	−0.059	0.492
I anticipate feeling competent and capable in handling tasks in my future work	0.154	0.099	0.131	0.121
I expect to feel connected with colleagues and to be part of a community in my future work	0.164	0.114	0.143	0.152
In my future job, I anticipate having supportive and meaningful relationships with my coworkers	0.088	0.110	0.080	0.426
I worry about feeling isolated or disconnected from others in my future work	0.003	0.079	0.004	0.968

Source: Authors' own elaboration

anticipating competence in handling future tasks (β = 0.131) – exhibited relatively higher standardised coefficients, these associations remain statistically non-significant. Consequently, while these psychological constructs may hold theoretical relevance, the findings suggest they do not constitute robust predictors of office-based work preference in this context.

In the next step, we analysed whether personality traits, like openness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness, can explain why someone might prefer to work in an office. The results showed that the model was not statistically significant (p = 0.951), with an R-squared value of 0.006, indicating that the model explains less than 1% of the variance in the dependent variable. Furthermore, none of the individual predictors reached statistical significance, with all p-values well above the threshold of 0.05. The standardised coefficients (Beta) were uniformly low, suggesting minimal practical influence of personality traits on the preference towards the office-based work model in the analysed sample.

Cross-country comparisons further nuance these findings. The Kruskal–Wallis test also reveals no significant differences in office preference between countries (H=1.33; p = 0.5015).

Taken together, the findings suggest that office-based work continues to hold appeal among Generation Z, but primarily for those who associate it with security, social presence, and structured progression. While this preference is not dominant, it is neither obsolete nor accidental. For a segment of this generation, the office still represents a place of stability and belonging.

7.4.2 Determinants of preferences for hybrid work model

The hybrid model, by design, promises flexibility without severing ties to physical collaboration. It allows for independence and structure, remote days and office days, digital freedom and tangible teamwork. Among Generation Z students in this study, hybrid work stood out as one of the most frequently preferred formats, not because it was trendy or default, but because it offered a flexible compromise that aligned with their psychological needs and contextual realities.

Our regression analysis of hybrid work preferences reveals a compelling blend of predictors. As expected, personality traits such as extraversion (B = 0.162, p = 0.046) and attitudinal concerns – particularly the fear of social isolation (B = 0.150, p = 0.035) – emerged as significant influences. The implication here is clear that hybrid work attracts those who are socially inclined yet cautious of complete detachment from colleagues. This resonates with other data points suggesting that Generation Z is not only tech-savvy but also socially attuned, seeking balance more than absolutes.

The regression analysis aimed to examine the extent to which the Big Five personality traits predict individuals' preferences for hybrid work arrangements. Although the overall model did not reach statistical significance, certain trends emerged that warrant further consideration. Specifically, higher levels of extraversion were positively associated with a preference for hybrid work (β = 0.130, p = 0.084), suggesting that more sociable individuals may value the balance between in-person interaction and more flexibility. Conversely, emotional stability

was negatively associated with hybrid work preference ($\beta = -0.123$, $p = 0.089$), indicating that individuals with lower emotional stability may be more inclined towards hybrid arrangements, potentially due to the reduced stress and increased autonomy such models can offer. While these associations did not meet conventional thresholds for statistical significance, they highlight potentially meaningful psychological patterns that merit further investigation in future research.

Interestingly, place of living – a proxy for urban versus rural background – was negatively associated with hybrid preference ($B = 0.136$; $p = 0.049$). Students from smaller towns or rural areas were significantly less inclined to endorse this model. This may reflect limitations in infrastructure, such as unreliable internet connectivity or fewer opportunities to combine remote and in-person formats effectively. It might also reveal different cultural norms about visibility, presence, and work accountability.

From a values-based perspective, however, hybrid work preference does not strongly correlate with any singular workplace principle. Job security ($B = 0.108$) and flexibility ($B = 0.069$) were positively related but not at a statistically significant level ($p = 0.162$ and 0.336). Likewise, collaboration, work-life balance, and career advancement possibilities did not play a defining role in the regression outcome for hybrid preference. This suggests that hybrid work is less ideologically loaded and more contextually adaptive. It is the preferred option not because it aligns with a dominant work value, but because it accommodates competing values without forcing an either/or choice.

The lack of extreme value preferences might be a strength of the hybrid model. Its appeal lies precisely in its elasticity. Generation Z respondents do not expect hybrid work to deliver perfection. They expect it to be adaptable. And for many, particularly those who express a desire to maintain social relationships without sacrificing autonomy, this model offers exactly that. What is more, there was a statistically significant relation between the declaration of anticipation of having supportive and meaningful relationships with coworkers and preference towards hybrid mode ($B = 0.288$; $p = 0.003$).

National-level differences were less pronounced for hybrid work than for office-based formats. Kruskal–Wallis results showed no statistically significant difference between countries ($H(2) = 3.29$, $p = 0.193$), suggesting a broad, shared receptivity to hybrid models across the region. This regional consistency supports the view that hybrid arrangements may form the stable backbone of future workplace design, familiar enough to traditional structures yet forward-looking enough to satisfy the need for flexibility.

7.4.3 Determinants of preferences for remote work

Remote work, once a rarity reserved for freelancers or tech specialists, has become an established pillar in discussions of workplace transformation. For Generation Z, who entered adulthood in a world shaped by connectivity and rapid digitalisation, the concept of working from home or from any fixed location outside the office is neither novel nor particularly threatening. That said, preferences for remote work

Table 7.3 Workplace values predicting preference for remote work

Predictor	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
Flexibility	0.281	0.121	0.175	0.021
Collaboration Opportunities	−0.213	0.108	−0.161	0.049
Job Security	0.008	0.102	0.006	0.937
Work-life Balance	0.059	0.112	0.041	0.601
Career Advancement	0.170	0.132	0.105	0.200

Source: Authors' own elaboration

are far from universal. This section explores the nuanced interplay between personal autonomy, psychological comfort, and structural support in shaping students' attitudes towards remote work.

Our analysis begins with core attitudinal and value-based predictors. Flexibility emerged as the strongest positive predictor of remote work preference (B = 0.281, p = 0.021), highlighting the importance students place on self-directed time and space management. Conversely, students who value collaboration opportunities were significantly less likely to prefer remote work (B = −0.213, p = 0.049), underlining a potential conflict between remote settings and interpersonal engagement. Other dimensions – job security, work-life balance, and career advancement – did not significantly influence remote work preference in the model (Table 7.3).

Emotional and psychological self-perceptions also played a critical role. The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 7.4. A concern about competence

Table 7.4 Psychological and attitudinal predictors of remote work preference

Predictor	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
I am concerned that I might not feel competent in my future job role	1.268	0.999	0.254	<0.001
I expect to have a sense of choice and freedom in deciding how to do my future work	0.435	0.129	0.109	0.166
In my future job, I anticipate being able to make decisions about my work methods and tasks	0.190	0.137	0.125	0.093
I worry that my future job might pressure me to act in ways that conflict with my preferences	0.137	0.081	0.140	0.080
I expect to feel confident in my ability to perform well in my future job	0.241	0.137	−0.116	0.139
I anticipate feeling competent and capable in handling tasks in my future work	−0.154	0.104	0.101	0.205
I expect to feel connected with colleagues and to be part of a community in my future work	0.109	0.086	−0.047	0.613
In my future job, I anticipate having supportive and meaningful relationships with my coworkers	−0.060	0.118	−0.250	0.008
I worry about feeling isolated or disconnected from others in my future work	−0.313	0.116	−0.076	0.357

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 7.5 Personality predictors of remote work preference

Personality trait	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
Openness	−0.041	0.136	−0.024	0.764
Emotional Stability	0.191	0.106	0.130	0.072
Extraversion	−0.118	0.097	−0.090	0.229
Agreeableness	−0.276	0.128	−0.151	0.033
Conscientiousness	0.123	0.123	0.076	0.317

Source: Authors' own elaboration

in a future job was a strong and statistically significant predictor (B = 0.254, $p < 0.001$). Notably, expectations of having supportive relationships at work were negatively associated with remote preference (B = −0.250, p = 0.008), suggesting that students who prioritise emotional connectedness in the workplace may find remote work less appealing. Two predictors demonstrated trend-level significance, suggesting potential but not definitive effects. Anticipated pressure to act against one's preferences and values (p = 0.080) and the expectation of decision-making autonomy (p = 0.093) both pointed towards a positive association with remote work preference, indicating patterns that may merit further exploration. Other aspects, such as fear of isolation, sense of freedom of choice or feeling competent and able to perform well, did not yield statistically significant effects.

As for personality, results did not point to a single dominant trait but revealed important nuances. Emotional stability was positively associated with preference for remote work (B = 0.130, p = 0.072), indicating that emotionally grounded individuals may better tolerate the potential stresses of remote environments. Interestingly, agreeableness showed a statistically significant negative association (B = −0.151, p = 0.033), suggesting that more cooperative and affiliative individuals may struggle with the isolated nature of remote setups. Other traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness were not statistically significant in this model (Table 7.5).

In summary, remote work preference among Generation Z is driven more by values such as flexibility and autonomy than by universal enthusiasm. It appeals particularly to those confident in their self-management and less dependent on workplace social structures. On the other hand, those who prize collaboration or emotional connection may find it less attractive. As hybrid work becomes the norm, these insights will be critical for designing inclusive, adaptable work models. Notably, the overall models accounted for modest but statistically significant variance in remote work preference. The psychological model explained the greatest proportion of variance in remote work preference (adjusted $R^2 = 0.167$), while workplace values and personality traits accounted for considerably less (adjusted $R^2 = 0.032$ and 0.030, respectively).

7.4.4 Determinants of preferences for work from anywhere (WFA)

Among all the work models considered in this study, the WFA approach stands out as the most symbolically charged. More than a simple location preference, WFA

Table 7.6 Core work values predicting WFA preference

Predictor	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
Flexibility	0.386	0.115	0.311	0.001
Work-life Balance	0.267	0.104	0.221	0.012
Career Advancement	0.145	0.106	0.118	0.179
Job Security	−0.154	0.098	−0.130	0.117
Collaboration Opportunities	−0.102	0.095	−0.084	0.290

Source: Authors' own elaboration

implies a lifestyle – one that favours autonomy, digital fluency, and global mobility. For Generation Z, whose coming-of-age years coincided with radical digital acceleration and global uncertainty, WFA may embody both an opportunity and a challenge. This section presents how this idealised model varies across the student populations of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Estonia, and what factors contribute to its appeal or lack thereof.

Our findings reveal that the single strongest predictor of WFA preference is the value placed on flexibility (B = 0.386, p = 0.001). Students who rated flexibility as a crucial workplace value consistently expressed higher enthusiasm for WFA. This is not surprising. WFA represents the ultimate form of flexible working – both in terms of location and, often, time. Notably, however, work-life balance (B = 0.267, p = 0.012) also emerged as a significant contributor. Unlike remote work, which can risk blurring boundaries, WFA may be perceived as a way to harmonise personal and professional life in an intentional and location-enhanced manner (Table 7.6).

Interestingly, concerns about competence or isolation, which were influential in shaping preferences for remote work, were less relevant for WFA. Instead, psychological resilience and openness to experience became more salient. Openness stood out among personality traits as the most significant positive predictor (B = 0.172, p = 0.010), confirming that WFA appeals to those who are intellectually curious, tolerant of ambiguity, and energised by novelty. Emotional stability also showed a positive trend (B = 0.145, p = 0.076), hinting that the uncertainty often associated with WFA requires a level of internal balance and calm (Table 7.7).

These findings align closely with attitudinal indicators. Respondents who expressed confidence in their ability to perform well, and those who anticipated having influence over decision-making, tended to rate WFA more favourably.

Table 7.7 Personality traits predicting WFA preference

Personality trait	*B (Unstd.)*	*SE*	*Beta (Std.)*	*p-value*
Openness	0.172	0.066	0.158	0.010
Emotional Stability	0.145	0.081	0.126	0.076
Extraversion	0.092	0.083	0.079	0.261
Agreeableness	0.061	0.088	0.049	0.491
Conscientiousness	−0.032	0.081	−0.027	0.693

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Worry about isolation, in contrast, did not significantly deter support for this model – perhaps because WFA is imagined not as a lonely experience, but one embedded in a more socially vibrant or travel-enriched context.

Cross-country comparisons further enrich the picture. Estonian respondents were the most enthusiastic adopters of WFA, with Czech students following and Polish respondents least inclined towards this option. This mirrors national differences in digital competence and lifestyle openness. Estonia's longstanding commitment to digital governance and remote public services may normalise WFA aspirations. In contrast, Polish students appear more cautious, perhaps due to infrastructural limitations, cultural scepticism, or a greater emphasis on job stability.

These differences are statistically supported. A Kruskal–Wallis test showed a significant effect of country on WFA preference ($H(2) = 10.67$, $p = 0.005$). Post hoc tests revealed that the difference between Estonia and Poland was particularly pronounced ($p = 0.003$).

Taken together, the WFA model functions less as a default preference and more as an aspirational mode – chosen by those who are psychologically prepared, value freedom over certainty, and are embedded in contexts that enable such choices. While its current appeal may be modest in numerical terms, its symbolic weight in shaping expectations for the future of work is profound.

To deepen the understanding of factors shaping preferences for WFA, an interaction analysis was conducted using the existing dataset. The study specifically examined whether the combination of the personality trait openness to experience and the value of flexibility would jointly influence respondents' preferences for WFA.

A linear regression model was applied, using a composite index of WFA preference as the dependent variable, and openness, flexibility, and their interaction term as predictors. Surprisingly, the results showed that none of these variables – openness ($p = 0.736$), flexibility ($p = 0.778$), or their interaction ($p = 0.511$) – were statistically significant. The adjusted R^2 indicated that the model explained only about 13.7% of the variance in WFA preference.

These findings suggest that, although openness and flexibility are theoretically aligned with the ideals of borderless, digitally mediated work, they have limited predictive power – either individually or in combination. This challenges a common assumption in contemporary organisational discourse: that individuals who value flexibility and score high on openness are naturally more inclined towards WFA models.

Instead, preferences for WFA may be shaped by a more complex interplay of contextual and experiential factors, such as digital competence, prior exposure to remote work or study, and national infrastructure. This outcome adds nuance to the existing literature and reinforces the need for multi-dimensional frameworks when assessing WFA readiness, particularly among younger populations.

Future analyses could explore other personality–value interactions – such as emotional stability with autonomy or extraversion with collaboration – to uncover potential synergistic effects that may better explain WFA preferences.

To assess what characterises students who are most inclined towards the WFA model, a WFA readiness was analysed. This measurement was based on three core indicators: the value placed on flexibility, self-assessed digital competence, and the

personality trait of openness to experience. These dimensions collectively reflect both practical capability and attitudinal openness to non-traditional work modes.

After computing the readiness, multiple regression analysis was used to test whether country of origin, gender, and other personality traits predicted a student's WFA readiness.

The analysis revealed that country was a statistically significant predictor: Estonian students scored highest on the WFA readiness index ($p < 0.01$), followed by Czech and then Polish students. This aligns with Estonia's national reputation for digital fluency and e-governance.

Gender differences were marginal but not significant, with female students showing a slightly higher average WFA readiness. Among personality dimensions, openness to experience remained the most powerful individual predictor ($p < 0.05$), while emotional stability and extraversion showed no independent effects.

These results reinforce the idea that readiness for WFA work is neither randomly distributed nor purely preference-driven. Rather, it stems from a confluence of digital competence, psychological flexibility, and contextual exposure. This multidimensional understanding of WFA readiness supports more strategic targeting of support resources – whether in higher education or organisational onboarding – towards those groups who may be most (or least) prepared for a location-independent future of work.

7.5 Differentiation of work model preferences: sociodemographic, psychological, and cross-national insights

To examine whether males and females differ in how they prioritise work values when selecting preferred work models, separate regression analyses were conducted for each gender. Specifically, the analysis focused on predicting preference for hybrid work based on five core values: job security, flexibility, collaboration, work-life balance, and career advancement.

Among male respondents, the model revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between work-life balance and hybrid preference ($\beta = -0.273$, $p = 0.041$). This suggests that male students who value work-life balance may perceive hybrid work as an insufficient solution for achieving it, possibly viewing remote or WFA arrangements as more effective. The overall model explained only a small proportion of variance ($R^2 = 0.058$), indicating that other factors likely play a more substantial role.

In contrast, female respondents showed a positive trend between work-life balance and hybrid preference ($\beta = 0.286$, $p = 0.053$). Although slightly above conventional significance thresholds, this trend implies that female students tend to associate hybrid work with better personal well-being outcomes. For them, hybrid models may represent a realistic balance between autonomy and in-person engagement. The explanatory power of the model was also modest ($R^2 = 0.089$).

These gender-differentiated findings point to the nuanced ways in which similar values, particularly work-life balance, are interpreted and operationalised by young people. For males, hybrid work may still feel tethered to conventional expectations,

while for females, it may offer a more empowering reconfiguration of workplace boundaries. No other values emerged as statistically significant in either group, underscoring the importance of contextualising individual predictors within the broader framework of social roles and expectations.

To examine how the size of a respondent's place of residence shapes their preferred form of work, an ANOVA was conducted comparing preferences for hybrid and remote models across the full urban-rural spectrum. Place of residence was coded on a scale from 1 (village) to 6 (large city over 500,000 inhabitants).

The analysis showed a statistically significant difference in hybrid work preference across residence sizes ($F(5, N) = value$, $p < 0.05$). Students from mid-sized cities (categories 3 and 4) expressed the strongest preference for hybrid work, possibly due to partial access to both infrastructure and social integration benefits. Conversely, students from the largest cities were more polarised – showing either strong commitment to office-based routines or enthusiasm for full WFA models.

For remote work, the differences by place of residence were less pronounced, but a weak trend emerged, suggesting students from villages or small towns rated remote work slightly less favourably than their urban counterparts. This could reflect disparities in quality of internet connection, home-working conditions, or cultural attachment to traditional work formats.

These results reinforce the idea that physical location continues to mediate perceived feasibility and desirability of modern work structures. Infrastructure, commuting norms, and local employment culture likely interact to shape these preferences. Understanding these differences is essential for employers designing inclusive hybrid or remote policies across regions.

To examine interrelationships among the most relevant constructs in the dataset, a Pearson correlation matrix was generated, including personality traits (Big Five), key workplace values (job security, flexibility, collaboration, career advancement, work-life balance), psychological attitudes (confidence, isolation concern, competence), and work model preferences (office, hybrid, remote, WFA).

The matrix revealed several moderate to strong associations. Notably, flexibility was positively correlated with WFA preference ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), and job security was positively associated with office preference ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$). Among personality traits, openness to experience showed the strongest correlation with WFA preference ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), while agreeableness was moderately associated with office preference ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 7.8).

Attitudinal variables also displayed coherent patterns. Confidence was positively associated with both remote and WFA preferences, while isolation concern showed opposing trends and was negatively related to remote preference and positively associated with hybrid preference. This suggests that social connection needs may influence the appeal of flexible, partially in-person models.

No severe multicollinearity was observed, with most inter-variable correlations remaining below $r = 0.70$. These patterns support the construct validity of the variables and suggest that preferences for work models are embedded in consistent and interpretable psychological and value-based structures. This correlational insight

Table 7.8 Summary of key predictors across work models

Predictor	*Work model*			
	Office	*Hybrid*	*Remote*	*WFA*
Flexibility	–	±	++	+++
Job Security	++	±	–	–
Collaboration	++	+	–	–
Work-Life Balance (Males)	–	–	+	++
Work-Life Balance (Females)	±	+	±	±
Openness to Experience	–	±	±	+++
Emotional Stability	±	–	+	+
Extraversion	±	++	±	±
Agreeableness	+	±	–	–
Confidence	–	+	++	++
Isolation Concern	±	+	–	–

(++ *strong positive,* + *moderate,* ± *neutral,* – *negative*)
Source: Authors' own elaboration

validates the use of these predictors in multivariate regression and clustering strategies employed elsewhere in the analysis.

Looking across the four work models – office, hybrid, remote, and WFA – it becomes evident that Generation Z's preferences cannot be reduced to a linear spectrum from tradition to innovation. Instead, each form captures different psychological, cultural, and structural logics. Some students gravitate towards the familiarity of office settings, others towards the promise of full autonomy, and yet others seek the middle ground. What unites them is not a shared preference but a consistent alignment between personal disposition, perceived workplace values, and contextual affordances.

Personality traits offer one of the clearest lenses for interpretation. Extraversion is most strongly tied to hybrid work, where social connection is balanced with flexibility. Agreeableness shows affinity for office work, reflecting a need for structured collaboration. Openness stands out in WFA preferences, suggesting that those with a tolerance for ambiguity and a hunger for novelty see borderless work as a genuine aspiration. Emotional stability, while less consistently significant, supports both remote and WFA models, indicating that confidence and composure are needed in less structured environments.

Students valuing job security and expressing concerns about competence tend to prefer traditional office work, whereas those seeking autonomy and demonstrating confidence favour remote or WFA models. Hybrid arrangements appear to appeal to individuals seeking balance across psychological and structural dimensions.

Workplace values – such as flexibility, collaboration, and work-life balance – act as directional forces rather than absolutes. Flexibility is the most consistent positive driver across remote and WFA models, while its negative correlation with office preference reaffirms the ideological divide. Job security, conversely, drives office preferences but shows little pull elsewhere. Collaboration serves as a hinge value, which is important in office contexts but discouraging for remote and WFA preferences.

National context provides further nuance. Statistical analysis showed statistically significant differences between groups separated by place of origin for the following statements presented in the questionnaire:

- "*In my future job, I anticipate being able to make decisions about my work methods and tasks*" ($p = 0.004$). The Estonians most frequently agreed with this statement (mean score of 6.1), the Czechs less frequently (5.7) and the Poles least frequently (5.4). Further post hoc analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between respondents from Poland and Estonia ($p = 0.003$).
- "*I anticipate feeling competent and capable in handling tasks in my future work*" ($p = 0.032$). The Estonians most often agreed with this statement (mean score of 6.0), the Czechs less often (5.5) and the Poles least often (5.3). Further post hoc analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between respondents from Poland and Estonia ($p = 0.026$).
- "*I expect to feel connected with colleagues and to be part of a community in my future work*" ($p = 0{,}013$). The Czechs most frequently agreed with this statement (mean score of 5.7), the Estonians less frequently (5.3) and the Poles least frequently (5.0). Further post hoc analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between Polish and Czech respondents ($p = 0.010$).
- "*In my future job, I anticipate having supportive and meaningful relationships with my coworkers*" ($p = 0.007$). The Czechs most frequently agreed with this statement (mean score of 5.7), the Estonians less frequently (5.0) and the Poles least frequently (4.8). Further post hoc analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic ($p = 0.05$).

There were no more statistically significant differences towards the other attitudes between the groups separated by place of residence ($p \geq 0.05$) (Table 7.9).

The data suggest that Estonian students consistently report higher levels of perceived autonomy and competence, while Czech students emphasise social connection. Polish students, in contrast, appear more cautious, particularly in relational and decision-making domains.

Polish students show greater preference for traditional office models and less enthusiasm for WFA, which may reflect structural and educational constraints or stronger cultural attachments to presence and hierarchy. Czech students often sit at the midpoint, evidencing moderate levels of digital adoption and balanced views. Estonian students emerge as the most future-oriented in their preferences, particularly favouring WFA and remote work. Their readiness aligns with Estonia's national digital infrastructure, which may normalise non-traditional work modes.

Thus, while national patterns are visible, they do not override personal logic. What we observe is a generation choosing work forms based on a convergence of psychological identity, cultural signals, and pragmatic judgment. Their preferences are not radical but reasoned, not idealistic but informed. This nuanced view allows employers, educators, and policymakers to appreciate that the next workforce is not rejecting the old model for the sake of novelty but rather building a personalised template that makes sense to them. These national differences, while

Table 7.9 Respondents' attitudes regarding hypothetical future work, by place of origin

	Poland		*Czechia*		*Estonia*		*Kruskal–Wallis*	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*H*	*p*
I expect to have a sense of choice and freedom in deciding how to do my future work	5.6	1.23	6.0	0.91	5.9	0.98	2.77	0.250
In my future job, I anticipate being able to make decisions about my work methods and tasks	5.4	1.17	5.7	1.02	6.1	0.79	10.96	0.004
I worry that my future job might pressure me to act in ways that conflict with my preferences	4.3	1.84	4.4	1.66	5.0	1.45	5.08	0.079
I expect to feel confident in my ability to perform well in my future job	5.7	1.18	5.9	1.06	5.8	0.81	0.58	0.747
I anticipate feeling competent and capable in handling tasks in my future work	5.3	1.53	5.5	1.37	6.0	0.85	6.90	0.032
I am concerned that I might not feel competent in my future job role	3.6	1.74	3.7	1.75	4.1	1.87	2.34	0.311
I expect to feel connected with colleagues and to be part of a community in my future work	5.0	1.49	5.7	1.39	5.3	1.43	8.75	0.013
In my future job, I anticipate having supportive and meaningful relationships with my coworkers	4.8	1.60	5.7	0.98	5.0	1.66	9.98	0.007
I worry about feeling isolated or disconnected from others in my future work	3.6	1.88	4.0	1.82	3.9	1.91	2.13	0.345

M – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, *H* – Kruskal-Wallis test value, *p* – significance level
Source: Authors' own elaboration

not deterministic, highlight the importance of embedding individual-level analyses within broader institutional and cultural frameworks. For example, Estonia's digital infrastructure may not only enable WFA readiness but also shape students' confidence in navigating autonomous work. In contrast, Polish students' lower scores on relational and competence indicators may reflect systemic gaps in educational or organisational support.

7.6 Modelling intention to work from anywhere (based on TBP framework)

To develop a comprehensive explanatory framework for Generation Z's behavioural intention to adopt WFA, we undertook a two-stage statistical procedure. The first phase involved a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) based on theoretical expectations drawn from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The second phase comprised a multiple regression analysis to test the extent to which attitudinal beliefs, perceived ease of adoption, and subjective social norms pressure predicted the intention to implement WFA.

The increasing integration of flexible work models – particularly WFA – into mainstream organisational practice has prompted growing interest in understanding the psychological and contextual factors that shape workers' acceptance of such arrangements. Among Generation Z, a cohort whose professional emergence coincides with widespread digitalisation and post-pandemic redefinitions of labour, attitudes toward WFA offer a timely lens for examining future work trends. This study draws from established psychological frameworks – particularly the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) – to explore the drivers of WFA behavioural intention among university students in three Central and Eastern European countries.

Similarly to the TPB, three major predictors are considered to explain intention: (1) attitudinal beliefs, (2) perceived ease of adoption (originally behavioural control), and (3) subjective norms. In this context, these are operationalised as described below.

Attitudinal Beliefs capture emotional and cognitive evaluations of WFA. These include perceptions of enjoyment, usefulness, job satisfaction, productivity, and work-life integration. These beliefs are expected to positively influence intention, consistent with past research on remote work models (Choudhury, 2020; White et.al., 2023).

Perceived Ease of Adoption, conceptually derived from TPB's "perceived behavioural control," refers here to an individual's confidence in understanding and executing WFA. Rather than using the broad term "control," we adopt the label *Perceived Ease of Adoption* to more accurately reflect the procedural and self-regulatory nature of this belief cluster. It includes ease of learning, clarity of principles, and personal confidence in applying WFA tools and processes.

Subjective Norms represent the influence of social validation, peer opinion, and endorsement from significant others. According to TPB, higher perceived social support should be associated with increased behavioural intention, although empirical findings in this domain have been mixed, especially among younger cohorts (Almer, et.al., 2003).

Behavioural Intention to implement WFA is treated as the dependent variable. This dimension reflects respondents' stated commitment to working in WFA mode in the future, conditional on opportunity. Intention is the best available predictor of behaviour in TPB and related decision-making models.

The survey included, among others, a set of 18 items relating to attitudes, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, and behavioural intentions regarding WFA. Based on theoretical models, we conceptually separated items into two groups for analysis: the dependent construct (behavioural intention) and the independent constructs (attitudes, perceived ease, and subjective norms). Items for each group were subjected to CFA with principal components analysis (PCA) with orthogonal Oblimin rotation, to ensure uncorrelated factors and maximise interpretability. CFA of these items yielded factors with strong loadings across all items (see Table 7.10), confirming one-dimensionality. Reliability and sampling adequacy metrics, such as the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure and Cronbach's α, exceeded conventional thresholds (KMO > 0.92, $\alpha > 0.50$ for all factors).

Table 7.10 Factor loadings across items

	Factor loadings (Cronbach's α)
Attitudinal beliefs	
WFA would be beneficial for my work life balance	−0.840
WFA will provide unique opportunities for my career and personal development	−0.829
The idea of WFA is attractive to me	−0.810
I think that WFA would be enjoyable	−0.803
WFA will help balance my work duties with personal life more effectively	−0.734
Perceived ease of adoption	
Learning to WFA effectively will be easy for me	0.932
I would find it easy to do my job in WFA mode	0.901
WFA would make it easier for me to complete my tasks efficiently	0.749
WFA will enhance my overall work productivity	0.712
WFA principles would be clear and understandable to me	0.626
I would find WFA to be flexible to implement to my job	0.539
I believe WFA will increase my job satisfaction	0.505
Subjective norms (social factor)	
Individuals who are important to me would support my decision to WFA	0.838
The opinion of my peers and colleagues would encourage me to WFA	0.687
People who influence my behaviour think that I should work from anywhere	0.622
Behavioural intention to implement WFA	
Assuming I have the choice, I predict that I would choose WFA	0.947
I plan to adopt WFA as my primary work arrangement in the future	0.946
I intend to work in WFA mode as often as it will be possible	0.925

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 7.11 Model summary and coefficients

Model	*R*	*R-squared*	*Corrected R-squared*	*Standard error of the estimate*
1	0.823[a]	0.677	0.672	0.57348965

[a] Predictors: (const), attitudinal beliefs, perceived ease of adoption, subjective social norms

		Coefficients				
Model		*Non-standardised coefficients*		*standardised coefficients*	*T*	*Significance*
		B	*Błąd standardowy*	*Beta*		
1	(Constant)	−0.022	0.041		−0.540	0.590
	perceived ease of adoption	0.476	0.053	0.474	9.006	<0.001
	attitudinal beliefs	−0.427	0.052	−0.419	−8.271	<0.001
	subjective norms (social factor)	0.061	0.047	0.060	1.308	0.193

dependent variable: behavioural intention

Source: Authors' own elaboration

To examine the determinants of students' intention to adopt the WFA model, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using three theoretically derived predictors: *attitudinal beliefs*, *perceived ease of adoption*, and *subjective social norms*. The dependent variable was a composite factor capturing *behavioural intention*, extracted from three high-loading items reflecting future orientation towards WFA engagement.

The model was statistically significant, explaining approximately 68% of the variance in behavioural intention ($R^2 = 0.677$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.672$). The regression coefficients and associated significance levels are presented in Table 7.11.

The multiple regression model estimating students' behavioural intention to adopt WFA revealed two statistically significant predictors and one non-significant predictor.

Perceived Ease of Adoption – capturing respondents' sense that WFA is understandable, simple to learn, and easy to implement – was found to be the strongest positive predictor of intention ($\beta = 0.474$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is in line with earlier research on digital adoption (Choudhury, 2020) and supports the TPB assumption that individuals are more inclined to form intentions when they feel confident in their ability to perform the behaviour. In this context, students who find WFA operationally manageable are more likely to intend its adoption. It also echoes findings from the technology acceptance model (TAM), where perceived ease of use enhances both perceived usefulness and intention (Davis, 1989).

Counterintuitively, the attitudinal beliefs factor – which includes emotional and cognitive evaluations of WFA as enjoyable, attractive, and meaningful – exhibited a significant negative association with behavioural intention ($\beta = -0.419$, $p < 0.001$). This result runs contrary to the foundational assumption of the TPB, which posits that positive attitudes towards a behaviour should increase the likelihood of behavioural intention.

This unexpected finding may reflect a deeper psychological or generational tension. One possible interpretation is the presence of an aspiration–feasibility gap: students may idealise WFA as a desirable future state but simultaneously doubt its practical attainability due to perceived barriers such as employer resistance, lack of infrastructure, or limited early-career autonomy. In this context, high attitudinal scores may reflect aspirational alignment rather than actionable commitment.

Another possibility is that overly positive attitudes towards WFA reflect a romanticised or utopian vision of work that, when confronted with real-world constraints, leads to hesitation or scepticism. This could be particularly relevant for Generation Z, who are simultaneously digitally fluent and economically cautious, a cohort shaped by crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and rising job precarity. This inversion invites a theoretical reconsideration of the TPB model in digitally native populations. It suggests that, for Generation Z, intention may be more strongly driven by perceived feasibility (e.g., ease of adoption) than by effective evaluations. In other words, confidence in one's ability to implement WFA may outweigh enthusiasm for the idea itself. Future research should explore whether this pattern holds across other flexible work models and whether it reflects a broader generational shift in how intention is formed – one that prioritises pragmatism over preference.

Subjective norms, which reflect peer influence and perceived social endorsement, were not found to significantly predict behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.193$). This aligns with earlier generational studies indicating that Generation Z places less emphasis on normative approval when making career decisions (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Nguyen, 2021). In the context of WFA, this may indicate that students perceive flexible work decisions as deeply personal rather than socially negotiated. The no significance of this factor also raises practical implications for how WFA is marketed. An emphasis on peer trends or social validation may be less persuasive than autonomy-oriented messaging.

In sum, the regression model reveals a nuanced dynamic. Perceived ease promotes intention, favourable attitudes unexpectedly diminish it, and subjective norms play no meaningful role. These results depart in part from classical TPB expectations and suggest that within digitally fluent Generation Z cohorts, practical feasibility is more influential than abstract preference, and confidence may trump enthusiasm in guiding behavioural commitment. Taken together, these findings suggest that intention to adopt WFA is not simply a function of liking the idea, but of believing it is realistically achievable. This has implications for how organisations frame WFA opportunities, not just as desirable, but as accessible and supported. This insight holds clear implications for educators, employers, and policymakers

aiming to encourage flexible work adoption, which builds confidence, manages expectations, and individualises support.

7.7 Summary of hypotheses testing

The hypotheses outlined earlier in this chapter were systematically tested using a combination of multivariate regression, interaction analysis, and cross-national comparisons. The results provide robust empirical support for the conceptual framework, while also revealing several unexpected patterns.

H1 – H4 were partially confirmed. Job security was a significant positive predictor of office-based preference ($\beta = 0.206$, $p = 0.006$), and flexibility significantly predicted both remote ($\beta = 0.281$, $p = 0.021$) and WFA preferences ($\beta = 0.386$, $p = 0.001$). However, autonomy and collaboration showed weaker or inconsistent effects across models.

H5 received limited support. Concern about social isolation negatively influenced remote work preference, but the effect was modest and not always statistically significant.

H6 – H8 were partially confirmed. Extraversion predicted hybrid preference ($B = 0.162$, $p = 0.046$), openness to experience was the strongest personality predictor of WFA preference ($B = 0.172$, $p = 0.010$), and emotional stability showed positive associations with both remote and WFA models, though not always at conventional significance levels.

H9 – H10 were supported. Gender moderated the relationship between work-life balance and hybrid preference, with divergent patterns for male (negative) and female (positive) respondents. Place of residence influenced hybrid preference, with students from rural areas showing lower support.

H11 was confirmed through Kruskal–Wallis tests, which revealed significant national differences in preferences for office, remote, and WFA models ($p < 0.05$ in each case).

H12 – H13, were not supported. The interaction between openness and flexibility, and between emotional stability and autonomy, did not significantly predict WFA or remote preferences, suggesting these traits and values may operate independently.

H14 – H16, derived from the Theory of Planned Behaviour, yielded mixed results. Perceived ease of adoption emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioural intention to adopt WFA ($\beta = 0.474$, $p < 0.001$), while attitudinal beliefs showed an unexpected negative association ($\beta = –0.419$, $p < 0.001$). Subjective norms were not statistically significant, indicating that social influence may play a limited role in this context.

Together, these findings validate some of the proposed hypotheses while challenging others. and highlight the complex interplay between psychological, contextual, and cultural factors in shaping Generation Z's work model preferences.

These outcomes reinforce the multifaceted nature of work model selection. While some predictors clearly map into specific preferences, others, such as social

concern and origin, operate more selectively. The data affirms that Generation Z's decisions are rooted in a thoughtful compromise between personal needs and contextual constraints, rather than simple trends or assumptions.

7.8 Conclusions and discussion

This chapter set out to explore how members of Generation Z envisage their future working lives – whether in traditional office environments, hybrid systems, remote arrangements, or the increasingly prominent WFA model. By examining different factors, including personality traits, work-related values, and sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, place of residence and country, the study offers a multidimensional perspective on what drives these preferences. While all four work models were compared, the WFA model was also examined in greater depth using the TPB, allowing for a more detailed understanding of how attitudes, perceived control, and social influences shape behavioural intentions in the digital era.

The findings demonstrate that Generation Z is far from homogeneous. Some students feel most secure in structured, office-based settings, while others are more drawn to flexible arrangements. Hybrid work clearly emerged as a widely appealing middle ground, particularly attractive to those who value both autonomy and interpersonal contact. Remote work finds favour with students who prioritise independence, although it appears less suitable for those concerned about isolation or lacking confidence in self-management. The WFA model, though not the most popular overall, did attract a specific group of respondents – those who were emotionally stable, open to new experiences, and confident in handling professional tasks independently.

The TPB-based analysis of WFA preferences revealed several interesting patterns. Attitudes, particularly the belief that WFA is enjoyable and aligned with one's personal values, emerged as the strongest predictors of intention. In contrast, perceived behavioural control, typically central within the TPB framework, had a surprisingly limited effect. For Generation Z, who have grown up in a world saturated with digital tools and virtual platforms, technological feasibility appears to be taken for granted. Intriguingly, perceived social norms exerted a slightly negative effect, suggesting that many students base such decisions on internal motivations rather than social expectations. This may reflect a broader generational shift, which is a growing desire to choose career paths that align with one's identity, rather than to conform to group norms.

These findings broadly support the core assumptions of the TPB, which posits that attitudes, perceived control and subjective norms are key determinants of behavioural intention. However, this study offers valuable nuance. The decisive role of attitudinal beliefs highlights the importance of work environments that align with personal goals, lifestyle aspirations and core values. Flexibility and enjoyment are not merely desirable – they are fundamental. The moderated relevance of perceived control is also significant. Given that today's students are digitally fluent, the usual obstacles related to technology or process are largely irrelevant. For them, the ability to work remotely is assumed rather than questioned. Meanwhile,

the negative correlation with social norms may reflect a generational scepticism towards conformity. In increasingly individualistic and autonomy-oriented cultures, peer pressure may hold little power – or even have the opposite effect.

National context was another meaningful factor. Estonian students emerged as the most enthusiastic supporters of flexible and remote models – unsurprising given Estonia's reputation for digital innovation and advanced e-governance. Czech respondents followed, while Polish students showed greater reservations towards non-traditional work forms. While cultural values are likely to influence these preferences, so too might differences in academic systems, employer expectations and national digital infrastructure.

From a practical perspective, these findings yield clear guidance. Employers must treat flexibility not as a slogan, but as a substantive organisational strategy. Hybrid work stands out as a pragmatic, low-risk solution that offers structure alongside freedom. WFA, while more complex to manage, represents a potential strategic advantage – particularly for companies aiming to attract globally minded, digitally native talent.

The implication for employers is that promoting WFA should focus less on making it merely "possible" and more on making it "desirable." Organisational messaging should stress how WFA enhances satisfaction, supports work–life balance and aligns with employee aspirations. Rather than adopting a single solution, organisations would do well to offer a flexible toolkit that caters to diverse psychological profiles and life situations. The hybrid model, in particular, offers a sensible compromise – appealing both to extroverts who value collaboration and to those seeking autonomy.

Policymakers and institutions also have important roles to play. National variation in work model preferences reflects deeper inequalities in infrastructure, access to digital education and prevailing cultural narratives around work. In countries such as Poland, where remote and WFA models are less popular, investment in digital literacy, secure technologies and inclusive labour policies could help close this gap. The results also underline the value of promoting WFA as a legitimate and aspirational work model, not a niche or temporary solution.

Higher education institutions have a dual responsibility – to prepare students for a pluralistic work setting, and to model the adaptability they are expected to embrace. It is not enough to teach digital tools. Students must be supported in reflecting on which work models suit their personalities, values and goals. Incorporating remote teamwork, asynchronous collaboration and international digital projects into the curriculum can build students' confidence and decision-making capacity. For example, Tallinn University of Technology has implemented virtual internships connecting students with global employers, while the SGH Warsaw School of Economics has embedded hybrid project management modules involving international collaboration. These initiatives offer not only practical skills but also exposure to the future realities of work.

Naturally, the presented study is not without limitations. The sample included students of economics and business disciplines from three Central and Eastern European countries, which may limit generalisability. It also captures a snapshot in

time – prior to most students entering the labour market. Moreover, some potentially influential variables, such as prior work experience or family background, were not included in the analysis.

Future research should aim to broaden the geographical and disciplinary scope and adopt longitudinal designs to track how preferences evolve with experience. Further investigation into how personality traits, work values and institutional conditions interact would also offer richer insight. Particular attention could be paid to the role of digital readiness and the conditions under which flexible models succeed or fail across various cultural contexts.

Finally, understanding Generation Z's approach to work is not merely an academic exercise – it is a strategic imperative. As this generation enters and reshapes the labour market, their expectations will influence not only organisational practices but also broader social norms regarding flexibility, autonomy, and inclusion. Engaging with them effectively demands not only structural adaptation but also a willingness to listen, reflect, and innovate. In sum, the findings point not to a generational revolution, but to a quiet change. Generation Z is not rejecting the past – they are reinterpreting it in the light of new possibilities. What they seek is not uniformity, but coherence and work arrangements that reflect their skills, values, and identities. For those ready to respond, the future of work may be not only more flexible, but also more human.

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