

ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Capabilities Approach to Working From Home: Is It the Path to Work Engagement and Work-Life Balance?

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Received: 30 October 2023 | **Revised:** 24 January 2025 | **Accepted:** 8 March 2025

Funding: This work was supported by NECE-UBI, Research Centre for Business Sciences, Research Centre and this work are funded by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, IP, project UIDB/04630/2020. This research was financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (www.arrs.gov.si) within the research program P5-0441. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Keywords: capabilities approach | trust | work engagement | work organization | work-life balance

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of the capabilities approach (as an ethical framework in management) on the well-being of workers in the context of working from home. A capabilities approach was used to examine the relationship between work engagement and work-life balance. Additionally, the conceptual model tested the role of trust as a mediator. The European Working Conditions Survey was the source of data for this study. Participants were selected based on their self-reported frequency of working from home. The final sample consisted of 23,748 participants. The hypothesis of the conceptual model was tested using the Partial Least Square (PLS) method for data analysis. The results show that, in general, the list of capabilities is empirically valid, presenting a significant relationship with work engagement and work-life balance, either directly or when mediated by trust. Based on the results of this work, organizations gain access to a set of guidelines on how to manage working from home based on the principles of the capabilities approach and liberated companies. This study presents the first empirical validation of the model's capabilities and demonstrates the application of the capabilities approach to the context of working from home.

1 | Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed a progressive transformation of how people work, as new and alternative ways of organizing work (Aroles et al. 2021) have been introduced into the daily lives of those working in many organizations. This transformation can take various forms, such as mobile working, coworking, flex offices, virtual collaboration, digital nomadism, and remote work. All of these share the assumption that performance and freedom (namely through greater flexibility and autonomy)

can be combined in fruitful ways (Aroles et al. 2021). Working from home is one of the most popular forms of remote work. The possibility of working from home seems to have very attractive benefits. Cost reductions, less commuting, productivity gains, greater freedom, and flexibility are just a few examples (Nakrošienė et al. 2019).

Working from home has gradually increased in popularity over the last decade (in 2013, 11.8% of European workers worked from home). However, this increase was more pronounced

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during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In Europe, before the pandemic (2019), the percentage of employed adults working at home was 14.3%. During the pandemic, this number increased to 23.3% (2021). In 2022, after the restrictions placed on many countries during the pandemic period came to an end, 21.5% of European workers worked from home. This was more than 7.2% higher than the pre-pandemic figure (Eurostat 2023).

Among other attributes, incorporating remote working practices into an organization's operations has implications in terms of control and, consequently, the degree of autonomy given to workers (Pianese et al. 2023). Because remote work implies physical distance, conventional notions of control, autonomy, and flexibility are challenged in this new context (Vaujany et al. 2021).

The need for organizations to establish some type of control and coordination over work, at the same time as seeking to respond to workers' expectations regarding greater flexibility, better work-life balance (WLB), and ultimately greater well-being (Samman 2007; Smit and Lawson 2023), may place some tension on the design of work in a remote context and, consequently, on the management of remote workers. Conventional approaches to work organization, based on traditional approaches to management, may be at stake, thus calling for a different philosophical and ethical management approach.

The capabilities approach (CA) developed by Sen (1999) may offer a different perspective to address these challenges and tensions. Based on the argument that people should have the freedom to choose the life course they want or value when applied to organizations, this approach can take the form of "liberated companies" (Getz 2009), that is, firms with an organizational configuration and work organization that offers employees the freedom and responsibility to take the actions they decide are best.

An important aspect of this approach pertains to capabilities. One of the most recent proposals was developed by Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021), who put forward seven concrete capabilities that organizations need to develop if they want to shift from a traditional to a "liberated" approach to management. These capabilities are: competence, responsibility, time autonomy, equality, inclusivity, self-motivation, and human flourishing. The promotion of these capabilities nurtures workers' well-being.

Although there is a growing interest in Sen's (1999) CA as a framework for (re)introducing ethics into organizations (Fia and Sacconi 2019), the concrete application of the list of capabilities is still very scarce and, therefore, the development of applied research is urgently needed (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). Therefore, in response to the call by Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021) to test the list of capabilities and their effects, this investigation aims to examine the role of the CA (as an ethical framework in management) in aiding the well-being of workers in the context of working from home. This general aim can be broken down into three specific goals: (i) test a concrete application of the list of capabilities suggested by Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021) within the framework of liberated companies; (ii) examine the influence of the list of capabilities proposed by Sferrazzo and

Ruffini (2021) in work and non-work-related outcomes (engagement and WLB, respectively); and (iii) test the role of trust as a mediator in the relationship between capabilities, work engagement, and WLB.

This research is expected to offer an empirical test of the list of capabilities proposed by Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021) and, consequently, demonstrate the applicability of Sen's (1999) CA in the context of organizational ethics. Secondly, this study is expected to demonstrate the relationship between the list of capabilities and the well-being of workers, thus reinforcing one of the fundamental premises of Sen's (1999) CA. Thirdly, it is also expected that this research will provide some clues as to the relative importance of some working practices for the well-being of workers in the context of remote work, while also addressing the fundamental role of building trusting relationships as a way of enhancing the relationship between the list of capabilities and the overall well-being of workers.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Theoretical Background

2.1.1 | Capability Approach

The CA is a normative approach to well-being or quality of life that focuses on the real capabilities of individuals to lead a life they enjoy (Bruni et al. 2008; Bruni et al. 2021). The CA was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, who defended the importance of freedom and individual action in achieving well-being or quality of life (Owens et al. 2022; Sen 1999). The main principles of the CA stress the importance of focusing on the individual's capabilities, the role of social justice, and the ways in which the individual's roles and capabilities determine well-being (Barreno-Alcalde et al. 2024). The CA for well-being involves the concepts of functionings and capability (Gasper 1997). 'Functionings' are the states of being and doing that are associated with access to education, health, and employment. "Capability" refers to the effective freedom that individuals have to carry out these functions (Gasper 1997). The CA indicates that functions as well as capabilities are crucial to an individual's happy life, aiming to increase people's capacity for the tasks that matter most to them (Hirai et al. 2016).

The CA has received praise for its potential benefits. However, it is not without its critiques and flaws. One of the most prominent critiques is that the CA is deemed too individualistic. On the one hand, being too focused on individual actions and choices, the CA fails to account for the role of "group capabilities," such as "collective productive capabilities," which were recently proposed by Andreoni et al. (2021), or the community-based capabilities approach proposed by Yerkes et al. (2020). On the other hand, the supposed individualistic nature of the CA takes the focus away from collective aspects of human living, such as social structures, social norms, and institutions (De La Ossa Guerra and Botero 2024; Robeyns 2017). Another criticism is related to the notion of capability, as it is claimed that not everything that is called a capability is, in fact, a capability. According to Robeyns (2017), just because something is important in generating and supporting capabilities does not

necessarily mean that it is a capability. The interdisciplinary nature of CA applications may be one of the causal roots for this conceptual confusion. The CA, as proposed by Sen (1999), is also criticized by some scholars for not presenting a list of capabilities or at least some guidance on the selection of capabilities (e.g., Sugden 1993; Roemer 1996; Nussbaum 2003; Naz 2016). Within the scope of this criticism, but from a different perspective, Karimi et al. (2016) refer to Health Economics and argue that the set of capabilities measured does not accurately reflect an individual's life choices or opportunities. The use of the CA has often been linked to areas such as development and public policy, primarily emphasizing government action. Nussbaum (2011), putting forward a capabilities theory of justice, views the government as a key agent of change. However, this focus on government action has led to criticism of the CA for neglecting other important actors, whether individual or collective (Robeyns 2017). This includes productive agents, as noted by Andreoni et al. (2021). Another criticism is related to individuals' ability to choose from different courses of action. The CA assumes that individuals should have the freedom to choose what they think best aligns with their well-being (Owens et al. 2022; Sen 1999). According to this criticism, this perspective does not consider the social constraints, such as social norms, social expectations, and social inequalities, exerted on personal choices and actions (De La Ossa Guerra and Botero 2024; Robeyns 2017). Finally, the CA's incompleteness when it comes to career guidance and policy-making has also led to criticism of the approach (Egdell and Robertson 2021). The CA should, therefore, be merged with other theories and frameworks to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of well-being.

Despite this criticism, the CA has been used in policy development and formulation, mainly in international development, health, and education (Egdell and Robertson 2021; Owens et al. 2022). The CA has served as a measure to evaluate the effectiveness of policies or programs to improve people's functioning and capabilities (Karimi et al. 2016; Binet et al. 2023). The impact of development initiatives on well-being has also been assessed using the CA, which underlines the importance of increasing the power and readiness of individuals to act in the development process (Mitchell et al. 2017). The CA is a valuable framework for assessing and improving human well-being in various settings, given its emphasis on individuals' current potential to achieve the lives they cherish.

The CA provides a strategic framework for managing remote teams in a way that enhances employee well-being by prioritizing their freedom and opportunities. The CA principles advocate for creating remote work environments that accommodate the diverse needs and aspirations of employees, thereby fostering job satisfaction by addressing essential psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and motivation (Battisti et al. 2022). Managers can utilize these principles to develop remote work policies that not only support professional growth and productivity but also significantly contribute to overall employee well-being. This approach demands that organizations recognize and address the unique challenges posed by remote work, including the need for flexibility, meaningful engagement, and a sense of belonging through tailored management practices.

Managerial support is critical in establishing a remote work environment that aligns with the CA principles, emphasizing emotional intelligence, clear communication, and trust-building. Effective remote management requires an understanding of the mental disconnects between managers and employees. There must be a focus on maintaining open communication channels to address individual needs, providing resources for skill development, and fostering a culture of trust and autonomy (Koudagani and Kiran Kumar 2023). This approach helps maintain productivity and engagement while enhancing employees' well-being by acknowledging and supporting their need for WLB (García-Salirrosas et al. 2023). Despite challenges such as isolation and difficulty in separating work from personal life (Wang et al. 2021), remote work presents significant opportunities for increasing flexibility, balancing professional and personal life, and creating conducive work environments. To fully leverage these opportunities, organizations should invest in technology that facilitates better collaboration, develop policies that support WLB, and foster an inclusive and engaging culture, in line with the CA principles, to improve employee well-being and satisfaction (Haque 2023).

Introducing their suggestions for a new set of abilities, Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021) scrutinize pre-existing inventories by authors like Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns (2003), as they encompass elements relevant to human development and human dignity—two significant components of unencumbered labor. In the context of organizations, applying the CA reorients human resource management. Rather than prioritizing the organization's needs, it stresses the need to enhance the individual's freedoms. This transformation is also evident in 'liberated companies'—firms structured to grant employees full autonomy and accountability to undertake actions they deem most beneficial. Hence, Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021) make the following propositions for capabilities: (1) Competence, (2) Responsibility, (3) Time autonomy, (4) Inclusivity, (5) Equality, (6) Human flourishing, and (7) self-motivation. Competence pertains to a person's ability to execute tasks effectively and efficiently, which is fundamental for both personal and professional success (Eraut 1998). Competence encompasses a range of skills, including technical know-how, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability to changing circumstances. Competence enables individuals to handle work responsibilities with confidence and efficiency, thereby reducing work-related stress and freeing up time for personal pursuits (Gagné et al. 2022). When individuals feel competent in their roles, they are more likely to complete tasks on time and to a high quality. This contributes to a smoother transition between work and home responsibilities. This proficiency not only enhances job performance but also ensures that personal time is preserved and valued, thus fostering a better WLB.

Responsibility involves being accountable for one's actions, decisions, and their outcomes in both work and personal contexts (Robinson 2009). It involves recognizing the importance of one's roles and managing them with integrity and diligence. This responsibility helps individuals set clear boundaries and prioritize tasks effectively (Gagné et al. 2022). By being responsible, individuals can better manage their time and commitments,

ensuring that work does not encroach on personal life and vice versa. This accountability is crucial for maintaining a balanced life, as it allows for the allocation of time and resources in a manner that supports both professional success and personal well-being. Responsible individuals are adept at navigating the demands of their roles, leading to a more harmonious integration of work and personal life.

Temporal self-nomination, or temporal autonomy, refers to a person's ability to manage their own time and schedule. This proficiency is vital for achieving WLB as it grants individuals the flexibility to allocate time based on personal priorities and needs, transforming a capability into an opportunity (Grasser and Noël 2023). Temporal autonomy empowers individuals to align their work schedules with personal commitments, leading to greater satisfaction and reduced conflict between work and personal domains (Nissinen et al. 2022). With temporal autonomy, individuals can better accommodate unforeseen demands from either area of their lives, ensuring that neither their work nor their personal life is neglected. This ability to control and optimize time use is fundamental to achieving a balanced and fulfilling life, as it allows individuals to manage their responsibilities without compromising their well-being. Inclusion involves fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support within a group, whether at work or in an individual's personal life (Shore et al. 2011). It is about creating environments where people feel valued, respected, and supported.

Inclusion builds strong relationships and networks that provide emotional and social support, which is crucial for maintaining a balanced life (Gagné et al. 2022). In a supportive environment, individuals are more likely to feel secure and appreciated, reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being. Inclusion promotes a sense of community and camaraderie, which are essential for both personal and professional fulfillment. When individuals feel included, they are better able to balance their various roles and responsibilities, leading to a more integrated and satisfying life.

Self-motivation is the internal drive to achieve personal and professional goals through intrinsic motivation. It involves setting and pursuing aspirations independently, without relying on external incentives. Self-motivation propels individuals to take initiative and persevere in their endeavors, which is crucial for achieving WLB (Nissinen et al. 2022). Self-motivated individuals are proactive in pursuing activities and goals that are meaningful to them, both at work and in their personal lives. This proactive approach helps them maintain a sense of purpose and direction, which is essential for a balanced and fulfilling life. By fostering self-motivation, individuals can better align their actions with their values and aspirations, leading to greater satisfaction and well-being.

Human flourishing is a holistic concept that encompasses overall well-being, fulfillment, and the realization of one's potential (Meynell 2008). It involves thriving in various aspects of life, including emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. Human flourishing is the ultimate goal of WLB, as it reflects a state where individuals are not only balancing their work and personal lives but are also achieving a profound sense of satisfaction and purpose (Mesurado et al. 2022). Flourishing individuals

experience positive emotions, meaningful relationships, and a higher quality of life. This state of well-being is essential for a balanced life, as it ensures that individuals are not merely surviving but are thriving in all areas of their lives. Organizations that support the development of human flourishing can create environments that promote the health and well-being of their employees, leading to more productive and fulfilled lives.

Table 1 systematizes the information on capabilities.

2.1.2 | Liberated Companies

The link between the CA and liberated companies is intrinsically tied to the foundational principles of enhancing individual freedoms and capabilities within organizational settings. The CA, as developed by Amartya Sen, emphasizes the importance of expanding people's choices and their ability to lead lives they value and have reason to value (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). This theoretical framework aligns closely with the ethos of liberated companies, which prioritize creating an environment where employees can exercise a higher degree of autonomy, leading to enhanced innovation, engagement, and productivity (Khoury et al. 2024). Liberated companies operate on the belief that employees are more fulfilled and effective when they have the freedom to choose their paths and contribute to the company's direction (Getz and Arnaud 2024), mirroring the CA's focus on individual capabilities and freedom (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). This type of company values and fosters the well-being and development of its workers (Ramboarison-Lalao and Gannouni 2019) to the detriment of other commercial objectives, liberating individuals from the "libertarian fantasy" in which the freedom to act is replaced by the freedom to perform (Shymko and Frémeaux 2022). Libertarian companies opt for decentralization and collaboration in decision-making, and they tend to have a flat organizational structure. Open channels of communication and the promotion of employee empowerment and autonomy are other key characteristics.

Emphasizing the importance of individual autonomy and agency, the CA strongly supports the concept of liberated companies. To this end, it is essential to have social and economic structures that allow individuals to exercise their capacities (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). By prioritizing the well-being and autonomy of workers, liberated enterprises share the values of the CA, thus favoring the realization of individual potential (Ramboarison-Lalao and Gannouni 2019).

In liberated companies, policies and practices can be designed and implemented using the CA as a basis. This approach helps companies create organizational structures and practices that support employee well-being and autonomy, resulting in better business results and higher employee satisfaction (Orton 2011). In addition, using the CA can help remove barriers to individual agency and autonomy within companies, promoting an inclusive and supportive work environment (Bertland 2009). Ultimately, the CA offers a framework for understanding the advantages of liberated enterprises and the key factors needed to enable individuals to experience enriched and meaningful lives in such organizations (Hummels and Nullens 2022).

TABLE 1 | Capabilities systematization.

Capabilities	Systematization
Competence	Competence is the ability to perform tasks effectively and efficiently, encompassing technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability to changing circumstances. It enhances job performance and reduces work-related stress, contributing to a better work-life balance by ensuring tasks are completed on time and to a high standard of quality
Responsibility	Responsibility involves being accountable for one's actions, decisions, and outcomes, with an emphasis on the importance of managing roles with integrity and diligence. It is crucial for maintaining a balanced life, as it enables individuals to prioritize tasks effectively and allocate resources to support both professional success and personal well-being
Time autonomy	Time autonomy refers to managing one's own time and schedule, allowing individuals to allocate time based on personal priorities and needs. It enables alignment between work schedules and personal commitments, fostering satisfaction and reducing conflicts between work and personal domains
Inclusivity	Inclusivity is the process of building strong relationships and networks that provide emotional and social support, fostering a sense of security and appreciation essential for reducing stress and enhancing well-being. It promotes community and camaraderie, enabling individuals to balance roles and responsibilities to create a more integrated and fulfilling life
Self-motivation	Self-motivation is the internal drive to achieve personal and professional goals, enabling individuals to take initiative and persevere in their pursuits without relying on external incentives. It helps individuals align their actions with their values and aspirations, fostering the purpose and direction needed for a balanced and fulfilling life
Human flourishing	Human flourishing is a holistic concept encompassing well-being, fulfillment, and the ability to realize one's potential across emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. It represents the ultimate goal of work-life balance, reflecting a state where individuals thrive with positive emotions, meaningful relationships, and a heightened quality of life

2.2 | Capabilities, Trust, Work-Life Balance, and Work Engagement in Organizational Settings

2.2.1 | Trust

Trust is vital to the success of a company, and it helps to promote a pleasant, healthy, and encouraging working environment (Hofhuis et al. 2016). When you trust someone, you believe that they will act in a reliable and predictable way, which is crucial for establishing lasting bonds in the corporate environment. The feeling of psychological security that this trust provides gives workers the power to take risks, share ideas, and collaborate more effectively (Burrell and Brauner 2021), thus improving organizational performance. Furthermore, trust can have a significant impact on the degree of employee engagement at work, as it is one of the factors that most influence perceptions and attitudes in the workplace (Rana and Chopra 2019).

Trust is a multifaceted concept in organizational environments, and its sources are diverse. Thus, employees have a number of capabilities that can contribute to establishing trust (Kähkönen et al. 2021). These capabilities include competence, responsibility, temporal autonomy, inclusion, self-motivation, and personal fulfilment (Canavesi and Minelli 2022). When employees display these characteristics, their colleagues and superiors are more inclined to trust them. For example, employees who perform their tasks competently are more likely to be trusted by their colleagues and supervisors to carry out their responsibilities accurately and quickly. Similarly, individuals who take

responsibility for their actions and demonstrate self-motivation are seen as trustworthy (Narvaez and Snow 2019). Promoting inclusion and temporal autonomy also plays a key role in fostering trust, as it creates an atmosphere of respect and fairness in the workplace (Shore et al. 2011). Promoting personal growth and general well-being, commonly referred to as human flourishing, has the potential to foster trust in the workplace. By cultivating a positive work environment that values and supports its employees, individuals are more likely to feel safe and appreciated (Zhenjing et al. 2022).

Developing trust and cultivating strong relationships in the workplace allows organizations to create a positive environment that encourages WLB, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. In this way, increased trust can lead to better organizational results, such as increased productivity and talent retention (Vanhala and Tzafrir 2021).

H1. *The capabilities of (a) competence, (b) responsibility, (c) time autonomy, (d) inclusivity, (e) self-motivation, and (f) human flourishing are positively related with trust.*

2.2.2 | Work-Life Balance

Work-Life Balance (WLB) is the ability to reconcile professional duties with personal and family obligations, which allows individuals to achieve their personal and professional goals (Thilagavathy and Geetha 2023). WLB is a vital aspect

of employee well-being and retention in organizational settings, thus contributing to the triumph of the organization as a whole. Through a balanced approach, stress can be relieved, work achievement can be maximized, and productivity can be harnessed. It is therefore necessary for organizations to understand and prioritize the balance between personal and professional life, ensuring the implementation of measures that meet the needs of employees (Gagnano et al. 2020; Thilagavathy and Geetha 2023).

A number of proficiencies have been associated with achieving a harmonious WLB, such as competence, responsibility, temporal self-nomination, inclusion, self-motivation, and human flourishing (Gagné et al. 2022). These proficiencies enable individuals to efficiently manage their tasks, both at work and at home, fostering a sense of balance and overall contentment. The ability to execute tasks effectively, coupled with being accountable for one's actions, allows for a smoother integration of professional and personal responsibilities. The autonomy to manage one's schedule and the sense of camaraderie and support from being included in a team setting are also crucial elements in this balance. Self-motivation drives individuals to pursue their goals, while a holistic sense of well-being is cultivated through human flourishing (Nissinen et al. 2022). By nurturing these skills within organizational frameworks, employers can enhance WLB, thereby promoting the overall health and well-being of their employees. This, in turn, leads to a more productive and contented workforce (Thilagavathy and Geetha 2023). The skills listed above are linked to a greater sense of balance between work and personal life (Rana and Chopra 2019). For example, Gagné et al. (2022) suggest that autonomy and relatedness have an impact on employees' job satisfaction, as well as their general happiness. In addition, promoting employee well-being and growth through servant leadership has been found to increase employee loyalty (Canavesi and Minelli 2022). A successful way to promote WLB is to recognize its importance and encourage its promotion within organizations, resulting in the well-being and success of employees and the organization as a whole (Thilagavathy and Geetha 2023).

H2. *The capabilities of (a) competence, (b) responsibility, (c) time autonomy, (d) inclusivity, (e) self-motivation, and (f) human flourishing are linked to higher levels of WLB.*

2.2.3 | Work Engagement

Identifying the factors that promote work engagement is vital for any organization and its workforce. Work engagement is an integral part of the organizational context, and it constitutes the degree of enthusiasm, energy, and commitment that a worker shows towards their work (Rana and Chopra 2019). Engaged workers are more likely to be productive, dedicated, and committed to their organization's goals and values. Thus, the level of commitment an employee brings to their job can significantly impact their effectiveness and productivity (Rana and Chopra 2019; Zhenjing et al. 2022). Encouraging employees to develop their capabilities, which, for this study, are competence, responsibility, temporal autonomy, inclusion, self-motivation, and human flourishing, can contribute to employees feeling more empowered and fulfilled in their roles. By doing so,

employers can reap the rewards of a highly engaged workforce (Canavesi and Minelli 2022).

The capabilities listed above can be seen as a way of supporting the promotion of engagement at work. Mastery and confidence in their work can be instilled in workers through their competence, which is achieved through skill, knowledge, and ability (Krauss and Orth 2022). A sense of ownership and commitment to their work can be developed in individuals through responsibility and inclusion, leading them to feel appreciated and secure at work (Lee et al. 2020). A sense of control and purpose can be maintained in individuals' work through individualized time management and self-motivation, resulting in greater dedication (Wehrt et al. 2022). Another important element is human flourishing, which encompasses various aspects of well-being, such as physical, emotional, and social considerations, which can offer a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment at work (A'yunnissa et al. 2023).

According to Nissinen et al. (2022) and Zito et al. (2019), higher levels of engagement at work are intrinsically linked to the list of capabilities listed above. To create a culture of engagement and motivation, companies must provide their employees with adequate resources, support, and skills. Giving employees independence and encouraging adaptability can also help establish WLB, ultimately leading to greater dedication and engagement with work (Vaziri et al. 2022).

H3. *The capabilities of (a) competence, (b) responsibility, (c) time autonomy, (d) inclusivity, (e) self-motivation, (f) human flourishing are linked to higher levels of work engagement.*

2.2.4 | Relationship Between Trust, Work-Life Balance, and Work Engagement

Trust in the workplace significantly influences employees' perception of WLB by fostering a sense of security and satisfaction among employees. Research has shown that organizational trust correlates with employee job satisfaction, indicating that, when employees feel they can trust their organization, they are more satisfied with their jobs (Zanabazar et al. 2024). This satisfaction extends to how employees perceive their ability to manage WLB, as a satisfying job can reduce stress and improve overall quality of life (Leitão et al. 2019). Trust within an organization can lead to a more engaged and committed workforce, further enhancing WLB through increased job satisfaction and loyalty (Naz et al. 2020).

The role of trust in management is crucial for enhancing WLB initiatives. Employees are more likely to participate in and benefit from WLB programs when they trust that management genuinely supports these initiatives (Cheng et al. 2022). Trust in management encourages employees to utilize WLB programs without fear of negative repercussions on their career progression. Furthermore, management's trust can lead to a stronger adoption of flexible work arrangements, which are essential for a healthy WLB. This trust also mediates the relationship between the workplace environment and employee performance, showcasing that trust in management is instrumental in realizing the full benefits of WLB initiatives (Zhenjing et al. 2022).

H4. *Trust is linked to higher levels of work-life balance.*

The theoretical foundations linking trust and work engagement are rooted in the fundamental principles of organizational behavior and psychology. Trust within an organization fosters a sense of safety and openness, allowing employees to dedicate themselves fully to their roles without the distraction of skepticism or fear of exploitation. Trust in leadership is pivotal for cultivating an environment where work engagement can thrive. Specifically, trust in leaders has been directly associated with higher levels of work engagement, as it empowers individuals to operate within a supportive framework where their contributions are valued and their professional growth is facilitated (Engelbrecht et al. 2017). Furthermore, the quality of the relationship between superiors and their subordinates directly impacts the level of trust and, consequently, the degree of work engagement among staff members (Aggarwal et al. 2020). This theoretical link underscores the premise that trust is not merely a by-product of organizational culture, but a foundational element that actively shapes the dynamics of work engagement. Furthermore, Yean et al. (2023) examining the impact of supervisory trust on the work engagement of academic staff, found a significant positive influence, indicating that trust in supervisors is a critical determinant of engagement levels. Chughtai and Buckley (2013) explored the effects of trust on work engagement among research scientists, revealing that both trust in top management and trust in team members significantly boost engagement with work. These findings are further corroborated by evidence suggesting that authentic leadership, which inherently includes trust-building as a core component, leads to increased work engagement through the mediating role of trust in supervisors (Chughtai and Buckley 2013). Such empirical studies validate the hypothesis that trust is related to higher levels of work engagement.

H5. *Trust is linked to higher levels of work engagement.*

The interplay between organizational capabilities and WLB is significantly influenced by the level of trust within an organization. Trust acts as a critical mediator in enhancing the relationship between an organization's capabilities (competence, responsibility, time autonomy, inclusivity, self-motivation, and human flourishing) and employees' WLB. This mediation suggests that, when employees trust their organization, they are more likely to experience a positive WLB, largely due to the empowerment and support fostered by trust (Hermanto et al. 2024). This relationship is pivotal, especially considering the challenges posed by unforeseen circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has underscored the importance of adaptive capabilities and trust in maintaining WLB. Furthermore, the positive impact of organizational trust on job performance provides a foundational understanding of its broader implications for WLB. Trust within an organization fosters an environment where employees feel valued and supported, thereby enhancing their job performance (Nabilla et al. 2023). This supportive environment is crucial for enabling employees to leverage organizational capabilities toward achieving a better WLB. The significance of trust extends beyond immediate job performance, influencing long-term employee satisfaction and well-being by reinforcing the capabilities that support WLB (Hermanto et al. 2024).

H6. *The capabilities of (a) competence, (b) responsibility, (c) time autonomy, (d) inclusivity, (e) self-motivation, and (f) human flourishing are linked to higher levels of work-life balance, when mediated by organizational trust.*

The concept of organizational trust as a mediator plays a key role in strengthening the relationship between capabilities (competence, responsibility, temporal autonomy, inclusion, self-motivation, and human flourishing) and commitment to work. Park and Kim (2024) showed that work engagement is significantly influenced by perceived organizational support, with organizational trust fully mediating this relationship. This suggests that perceived support from the organization, coupled with trust in its leadership and systems, increases employees' levels of commitment. Furthermore, trust in leadership has specifically been identified as a key factor that partially mediates the relationship between organizational job characteristics and workers' level of work engagement (Dinda and Wahyuni 2023; Tabak and Hendy 2016). This implies that, when workers have confidence in their leaders and the direction they give the organization, they are more likely to show higher levels of commitment to their work. Organizational trust acts as a bridge, facilitating a positive interaction between an employee's capabilities and their willingness to invest effort and enthusiasm into their jobs.

H7. *The capabilities of (a) competence, (b) responsibility, (c) time autonomy, (d) inclusivity, (e) self-motivation, and (f) human flourishing are linked to higher levels of work engagement, when mediated by organizational trust.*

Figure 1 shows the research model.

3 | Methods

3.1 | Data and Sample

The study data was obtained from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions database, which was collected through the 2021 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). Access to the database is public upon registration on the Eurofound website. The objective of the EWCS is to collect concrete experiences of workers across various topics, such as the quality and characteristics of their work, forms of work organization, hybrid work, their balance between personal and professional life, health and safety at work, and engagement with work, among others.

The EWCS sample is made up of 71,758 workers (both employed and independent) living in 36 European countries (27 countries belonging to the European Union, North Macedonia, United Kingdom, Norway, Montenegro, Switzerland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia). Data was collected in 2021, between March and November, through telephone interviews, each lasting 22 min on average. Participants were selected by direct random dialing to cell phone numbers. The number of participants interviewed in each country varied between 1000 and 4100. Given the multiplicity of languages used in the countries (some countries, such as Belgium and Spain, use more than one language) that comprise the sample, 55 versions of the questionnaire were used in the languages of

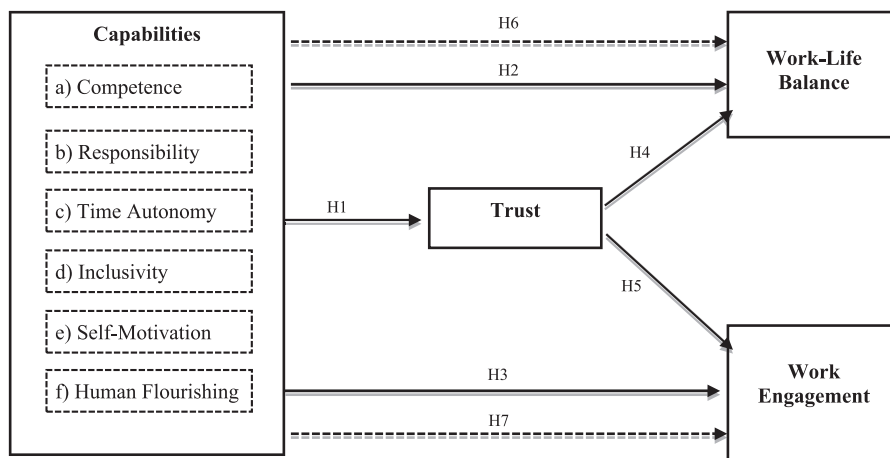


FIGURE 1 | Research model. Direct effect (→); Direct effect—mediating role of trust (→).

the different participating countries. Participation was voluntary and responses were confidential. Informed consent was obtained from each participant by telephone at the beginning of the interview.

Given the purpose of this study, the participants considered in the sample were selected using the variable LOC_Home (QM35E), relating to the question “Your own home: how often you have worked in each location during the last 12 months in your main paid job”. Responses to this question were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1—never; 2—rarely; 3—sometimes; 4—often; 5—always). In this way, we considered participants who responded that they worked many times in the last 12 months and were always at home. Thus, our sample was reduced to 23,748 workers, of whom 43.2% answered “always” and 56.8% answered “often” to the question regarding LOC_Home.

Table 2 shows the sociodemographic characterization of the participants. The sample is gender-equitable, as 48.6% were men and 51.1% were women. The average age was 39.86 years with the 35–44 age group being the most significant (28.7%). 77.1% of participants had tertiary education and were full-time workers (83.6%). Regarding seniority in the work carried out, 39.6% had worked for more than 10 years, 32.2% between 1 and 4 years, and 18.5% between 5 and 9 years. The sample participants had different professional occupations; the most significant being professionals (47.2%), managers (17.5%), and technicians and associate professionals (16.1%). Most workers interviewed stated that, on average, they worked between 35 and 40 h a week.

3.2 | Measurements and Methodological Procedures

Considering the purpose of the study and the availability of data in the 2021 European Working Conditions Survey database, nine constructs were developed (see Figure 1; Table A1 for the description of the items and measurement scales): competence, responsibility, time autonomy, trust, WLB, and

engagement were measured using three items each; inclusivity was measured using four items; and self-motivation and human flourishing was measured using two items each. The ability of “equality” was not included in this study because the database does not present suitable variables to measure that construct.

3.3 | Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study was carried out in five stages. Firstly, a statistical analysis (mean and standard deviation) of the items of the constructs included in the research model was carried out using SPSS software (v25). The second stage consisted of factor analysis, using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The objective of carrying out the EFA was to divide the items by factors, and the CFA was to evaluate the factor loads of each item and the reflective nature of the proposed research model. After assessing the quality of the items that measure the constructs, the relationships between constructs established in the research model were tested by applying the Partial Least Square (PLS) method in Smart PLS (V. 4.0). The PLS method combined factor analysis with the estimation of linear regressions using the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) method. This method suits the purpose of the study because it involves data collected through questionnaires and, as such, does not have a normal distribution (confirmed by the kurtosis and skewness statistics). The PLS method does not require data normality, and it allows for optimizing the relationships established by the research model between constructs and between the items that measure the constructs. In the fourth stage, the model obtained after applying the PLS method was evaluated according to the measures suggested by Hair et al. (2019): (i) Cronbach’s Alpha measurements ($C\alpha > 0.70$); (ii) composite reliability (CR > 0.70); (iii) Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50); and (iv) discriminant validity were tested by the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Finally, to test the relationships established in the research model, a bootstrap analysis was carried out in Smart PLS, which was based on estimating simple linear regressions using the OLS method between constructs.

TABLE 2 | Socio-demographic characterization of the participants.

Frequency (%)	
Gender	
Male	48.6
Female	51.1
Others	0.3
Age	
Between 16 and 24 years	4.6
Between 25 and 34 years	22.9
Between 35 and 44 years	28.7
Between 45 and 55 years	26.8
> 56 years	17.1
Education	
Primary education	0.4
Secondary education	22.1
Tertiary education	77.1
Worker occupation	
Full time	83.6
Part time	15.6
Professional seniority	
< 1 year	9.7
Between 1 and 4 years	32.2
Between 5 and 9 years	18.5
10 or more	39.6
Weekly working hours	
< 20 h	6.6
Between 21 and 34 h	9.2
Between 35 and 40 h	78.8
Between 41 and 47 h	3.6
> 48 h	1.8
Professional occupation	
Managers	17.5
Professionals	47.2
Technicians and associate professionals	16.1
Clerical support workers	9.5
Service and sales workers	3.8
Craft and related trades workers	2.5
Others	3.4

4 | Results

4.1 | Statistical Description of Variables and Indicators

Table 3 contains a statistical description (mean and standard deviation) of the items that measure the constructs.

4.2 | Factor Analysis

Table A2 contains the results of the factor analysis. The results of the EFA implementation reveal that the items were divided into nine factors, referring to the constructs presented in the research model (competence, responsibility, time autonomy, trust, WLB, engagement, inclusivity, self-motivation, and human flourishing). As the study sample was collected through a questionnaire, we performed the common method bias using the Harman unifactorial test to evaluate the quality of the responses, checking the consistency of the responses or the existence of bias. The nine factors that resulted from the division of the items present an accumulated variance of 62.35%, with no single factor explaining more than 50% of the overall variance. As such, we can conclude that the data was not affected by the common method bias. The CFA implementation results demonstrate that the confirmatory factor loadings are > 0.70, with no item being excluded, thus confirming the reflective nature of the PLS model.

4.3 | Measurements of the Research Model After Applying the PLS Method

Table 4 contains the results validating the constructs included in the research model, after applying the PLS method. The resulting model is convergent and reliable, as the results of Cronbach's Alpha measurements ($C\alpha > 0.70$), composite reliability (CR > 0.70), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50) are superior to the reference values. Furthermore, the model presents discriminant validity according to the results of the Fornell Larcker criterion (on the diagonal of Table 3 in bold), because the square root of the average variance extracted by a construct is greater than the correlation between each construct. The model has an excellent fit: (i) the Goodness-of-Fit Index (0.954; reference value > 0.90); (ii) Normative Fit Index (0.963; reference value > 0.90); and (iii) the root mean square approximation error (0.071; reference value < 0.08).

4.4 | Research Model Estimation Results

Table 5 shows the results of estimating the direct relationships that appear in the research model.

The results demonstrate that the list of capabilities is positively related to trust in the organization, with the exception of responsibility. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is generally accepted, except H1b (Responsibility), which is rejected. However, the relationship

TABLE 3 | Statistical description of the items.

Construct	Items	Mean	Std. deviation
Competence	Opportunities job	4.29	0.974
	Training employer	1.56	0.496
	Training on the job	1.55	0.498
Time autonomy	Able hour off	3.24	0.842
	Free time work	3.28	1.260
	Short notice	4.47	0.864
Self-motivation	Prospects	3.54	1.312
	Learning new things	3.94	0.897
Responsibility	Autonomy order	3.81	1.08
	Autonomy method	3.60	1.145
	Autonomy speed	3.59	1.115
Inclusivity	Decision influence	3.86	1.032
	Improving work organisation	3.74	1.153
	Consulted	3.85	1.214
	Meeting	1.79	0.408
Human Flourishing	Work welldone	4.20	0.794
	Usefull work	4.34	0.800
Trust	WP mantrustemp	4.30	0.886
	WP goodcoop	4.54	0.756
	WP emptrustman	3.94	1.024
Work Life Balance	WLB worry	3.09	1.172
	WLB tired	3.30	1.062
	WLB concentration	3.79	0.988
Engagement	Eng energy	3.74	0.874
	Eng enthusiastic	3.98	0.886
	Eng timeflies	4.13	0.864

between the list of capabilities and trust in the organization is not uniform. Inclusivity is the capability that most influences trust in the organization ($\beta=0.201$), followed by competence ($\beta=0.142$), human flourishing ($\beta=0.094$), time autonomy ($\beta=0.075$), and finally, self-motivation ($\beta=0.051$). Furthermore, the capabilities of competence, responsibility, time autonomy, and human flourishing positively influence WLB, confirming hypotheses H2a (Competence), H2b (Responsibility), H2c (Time Autonomy), and H2f (Human Flourishing). Time autonomy is the capability that has the most intense positive relationship with WLB ($\beta=0.237$),

followed by human flourishing ($\beta=0.087$), responsibility ($\beta=0.034$), and competence ($\beta=0.025$). A negative relationship between the capabilities of inclusivity, self-motivation, and WLB was also found, although inclusivity was not statistically significant. In this way, hypotheses H2d (Inclusivity) and H2e (Self-Motivation) are rejected, respectively.

In general, the positive relationship between the list of capabilities and work engagement is confirmed, except for time autonomy. In this way, all H3 hypotheses are confirmed, except H3c (Time Autonomy). Inclusivity is the capability that most positively influences work engagement ($\beta=0.079$), followed by competence ($\beta=0.075$), responsibility ($\beta=0.069$), and self-motivation ($\beta=0.054$). Finally, the results demonstrate a positive relationship between organizational trust and WLB ($\beta=0.158$) and work engagement ($\beta=0.177$), confirming hypotheses H4 (WLB) and H5 (Engagement).

Table 6 shows the results of estimating the relationship between the list of capabilities and WLB and work engagement when mediated by organizational trust.

The results reveal that, in general, the list of capabilities is positively related to WLB and work engagement, when mediated by organizational trust, except for the capability of responsibility. As such, all H6 and H7 hypotheses are confirmed, except H6b (Responsibility>Trust > WLB) and H7b (Responsibility>Trust > Engagement). Inclusivity is the capability that most influences WLB ($\beta=0.041$), along with work engagement ($\beta=0.057$), when these relationships are mediated by organizational trust.

5 | Discussion

The central goal of this study was to examine to what extent the CA (as an ethical framework in management) is relevant for workers' well-being in the context of remote work. The first specific goal was to empirically validate the list of capabilities by testing a concrete application, as suggested by Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021). The results reveal that the list of capabilities is viable. Not only are they relevant through the statistical validation of the list of capabilities, but also through their significant relationships with other constructs, such as trust, WLB, and work engagement. The idea that organizations can and should enhance employees' freedom and autonomy to make the right decisions and flourish as professionals and human beings is not only possible but desirable (Picard and Islam 2020).

Another set of findings is related to the outcomes of the list of capabilities. The findings generally reveal that the capabilities are related to both work engagement and WLB. Work engagement can be characterized by a state of enthusiasm, energy, and dedication to one's work (Rana and Chopra 2019). Several factors have been shown to contribute to higher engagement at work, especially when working from home (Mehta 2021). The list of capabilities encapsulates several of the most important aspects for promoting work engagement, such as the ability to make choices regarding work tasks (responsibility; $b=0.069$), being part of the decision making processes (inclusivity; $b=0.079$), and choosing the path that the individual wants to pursue (self-motivation; $b=0.054$), all of which are supported by a set of skills capable

TABLE 4 | Measures of reliability, convergence, and validity.

Constructs	C α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Competence (1)	0.805	0.728	0.554	0.744								
Time Autonomy (2)	0.784	0.771	0.527	0.089	0.726							
Self-Motivation (3)	0.779	0.780	0.552	0.300	0.093	0.743						
Responsibility (4)	0.771	0.818	0.601	0.156	0.193	0.113	0.775					
Inclusivity (5)	0.757	0.749	0.529	0.276	0.151	0.230	0.302	0.727				
Human Flourishing (6)	0.721	0.837	0.720	0.319	0.082	0.180	0.170	0.259	0.849			
Trust (7)	0.719	0.842	0.641	0.247	0.127	0.168	0.104	0.288	0.219	0.801		
Work Life Balance (8)	0.774	0.778	0.541	0.097	0.246	0.047	0.099	0.103	0.140	0.205	0.735	
Engagement (9)	0.787	0.821	0.610	0.245	0.015	0.180	0.170	0.259	0.371	0.284	0.202	0.781

TABLE 5 | OLS estimates: Results of direct effects on endogenous variables.

	Coef.	T statistics	p	Confidence interval		Hypothesis support
				2.5%	97.5%	
H1a: Competence → Trust	0.142	16.669	0.000	0.125	0.158	Yes
H1b: Responsibility → Trust	-0.017	2.395	0.017	-0.032	-0.004	No
H1c: Time Autonomy → Trust	0.075	11.088	0.000	0.062	0.088	Yes
H1d: Inclusivity → Trust	0.201	19.672	0.000	0.181	0.221	Yes
H1e: Self-Motivation → Trust	0.051	7.376	0.000	0.037	0.066	Yes
H1f: Human Flourishing → Trust	0.094	11.715	0.000	0.078	0.110	Yes
H2a: Competence → Work Life Balance	0.025	3.668	0.000	0.011	0.037	Yes
H2b: Responsibility → Work Life Balance	0.034	4.411	0.000	0.019	0.048	Yes
H2c: Time Autonomy → Work Life Balance	0.237	35.569	0.000	0.224	0.250	Yes
H2d: Inclusivity → Work Life Balance	-0.007	0.843	0.399	-0.024	0.009	No
H2e: Self-Motivation → Work Life Balance	-0.045	5.578	0.000	-0.061	-0.029	No
H2f: Human Flourishing → Work Life Balance	0.087	12.409	0.000	0.073	0.100	Yes
H3a: Competence → Engagement	0.075	9.508	0.000	0.060	0.090	Yes
H3b: Responsibility → Engagement	0.069	9.636	0.000	0.054	0.082	Yes
H3c: Time Autonomy → Engagement	-0.073	11.602	0.000	-0.087	-0.060	No
H3d: Inclusivity → Engagement	0.079	9.652	0.000	0.063	0.093	Yes
H3e: Self-Motivation → Engagement	0.054	7.222	0.000	0.041	0.070	Yes
H3f: Human Flourishing → Engagement	0.257	34.140	0.000	0.241	0.271	Yes
H4: Trust → Work Life balance	0.158	18.625	0.000	0.141	0.174	Yes
H5: Trust → Engagement	0.177	19.219	0.000	0.161	0.195	Yes

of allowing the individual to make better decisions and face the challenges posed by working from home (Krauss and Orth 2022; Lee et al. 2020; Wehrt et al. 2022). Finally, achieving what an individual values through work (human flourishing; $b=0.257$) is a fundamental condition for promoting the enthusiasm,

dedication, and energy characteristics associated with work engagement (A'yunnissa et al. 2023).

The exception is the capability of time autonomy. This capability is related to the ability to allocate time to different tasks

TABLE 6 | Results of mediating effects of trust on endogenous variables.

	Coef.	T statistics	p	2.5%	97.5%	Hypothesis support
H6a: Competence → Trust → Work life balance	0.029	13.612	0.000	0.025	0.033	Yes
H7a: Competence → Trust → Engagement	0.040	14.113	0.000	0.035	0.046	Yes
H6b: Responsibility → Trust → Work life balance	-0.004	2.403	0.017	-0.007	-0.001	No
H7b: Responsibility → Trust → Engagement	-0.005	2.397	0.017	-0.009	-0.001	No
H6c: Time Autonomy → Trust → Work life balance	0.015	8.690	0.000	0.012	0.019	Yes
H7c: Time Autonomy → Trust → Engagement	0.021	10.666	0.000	0.018	0.025	Yes
H6d: Inclusivity → Trust → Work life balance	0.041	14.236	0.000	0.036	0.047	Yes
H7d: Inclusivity → Trust → Engagement	0.057	15.540	0.000	0.051	0.065	Yes
H6e: Self-Motivation → Trust → Work life balance	0.011	7.063	0.000	0.008	0.013	Yes
H7e: Self-Motivation → Trust → Engagement	0.015	7.222	0.000	0.011	0.019	Yes
H6f: Human Flourishing → Trust → Work life balance	0.019	9.747	0.000	0.015	0.023	Yes
H7f: Human Flourishing → Trust → Engagement	0.027	9.658	0.000	0.022	0.032	Yes

(Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). The lack of a relationship between time autonomy and work engagement may be related to the nature of work when working from home. In this context, the individual may lack proximity to supervisors and co-workers. This can lead to fewer work references, particularly when defining the tasks that need to be carried out and the time allocated to each. Consequently, the worker may experience some feelings of disorientation, which could lead to a reduction in enthusiasm, energy, and dedication.

WLB refers to the ability to balance professional and personal demands. A proper work environment is crucial to this purpose (Dilby and Farmanesh 2023). The capabilities of “competence” ($\beta=0.025$), “responsibility” ($\beta=0.034$), “time autonomy” ($\beta=0.237$), and “human flourishing” ($\beta=0.087$) are positive and significantly related to WLB. Having the right skills, the autonomy to manage one’s time, and being responsible for making decisions regarding one’s work are all elements that allow individuals to manage their work tasks more efficiently, thus leaving time to manage personal affairs (Gagné et al. 2022; Nissinen et al. 2022). Ultimately, being able to accomplish what one values and desires—human flourishing ($\beta=0.087$)—contributes to greater well-being (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021), and WLB is a cornerstone of this state.

The capabilities of “inclusivity” and “self-motivation” are not aligned with these results. With regard to the former, the result is not significant, and for the latter, the relationship with WLB is negative ($b=-0.045$). Self-motivation is related to having the opportunity to choose the direction of one’s life (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). In an organizational context, self-motivation may be related to career choices and paths (Sotto-Mayor et al. 2023), including promotions. Being highly self-motivated can mean having career and progression objectives that imply greater dedication to work. This greater dedication and focus on work can,

therefore, harm the balance between personal and professional life (Palumbo 2020).

The third specific goal was to understand the role of trust in the relationship between capabilities, work engagement, and WLB. Backed up by previous academic literature (Tosun and Özkan 2023), it was expected that trust could be related to the capabilities (H1), to WLB (H4), and to work engagement (H5). It was also expected that trust could mediate the relationship between the capabilities, WLB, and work engagement (H6 and H7, respectively).

The results show that the capabilities are an important set of factors for promoting trust in organizations. Capabilities such as inclusivity ($\beta=0.201$), competence ($\beta=0.142$), human flourishing ($\beta=0.094$), time autonomy ($\beta=0.075$), and self-motivation ($\beta=0.051$) can function as sources that establish feelings of trust. The importance of these relationships is even more relevant when working remotely, when workers experience fewer interactions and less social contact with their colleagues and supervisors (Gálvez et al. 2020). The exception to this trend is the result for responsibility ($\beta=-0.017$), showing that the greater the responsibility, the lower the trust. Responsibility is related to the capacity for self-organization and the ability to take initiative. In this way, responsibility is related to the degree of autonomy at work (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). When people are autonomous, they need less guidance from their supervisors and tend to rely less on their co-workers, which may, in turn, lower their level of interactions. In a remote work environment like working from home, this self-imposed isolation may be even greater (Gálvez et al. 2020), thus reinforcing the absence of trust-promoting social contacts.

As expected, the findings also reveal that trust is an important factor for enhancing WLB ($\beta=0.158$) and work engagement

($\beta=0.177$). Trust can contribute toward creating a positive and open environment when making decisions and talking about issues related to WLB (Thilagavathy and Geetha 2023). Trust is also relevant for promoting work engagement. An environment where individuals can rely on their co-workers and leaders helps to promote psychological safety (Siyal 2023), thus offering a safer environment in which an employee can be dedicated to their work (Bellamkonda et al. 2021).

In general, trust functions as a mediator between the capabilities, WLB, and work engagement. As far as these findings are concerned, trust works as a social glue, providing the right environment for individuals to showcase their capabilities, which, following the assumptions of the CA (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021), allows for higher levels of satisfaction and well-being to be achieved.

The only exception is the capability of responsibility, which is negatively related to WLB and work engagement when mediated by trust. The negative relationship of responsibility with WLB and work engagement may be related to the nature of work when working from home. Responsibility is related to the autonomy of deciding how and where to do work (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). The presence of trust may imply that individuals feel more pressure to be autonomous, which, in turn, may jeopardize their work engagement—specifically with regard to levels of enthusiasm, energy, dedication, and ultimately WLB.

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

The first and most important theoretical contribution is that the list of capabilities proposed by Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021) has an empirical application, thus contributing to extending research on the CA (Sen 1999) and the notion of liberated companies (Getz 2009) to an alternative form of work, such as working from home. Another important contribution is the reinforcement of one of the most important assumptions of the CA. According to the findings of this study, the list of capabilities is an instrument through which individuals can achieve better well-being when working from home.

More than a philosophical and ethical orientation, the list of capabilities has proven to be a concrete guide for promoting the notions of Sen's (1999) CA and Getz's (2009) liberated companies.

5.2 | Managerial Implications

This research offers some guidelines to organizations in general and human resources management in particular regarding the implementation of alternative forms of work—specifically, working from home—based on the principles of freedom and autonomy.

Organizations can choose to follow an ethical approach centered on the individual, allowing workers to flourish not only as professionals but also as human beings. This can be achieved by designing a work organization structure based on features

such as skills development, autonomy, responsibility, and self-motivation.

Another important implication for managing organizations is that, by showing the applicability of the CA and, specifically, the list of capabilities, managers are given a roadmap through which they can promote WLB. Instead of developing WLB programs while maintaining a traditional management approach to work organization, starting with an ethical and philosophical change allows one to focus on the root of WLB challenges.

Finally, given the importance of work engagement for individual and organizational outcomes, such as performance (Corbeau and Iliescu 2023), the relationship between capabilities and engagement demonstrated in this study affirms and reinforces the potential benefits of an ethical approach to working from home that focuses on the individual and their needs (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021), rather than focusing on the needs of the organization.

6 | Conclusion

The list of capabilities has proven to be empirically testable in the context of alternative forms of work, such as working from home. Thus, it was demonstrated that the assumptions of CA can be applicable to the organizational context through an organizational philosophy and ethics that are more relevant to the individual. Specifically, showing that several capabilities proposed by the CA are relevant in the context of working from home, a roadmap is established to promote work engagement and WLB within ethical management and an individual-centered organizational philosophy. Additionally, by demonstrating the relevance that building trusting relationships has in this context, the paths towards the positive outcomes (such as work engagement and WLB) of the CA become clearer for individuals.

Despite its contributions, this work contains some limitations. The conceptual model does not include equality, which is one of the seven capabilities pointed out by (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). As previously explained, this choice was made due to the limitations imposed by the database. Further research should include the role of this capability. Using a secondary database limits the choice of variables to assess the constructs. Nevertheless, using a large database brings other strengths, such as a large sample, a diversity of countries, and enhanced quality control of field-work and data. Even so, future research may use primary data, thus facilitating the construction of variables better suited to the objectives. Furthermore, scholarly literature has demonstrated that workers' sociodemographic characteristics affect their capabilities—a situation that is not considered in this study. In future research, it would be interesting to introduce gender, age, and education, among other variables, into the research model as moderating variables of the relationship between capabilities, WLB, and engagement. Although the research aimed to focus on working from home, other alternative forms of work could reveal different dynamics. For example, it would be interesting to test the list of capabilities on digital nomads.

Acknowledgments

NECE-UBI, Research Centre for Business Sciences, Research Centre, and this work are funded by FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, IP, project UIDB/04630/2020.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Peer Review

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://www.webofscience.com/api/gateway/wos/peer-review/10.1111/beer.12802>.

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Appendix A

TABLE A1 | Items and measures.

Construct	Item	Description item	Scale
Competence	Opportunities job (a)	I have enough opportunities to use my knowledge and skills in my current job	1 = strongly agree 2 = tend to agree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = tend to disagree 5 = Strongly disagree
	Training employer (b)	Training paid for or provided by your employer [over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills?]	1 = Yes 2 = No
	Training on the job (b)	On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors) [over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills?]	
Time autonomy	Able hour off (c)	Would you say that for you arranging to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters is...	1 = very easy 2 = fairly easy 3 = Fairlt difficult 4 = very difficult
	Free time work	Since you started your main paid job, how often have you worked in your free time to meet work demands?	1 = Daily 2 = several times a week 3 = several times a month 4 = less often 5 = never
	Short notice	Over the last 12 months, how often have you been requested to come into work at short notice?	
Self-motivation	Prospects (a)	My job offers good prospects for career advancement [to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your job?]	1 = strongly agree 2 = tend to agree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = tend to disagree 5 = Strongly disagree
	Learning new things	Working to tight deadlines [and, does your job involve...]	1 = never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always
Responsibility	Autonomy order	Your order of tasks [generally, does your main paid job involve...]	1 = never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always
	Autonomy method	Your methods of work [generally, does your main paid job involve...]	
	Autonomy speed	Your speed or rate of work [generally, does your main paid job involve...]	
Inclusivity	Decision influence	You can influence decisions that are important for your work [please tell me how often the following applies to your work situation?]	1 = never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always
	Improving work organisation	You are involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of your department or organisation [...select the response which best describes your work situation]	
	Consulted	You are consulted before objectives are set for your work [...select the response which best describes your work situation]	
	Meeting (b)	A regular meeting in which employees can express their views about what is happening in the organisation [Does the following exist at your company or organisation...?]	1 = Yes 2 = No
Human flourishing	Work welldone	Your job gives you the feeling of work well done [please tell me how often the following applies to your work situation?]	1 = never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always
	Usefull work	You have the feeling of doing useful work	

(Continues)

TABLE A1 | (Continued)

Construct	Item	Description item	Scale
Trust	WP mantrustemp (a)	The management trusts the employees to do their work well [to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?]	1 = strongly agree 2 = tend to agree
	WP goodcoop (a)	There is good cooperation between you and your colleagues [to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?]	3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = tend to disagree
	WP emptrustman (a)	In general, employees trust management [to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?]	5 = Strongly disagree
Work life balance	WLB worry (a)	Kept worrying about work when you were not working [since you started your main paid job, how often have you...?]	1 = strongly agree 2 = tend to agree
	WLB tired (a)	Felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done [since you started your main paid job, how often have you...?]	3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = tend to disagree
	WLB concentration (a)	Found it difficult to concentrate on your job because of your family responsibilities	5 = Strongly disagree
Engagement	Eng energy (a)	At my work I feel full of energy [for each statement, please tell me how often you feel this way...]	1 = strongly agree 2 = tend to agree
	Eng enthusiastic (a)	I am enthusiastic about my job [for each statement, please tell me how often you feel this way...]	3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = tend to disagree
	Eng timeflies (a)	Time flies when I am working [for each statement, please tell me how often you feel this way...]	5 = Strongly disagree

Note: Inversion of scales where (a) 1- strongly disagree a 5-strongly agree; (b) 1-No:2-Yes; (c) 1-very difficult a5-very easy.

TABLE A2 | EFA and CFA results.

	Confirmatory									Communality	
	Factor Loads	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8		Factor 9
Competence	0.966	0.753									0.786
	0.741	0.774									0.774
	0.767	0.757									0.769
Time Autonomy	0.874	0.851									0.729
	0.795	0.759									0.796
	0.705	0.751									0.721
Self-Motivation	0.965		0.799								0.875
	0.716		0.726								0.832
Responsibility	0.751			0.741							0.739
	0.745			0.796							0.723
	0.827			0.739							0.718
Inclusivity	0.668				0.762						0.783
	0.656				0.813						0.758
	0.719				0.772						0.757
	0.567				0.833						0.786
Human Flourishing	0.793					0.736					0.733
	0.902					0.809					0.701
Trust	0.838						0.726				0.768
	0.702						0.735				0.706
	0.853						0.779				0.755
Work Life Balance	0.733							0.776			0.739
	0.654							0.784			0.719
	0.810							0.725			0.716
Engagement	0.830								0.763		0.751
	0.871								0.724		0.796
	0.719								0.702		0.731