“DIGITALLY PRESENT, PROFESSIONALLY ABSENT? INVESTIGATING LEADERSHIP STEREOTYPES IN REMOTE WORK FOR WOMEN IN UK TECHNOLOGY”

Research Paper

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“Abstract”

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted work from offices to homes, changed daily routines, and influenced career development. This change brought both opportunities and challenges for women in the technology sector. This research examines the impact of gender stereotypes on the career advancement of women in remote work environments, utilizing survey data collected from 339 women employed in the UK tech sector. The research examines three key areas: leadership, competence, and recognition, and their impact on visibility and promotion. The findings indicate that recognition is the most significant factor in assisting women in achieving visibility and promotions. Leadership stereotypes, on the other hand, persist as a barrier, whereas competence stereotypes had minimal impact. This indicates that while women's technical skills are widely recognized, there are still lingering uncertainties regarding their leadership abilities. This article draws exclusively from the quantitative phase of a broader doctoral research project. The findings underscore the need for more equitable recognition and evaluation systems within remote work environments.

Keywords: Remote work; Gender stereotypes; Women in technology; Leadership perceptions; Recognition and visibility; Career advancement.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work across various sectors, resulting in a rapid transition to remote work in the contemporary professional landscape. Remote work, which was previously available to a select group of employees, is currently developing into a fundamental component of organizational strategy, allowing businesses to decrease costs, sustain operations, and provide employees with increased flexibility (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2022; Torres M.A., 2023). Additionally, remote working is widely perceived to improve work-life balance, lower stress from commuting, and provide employees with more freedom and control over their daily routines (Ingusci et al., 2023; Kaushik and Guleria, 2020).

However, the transition to remote work has also raised questions about fairness and equality, specifically for women in male-dominated fields such as technology. While flexibility in remote work may reduce some barriers, it can also lower women's visibility, limiting access to informal networks and mentorship opportunities, both of which are critical for professional progress (Babic and Hansez, 2021; Taparia and Lenka, 2022). This paradox is particularly evident in the technology sector, and despite being a driver of innovation, it has struggled with gender inequality for decades. Even in the 21st century, stereotypical gender views do persist, the progress toward equity has been slow and inconsistent, and women continue

to be underrepresented in society and the workplace, particularly in positions of authority (Fox, Johnson, and Rosser, 2024; Horn et al., 2023).

Several studies have demonstrated that women are typically regarded as supporting contributors rather than qualified leaders. This perception leads to biased evaluations in the areas of recruiting, performance appraisal, and promotion (Eagly, 2013; Eagly and Wood, 2016a, 2016b; Eagly and Koenig, 2021). Due to the lack of physical presence, these stereotypes may be further strengthened in remote work environments, resulting in heightened doubts regarding the capabilities, dedication, or leadership potential of women (Tsai, 2024). To effectively address persistent inequalities, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of how such concepts develop in a remote work environment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following question: how do gender stereotypes affect perceptions of women's competence, leadership, and recognition in a remote work setting, and how does this influence career advancement?

A detailed study was carried out using survey data from 339 professionals working in the technology sector in the United Kingdom. The study utilized a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, which employs quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews. This article focuses specifically on the quantitative findings of one research question, examining how stereotypes relate to outcomes such as visibility and promotion.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Gender stereotypes and leadership perceptions

A gender stereotype is a preconceived idea about someone based on their gender (Tabassum and Nayak, 2021). These ideas are deeply rooted in social and cultural norms that often see men as strong leaders and women as community supporters (Eagly, 2013; Eagly and Wood, 2016a). Social Role Theory claims that these stereotypes emerge from the association of leadership with agentic characteristics such as assertiveness and decisiveness, which are typically attributed to men. On the other hand, communal characteristics that are associated with women, such as empathy and compassion, are undervalued in leadership contexts (Tremmel and Wahl, 2023; del Carmen Triana *et al.*, 2024). These preconceived notions may shape decisions throughout organizational processes, from hiring to performance appraisals and promotions, disadvantaging women in leadership paths (Eagly, 2018; Babic and Hansez, 2021).

2.2 Structural and perceptual barriers to career advancement

Women continue to face numerous real and perceived barriers to obtaining positions of leadership. Many women, particularly mothers, struggle to be perceived as completely dedicated professionals due to the "ideal worker" norm, which emphasizes constant availability and independence from caring responsibilities (Casad and Wexler, 2017; Lievens and Chapman, 2019). The "old boys' club" is another obstacle for women to break through and get mentorship, connections, and informal sponsorship (Fox-Robertson and Wójcik, 2024).

Additionally, women often encounter a "double bind" in leadership roles. If they show confidence and assertiveness, they may be labeled as "too aggressive." Nonetheless, if they distance themselves from such behaviors, they are often criticized for lacking leadership capabilities (Trzebiatowski, McCluney and Hernandez, 2023). This results in a problematic situation in which women may be assessed unfavorably, regardless of the approach they adopt (Ekström Hagevall, 2021; Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Kour and Chib, 2023).

2.3 Remote work and the equity illusion

Remote work is often positioned as a flexible and inclusive alternative to office-based models. However, it may also reproduce existing challenges by reducing informal interactions, such as hallway conversations, networking, and mentoring, that are critical for recognition and advancement (Taparia and Lenka, 2022). In such environments, recognition depends more on formal systems like performance reviews or structured feedback (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2022). This reflects what some researchers describe as the "equity illusion" of remote work: while flexibility increases, underlying biases can persist or adapt to digital contexts (Tsai, 2024).

Remote work can also intensify expectations around work–life balance. Women often take on greater household and caregiving responsibilities, reinforcing stereotypes about limited commitment to leadership roles (Ingusci *et al.*, 2023). Younger and less experienced women may be particularly disadvantaged by reduced access to mentoring and feedback, leading to cumulative disadvantages over time (Gilbert, 2025).

2.4 Gender inequality in the technology sector

The technology sector distinctly exemplifies these structural difficulties. Despite substantial growth and increasing demand for diverse talent, women continue to be underrepresented in technical areas and are significantly less prominent in leadership positions (Horn *et al.*, 2023). In 2025, women comprised merely 26% of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) occupations, with an even diminished representation in AI, engineering, and executive roles (Kruglova, 2025). Worldwide, women constituted 27.6% of the technology workforce, with only 17% of tech companies led by female CEOs and a scant 8% having women as CTOs (Rahmonbek, 2025). In large tech companies like the Big Five, women accounted for about 33% of the workforce, but none of them had more than 25% of the core technical responsibilities (O'Carroll, 2025; Rahmonbek, 2025).

The social and business culture of "prove yourself," where women have to keep showing that they are competent, makes these structural hurdles even stronger (Ford *et al.*, 2021). These disparities correspond with Social Role Theory, which indicates that established gender stereotypes persist in shaping perceptions of leadership attributes, even in settings undergoing fast transformation (Eagly and Wood, 2016a).

These factors together show that there are substantial inequalities in gender equity; women are overlooked in technical roles with lower numbers at the top of the hierarchy, plus having to deal with a leadership environment that constantly questions their capabilities and credibility.

2.5 Research gap and contribution

Recent studies have shown that gender preconceptions can have a significant impact on the career advancement opportunities available to women, frequently limiting their potential for advancement. However, the majority of what we know so far comes from studies that are more limited in scope and qualitative in nature. This indicates a lack of a comprehensive understanding of how patterns operate on a larger scale. Currently, there is a dearth of quantitative data concerning the ways in which factors such as recognition, perceived competence, and leadership evaluations interact with one another to influence career development, particularly in the context of remote work environments. This gap has been highlighted by recent reviews, calling for future research that makes use of more detailed datasets and insights from real-world workplaces.

This article is a component of a larger research project that investigates the technology sector in the United Kingdom, which is characterized by gender disparities that are still extremely apparent. In this study, recognition and visibility are examined to see how they influence stereotypes, as well as how they influence the experiences and possibilities available to women in digital workplaces.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design and approach

Through a quantitative explanatory design, this research assesses the impact of gender stereotypes on women's career outcomes in remote work environments within the UK technology sector. The research goal is to measure the relationships between perceptions of competence, recognition, leadership, and outcomes related to career progression, such as visibility and promotion. This article outlines findings derived from the quantitative component of an extensive PhD dissertation, which combined survey analysis with qualitative interviews. The qualitative insights are forthcoming and not included in the current study.

3.2 Data collection and participants

Data were collected via a structured online questionnaire distributed to female professionals engaged in technology firms situated in the UK. The survey was aimed at a varied group of participants spanning different employment levels, organizational categories, and years of business experience. A total of 339 valid responses were obtained, including junior personnel, middle managers, senior leaders, and a limited number of C-suite executives.
To encompass contextual diversity, demographic inquiries addressed age, parenting status, years of industry experience, and seniority level. This combination of characteristics established a stable basis for analyzing the impact of preconceptions on career outcomes in remote environments.

The total sample size of 339 respondents was accepted as adequate for the statistical analysis conducted in this study. Krejcie and Morgan Table (KMT) provides predefined sample sizes, which recommend a minimum of around 340 respondents to ensure representativeness for large populations. This indicates that the current sample falls within the acceptable range (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). Furthermore, post-hoc statistical power analysis verified that this sample yielded a power level exceeding 0.80 for identifying medium effect sizes in Chi-Square tests (Wuensch, 2025) and regression models at $\alpha = 0.05$. This signifies that the study possessed sufficient sensitivity to identify significant correlations. Moreover, the sample size corresponds with, and in some cases exceeds, participant counts documented in comparable studies on gender stereotypes and remote labor (often between 200–300 participants), thereby reinforcing the robustness and contextual significance of the findings.

3.3 Survey instrument and variables

The questionnaire combined demographic questions with items designed to measure perceptions of gender stereotypes and career outcomes. All attitudinal items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree/Never*, 5 = *Strongly Agree/Always*). The instrument was pre-tested to ensure clarity, reliability, and content validity with 20 respondents and reviewed by two subject-matter experts. Based on the feedback, question sequence adjustments and minor text editing were made before final distribution.

Variable	Description	Example Survey Item
Leadership Stereotype	Beliefs about whether women are viewed as capable leaders in remote work.	"Women are seen as effective leaders in remote work settings."
Competence Stereotype	Perceptions of women's technical or role competence compared to men.	"Women are perceived as equally competent as men in remote work roles."

Equal Recognition	Extent to which women's contributions are acknowledged in remote settings.	"Women's contributions receive the same recognition as men's in virtual meetings."
Feedback Frequency	Frequency of feedback women receive compared to their male colleagues.	"I receive constructive feedback from management."
Visibility to Management	Perceptions of whether women's work is visible to leadership.	"My work is visible to senior management in remote settings."
Career Outcomes	Indicators of progression, such as promotions and performance evaluations.	"I believe women have equal opportunities for promotion in my organization."

Table 1. Key Variables and Sample Survey Items.

3.4 Data analysis methods

The analysis followed a structured sequence:

Descriptive Statistics: Computed to profile respondents and summarize baseline perceptions of gender stereotypes.

Reliability Testing: Cronbach's Alpha was conducted on stereotype-related variables (Leadership, Competence, Equal Recognition) to ensure internal consistency.

Inferential Statistics:

- **Chi-Square Tests of Independence** were applied to examine associations between stereotype perceptions and workplace outcomes (promotion status and visibility to management).
- **Ordinal Logistic Regression** was performed to assess whether stereotype variables significantly predicted visibility to management.

All analyses were conducted using established statistical thresholds ($p < .05$ for significance). Data analysis was performed in SPSS. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant academic review board, and all participants provided informed consent before completing the survey.

4 Results

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

A total of 339 professionals from the UK technology sector participated in the survey. The demographic distribution is summarized in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1. The sample reflects diversity in age, parental status, years in the industry, and career stage. The largest age group was 31–40 years (34.5%), followed by 21–30 years (27.7%). In terms of parental status, 42.8% reported having dependent children living at home. More than one-third of participants (39.8%) reported having over six years of industry experience. In relation to seniority, the majority were in middle management (49.8%) or junior roles (32.1%), while the sample also included senior managers (10.6%) and C-suite executives (2.9%).

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age	21–30	94	27.7%
	31–40	117	34.5%
	41–50	73	21.5%
	51–65	53	15.6%

	>65	2	0.5%
Parental Status	Yes	145	42.8%
	No	194	57.2%
Years in Industry	<1 year	15	4.4%
	1–2 years	57	16.8%
	3–4 years	87	25.6%
	5–6 years	45	13.2%
	>6 years	135	39.8%
Seniority Level	Intern	7	2.0%
	Junior	109	32.1%
	Middle Management	169	49.8%
	Senior Management	36	10.6%
	C-suite Executive	10	2.9%
	Other	8	2.3%

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

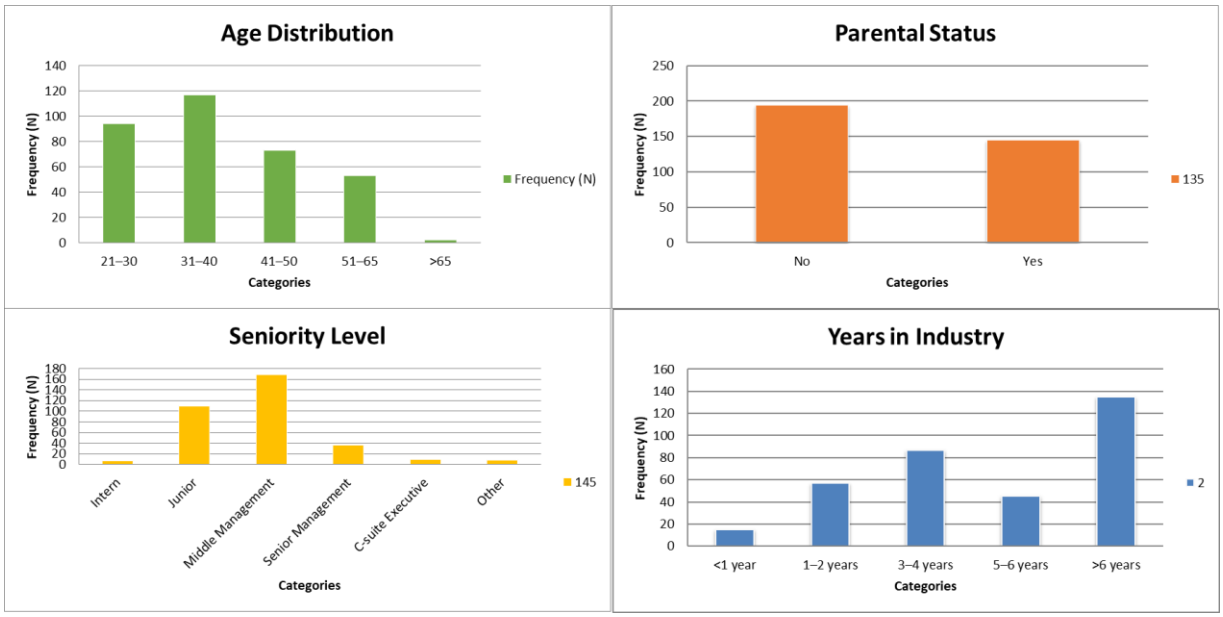

Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

4.2 Descriptive statistics of stereotype perceptions

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the five key variables: Leadership Stereotype, Competence Stereotype, Equal Recognition, Feedback Frequency, and Visibility to Management.

Variable	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Leadership Stereotype	2.69	2	0.77
Competence Stereotype	2.83	3	0.76
Equal Recognition	3.43	4	0.78
Feedback Frequency	3.50	4	0.88
Visibility to Management	3.66	4	0.75

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Stereotype and Workplace Variables.

These mean values indicate that respondents generally reported more positive experiences in terms of recognition, feedback, and visibility (averages above 3.5), whereas perceptions of leadership and competence stereotypes remained closer to the mid-point (averages below 3.0). This pattern suggests that while recognition systems in remote work may be improving, underlying doubts about women's leadership and competence persist. Such contrasts highlight the paradoxical nature of digital workplaces, where procedural fairness may advance while cultural bias remains.

4.3 Reliability of stereotype measures

Cronbach's Alpha was computed for the three stereotype-related variables (Leadership, Competence, Equal Recognition).

Item	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Leadership Stereotype	0.715
Competence Stereotype	0.689
Equal Recognition	0.678
Overall, Alpha	0.734

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha for Gender Stereotype Variables.

The overall value of 0.734 exceeds the threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

This level of reliability confirms that the measures were consistently interpreted by respondents, supporting their suitability for inferential analysis. While Equal Recognition's item-level alpha was slightly below the 0.70 ideal threshold, its theoretical importance justified retention, and results confirmed its strong predictive role in later models.

4.4 Associations between stereotypes and career outcomes

Chi-Square Tests of Independence were conducted to assess associations between stereotype variables and workplace outcomes.

Stereotype Variable	Outcome Variable	χ^2 (Chi-Square)	Df (degrees of freedom)	p-value	Significant?
Leadership Stereotype	Promotion Status	6.41	2	0.041	Yes
Competence Stereotype	Promotion Status	2.18	2	0.336	No
Equal Recognition	Promotion Status	7.85	2	0.020	Yes
Leadership Stereotype	Visibility to Management	4.27	2	0.118	No
Equal Recognition	Visibility to Management	9.12	2	0.010	Yes

Table 5. Chi-Square Test Results for Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Outcomes

As Figure 2 illustrates, leadership stereotypes and equal recognition both showed significant associations with promotion status. In statistical terms, their Chi-Square values (6.41 and 7.85, respectively) exceeded the critical value of 5.99 (the threshold for significance at df = 2, α = 0.05). This indicates that biased leadership perceptions and recognition disparities remain significant barriers to women's advancement. Conversely, competence stereotypes did not reach the critical threshold (χ^2 = 2.18, p = 0.336), suggesting that technical ability may play a less central role in evaluative decisions within this context.

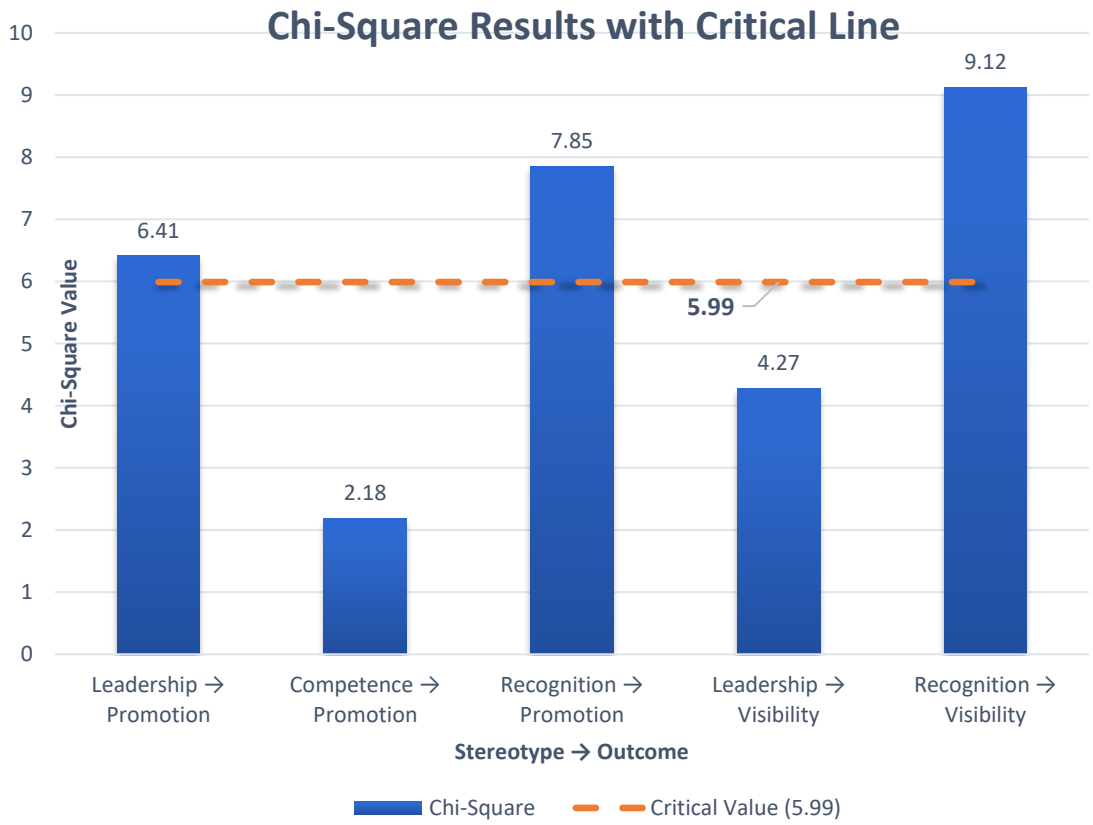

Figure 2. Chi-Square Test Results for Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Outcomes

4.5 Predicting visibility to management (ordinal logistic regression)

Ordinal logistic regression was conducted to assess whether stereotype perceptions predicted respondents' reported visibility to management.

Predictor	Odds Ratio (OR)	95% CI for OR	p-value	Significant?
Leadership Stereotype	1.21	0.58 – 2.53	0.603	No
Competence Stereotype	0.75	0.36 – 1.57	0.449	No
Equal Recognition	2.93	1.67 – 5.16	0.000	Yes

Table 6. Ordinal Logistic Regression Results (Predicting Visibility to Management)

Equal Recognition was the only statistically significant predictor of visibility to management. Respondents who reported equal recognition were nearly three times more likely to state that their work was visible to management compared to those who did not (Odds Ratio = 2.93, 95% CI: 1.67–5.16, p < 0.001).

Leadership and competence stereotypes were not significant predictors ($p > 0.05$). Their confidence intervals for Odds Ratios crossed 1, indicating no reliable effect on visibility.

Overall, the regression model explained approximately 19% of the variance in visibility (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.19$). These findings suggest that recognition plays a central role in shaping visibility outcomes in remote work; however, leadership and competence stereotypes did not independently influence visibility once recognition was accounted for.

5 Discussion

5.1 Recognition as the central mechanism

As results in Tables 5 and 6 indicate, equal recognition closely tracks promotion chances and emerges as the strongest predictor of being seen by management. That is to say, organizational recognition systems are key to shaping women's career pathways, particularly in remote work environments where opportunities for informal visibility are limited. This pattern fits with Taparia and Lenka (2022), who describe recognition as a kind of gatekeeping for advancement in digital workplaces where spontaneity is scarce (Taparia and Lenka, 2022). In virtual settings, the absence of face-to-face interaction reduces informal visibility, making contributions easier to overlook. This calls for the need for structured, equitable recognition systems. With regular, documented recognition that leaders can access and assess, promotion credit will no longer depend on physical presence. As contributions are specific and verifiable, these systems limit gender stereotyping and distribute opportunities more fairly.

5.2 Leadership stereotypes as a persistent barrier

The chi-square results show that leadership stereotypes are significant for those who get promoted but not for those who get noticed by managers. In other words, even when women's contributions are seen and acknowledged, lingering doubts about their leadership capabilities may hinder their promotion. This pattern aligns with social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2016a) and the concept of "double bind" (Trzebiatowski, McCluney and Hernandez, 2023). Remote work can have a negative impact by limiting the everyday interactions that help build trust.

5.3 Competence stereotypes: a surprising non-factor

Contrary to recent claims in the literature (Schmader, 2023; Fox, Johnson and Rosser, 2024) competence-related stereotypes showed no statistically significant association with either promotion or managerial visibility in our chi-square or regression analyses. This pattern suggests that, in the UK tech sector, doubts about women's technical ability may no longer be the binding constraint. Instead, evaluative bias appears to have shifted toward judgments of leadership suitability and the consistency of recognition. Once women are established in technical roles, their competence is less contested; the barriers become whether they are viewed as "leadership material" and whether their contributions are credited in ways that result in promotion decisions. For organizations, the implication is clear: interventions should extend beyond validating technical skill to reworking leadership criteria, calibrating promotion processes, and building transparent, equitable recognition systems.

5.4 The remote work paradox: the equity illusion

Taken together, the evidence reveals a paradox. Remote work was widely expected to expand equity by removing everyday challenges such as long commutes, rigid schedules, geographic immobility, and gaps in on-site childcare that fall most heavily on women, especially caregivers. Traditionally, these logistical difficulties have held back women's advancement into leadership pathways, not because of a deficiency in competence, but because of systemic exclusion from essential opportunities that enable visibility, networking, and informal sponsorship. The findings suggest that while digital environments might

sustain recognition and visibility through formal processes, they do not inherently confront the underlying cultural biases that shape perceptions of leadership. Negative views about women's leadership skills are nevertheless common, even when it is evident that they are capable and make a valuable contribution. This indicates that structural flexibility alone is insufficient to challenge gendered assumptions regarding authority and decision-making. Emerging research supports this view, showing that gender bias is not eliminated by the adoption of new organizational models but rather evolves to fit within them (Tsai, 2024).

In remote work settings, the absence of physical presence may increase doubts about leadership readiness, as informal signals and relational dynamics become harder to convey. Unless organizations proactively redesign evaluation criteria and leadership development pathways to account for these shifts, remote work may reproduce the glass ceiling in subtler, digitally mediated forms.

5.5 Implications for theory and practice

- **Theoretical contribution:** The study extends social role theory into the digital workplace context, showing that recognition mediates the relationship between stereotypes and career outcomes. While competence-related biases appear less influential, persistent doubts about women's leadership capabilities suggest that the glass ceiling remains intact, albeit in a more subtle and digitally mediated form. These findings underscore the need to reframe equity interventions to address not only structural access but also perceptual barriers that continue to shape advancement in remote work environments.
- **Practical implications:** Organizations must implement transparent recognition systems, integrate bias-sensitive promotion processes, and ensure that leadership evaluation criteria are inclusive in remote settings.
- **Policy relevance:** Gender-inclusive remote work policies should embed structured mentoring and formalized feedback mechanisms to compensate for the loss of informal career-building opportunities.

6 Conclusion

This study examined how gender stereotypes shape women's career progression in the UK technology sector under remote work conditions, using survey data from 339 professionals. The results provide three key insights:

The Central Role of Recognition in Career Advancement: Equal recognition strongly influenced both promotion chances and how visible women were to management, showing its key role in supporting their advancement in digital workplaces.

Persistent Leadership Biases in Remote Contexts: Negative perceptions of women's leadership capabilities remain a barrier to promotion, even when visibility is achieved.

Competence Stereotypes and Promotion Outcomes (A Weak Link): Contrary to expectation, doubts about technical competence were not significantly associated with promotion or visibility, suggesting that barriers now lie more in leadership evaluations than technical assessments.

Taken together, these findings signify a paradox within remote work settings, where structural recognition is possible, but cultural biases remain a barrier to women's career growth.

Limitations and Future Research:
This study has some limitations, including its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported perceptions, and focus on the UK tech industry. Future research should use longitudinal designs, compare different sectors and countries, and apply mixed methods to better understand how initiatives like bias training, structured mentoring, and recognition systems influence women's career paths in digital work settings.

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