



Digital Control and Employee Thriving: Work Alienation and Inclusive Leadership in Contemporary Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

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Digital technologies are reshaping not only the tasks employees perform, but also the way authority, relationships, and everyday work are experienced. This paper brings together two increasingly visible features of contemporary organizations - algorithmic control and workplace social isolation - to explain differences in employee thriving. Drawing on labor process theory, the sociology of alienation, conservation of resources logic, and the socially embedded model of thriving, it treats work alienation as the mechanism through which intensified digital control and weakened social connection can erode vitality and learning. Inclusive leadership is examined as a relational resource that may soften this effect. The model indicates that algorithmic control and workplace social isolation are associated with greater work alienation, while alienation is linked with lower thriving. The practical implication is straightforward: efficiency gains from digital systems are unlikely to be sustainable unless employees retain discretion, meaningful social ties, and access to inclusive leaders.

1.0 Introduction

Modern digital technologies are now embedded into the daily operations of numerous companies. Computerized systems arrange shift work, assign tasks, measure performance, recommend priorities, assess results, and occasionally play a role in rewarding, punishing, or maintaining access to work. All of this is commonly called algorithmic management. However, its impact extends beyond technology per se and is capable of redefining the locus of managerial power, making employees' behavior more visible, accelerating performance evaluation, and altering the level of discretion workers exercise when performing their jobs. This is why the growing body of literature views algorithmic management as an important aspect of the transformation of employment relations and not just an HR instrument (Parent-Rochelleau et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025; Schmid & Wiesche, 2026).

While there has been an increase in digital control, there have also been increased levels of social fragmentation in terms of work. Working remotely or hybridly, individualized workflows, asynchronous communication, dispersed teamwork, and mediated work can limit the frequency and effectiveness of interactions within the workforce. Social isolation is not equivalent to working alone. A worker could be attending meetings and staying connected at all times through technology but may experience a lack of companionship, recognition, informal support, and interaction. There has been a significant rise in the interest of workplace isolation and loneliness since it could influence one's well-being, attitude, and behavior despite maintaining formal communication channels (D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023; Artar & Erdil, 2024; Wright, 2025).

The above two aspects are usually studied in different lines of inquiry. Algorithmic management is investigated from the angles of control, autonomy, transparency, fairness, and shifting roles of human managers. Workplace isolation, in turn, is studied in connection with belonging, loneliness, social support, and interpersonal relations. In real life, workers could experience both phenomena simultaneously. Someone could be very much watched through some technological means while feeling detached from coworkers and managers. This leads to an interesting paradox of the workplace: people could become more visible for the organization through being data while being less connected socially to the organization.

Employee thriving can be considered an appropriate outcome measure for addressing this dilemma, as it encompasses a positive, developmental aspect of work experience. Thriving is defined as the combination of vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Porath et al., 2012). Individuals are said to thrive at work if they have experienced vitality and learning as their workplace experience. Vitality and learning imply that work energizes one and that individuals feel that they are gaining new knowledge and skills from work. Thus, thriving is more than not experiencing burnout or dissatisfaction at work. It focuses on whether work experiences allow individuals to develop or not.

However, inclusive leadership offers another valuable boundary condition to this proposition. While digital systems might help in standardizing control, it is leaders who determine how the employees perceive the organizational processes and how heard they are by their managers. Inclusive leaders are approachable, responsive to employees' opinions, sensitive to

differences, and willing to engage individuals in decision-making processes related to their work. Such behaviors can increase employees' sense of belonging and offer relational resources. Recent research has found that inclusive leadership positively impacts employees' well-being and thriving; however, the effects of inclusive leadership depend on the context and on the person (Liu, Fang, & He, 2025; Rosari et al., 2025). Some research also demonstrates that inclusive leadership could be linked with reactions to social disconnectedness at the workplace (Jadon et al., 2026). Thus, such leadership could be tested in relation to whether supportive leadership mitigates the impact of alienation.

Within this context, the paper explores how algorithmic management and work place social isolation affect thriving of workers through work alienation and if inclusive leadership reduces the negative relationship between alienation and thriving. The paper purposefully combines perspectives from both management and sociology. Management scholars bring in their research regarding algorithmic management, leadership, work design, and thriving while sociologists bring in the concepts of alienation, control, and social connectedness. The combination of these perspectives is important since the digital workplace is not only an organizational form but also a social form and human reality.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Algorithmic control as a new form of managerial coordination

Algorithmic management entails the use of data systems to engage in or facilitate certain aspects of managerial processes such as supervision, goal setting, scheduling, performance management, and other related aspects. Parent-Rochelleau et al. (2024) created the Algorithmic Management Questionnaire in order to examine how these processes are viewed by employees in various areas of management. This concept is valuable because it directs focus not only on the existence of the algorithms but also on how this algorithmic management process is actually perceived by the employees. For the purposes of this paper, algorithmic control means how far the digital tools are capable of directing, supervising, standardizing, or evaluating work processes so that employees feel their discretion restricted.

Theories on labor processes become particularly relevant when it comes to explaining why this kind of control becomes important. For a long time, companies have tried to find ways to transform potential into predictability, while digital technologies do this job by transforming behavior into information and making comparisons possible at once. As noted by Kellogg et al. (2020), algorithms are the contested terrain of control because people can respond in different ways to digital technologies – comply with them, reinterpret them, resist them or even manipulate them. Wood (2024) also states that algorithmic management should be considered an organizational and political problem rather than a technical one. In this sense, the main issue is not automation but power over knowledge and discretion.

Algorithmic management and psychosocial impacts have been empirically associated as well. Thus, according to Mbare et al. (2024), employees in platform work experience algorithmic management as a psychosocial risk where control is intensive while support is lacking. In turn, Valtonen et al. (2025) indicate that the influence of AI on workers depends significantly on the

manner in which technology is implemented and experienced. The research on both conventional firms and gig economy implies that autonomy, precariousness, human manager involvement, and employee relations can be considered the key mediating mechanisms in the relationship between algorithmic management and employee well-being (Zha et al., 2026; Schmid & Wiesche, 2026). Summarizing the above findings, it is necessary to stress that the control of employees by algorithm becomes particularly alienating where the latter feels managed but not supported by a systems.

2.2 Workplace social isolation in digitally mediated work

Workplace social isolation pertains to the feeling of lack of social connection, interaction or integration at work. While there is an overlap between social isolation and loneliness at work, they are not synonymous terms since isolation is caused by structural distance, less informal contacts or access to relationships at work, while loneliness refers to the discomfort experienced as a result of discrepancy between desirable and existing relationships. Perceived social isolation is emphasized here, which describes employees' feeling of detachment from their coworkers or organizational life, regardless of whether they work remotely, in hybrid mode, or on-site.

Social isolation is important from a sociological perspective since working is more than exchange of efforts for wages; rather, it is a social relation. Employees get information, acknowledgment, emotional support, social identification, social comparison and sense of belonging to a broader group from their coworkers. When these resources diminish, work can be perceived as impersonal and disconnected. Longitudinal findings of Lagios et al. (2023) are especially relevant in this context: professional isolation was found to lead to increased work alienation, which correlated with poor job attitudes. Therefore, social isolation is not only uncomfortable.

2.3 Work alienation as the central mediating mechanism

Work alienation refers to the situation where employees feel detached from what they do psychologically and cannot relate their work to self-experience. While the concept has rich sociological antecedents, the organizational research field tends to conceptualize it as detachment, meaninglessness, low identification, and poor personal relationship with daily work activities. The measurement of Nair & Vohra (2009)'s eight-item scale is one of the factors that established this construct within management literature. More recently, Liu, Carminati, and Wilderom (2025) revived work alienation as an object of interest due to the conceptualization of tensions of work alienation between agency and constraint, attachment and detachment, and objective and subjective nature of work.

There is evidence for such mediating effects of work alienation. Specifically, according to Lagios et al. (2023), professional isolation and low meaningfulness were the factors that led to work alienation in a period of significant disturbance of work. Moreover, in another case, Amarat et al. (2019) found that work alienation mediated the effect of workplace loneliness on performance of nurses. According to Liu et al. (2025), the dynamics and relational nature of work alienation are crucial to understand the process and make it applicable to digital coordination of works.

2.4 Employee thriving as a developmental work outcome

Work thriving is a psychological condition involving the coexistence of vitality and learning. Vitality encompasses energy and aliveness, whereas learning refers to gaining in knowledge, competence, and capability (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Porath et al., 2012). Both aspects are important. Workers can learn without being energetic, or be energetic without growing. But work thriving implies the existence of both. Thus, this condition becomes relevant in the modern labor market by questioning whether workers can maintain energy while continuously growing in their jobs.

Work thriving in the socially embedded approach to this concept implies that this condition is not a personal trait but rather a product of a workplace context. This means that such factors as agentic actions, knowledge exchange, and positive relationships provide favorable conditions for vitality and learning. Hence, organizational practices can facilitate these conditions or hinder them. The recent research on leadership supports this idea. In particular, Rosari et al. (2025) note the positive connection between inclusive leadership, work thriving, and job satisfaction. Also, Liu, Fang, and He (2025) define thriving at work as one of the main mechanisms through which inclusive leadership influences worker well-being.

2.5 Inclusive leadership as a relational boundary condition

Inclusive leadership can normally be seen in terms of open-mindedness, accessibility, availability, and readiness to appreciate employee contributions. In particular, the studies by Carmeli et al. (2010) revealed that inclusive leadership contributes to the involvement of employees thanks to psychological safety and the following investigations added belonging, well-being, and personal development to this construct. This concept of inclusive leadership seems especially significant in relation to digitally mediated workplaces, since technology may result in distancing between the rules and employees, so that inclusive leadership becomes an opportunity to humanize such processes.

In the framework of the current study, it is assumed that inclusive leadership will fulfill the role of the buffer. Supportive supervision does not make it possible to eliminate all sources of structural alienation and, at the same time, it is not sufficient to reverse the effects of controlling algorithm or remote work arrangements. However, what inclusive leadership does make possible is changing the way how alienation is transmitted to employees' functioning. Even the alienated employees may have opportunities for their voice, learning, and relational engagement, provided that leaders remain accessible and ready to listen.

2.6 Integrating labor process theory, COR logic, and the socially embedded model of thriving

This model uses three perspectives that complement each other, rather than oppose one another. The theory of labor process is used to provide a reason for the emergence of a contested form of management – algorithmic control, which involves focus on surveillance, standardization, discretion, and distribution of control over productivity. Then, the sociological concept of alienation provides insights into the experience that people go through when they feel low levels of autonomy, meaning, or detachment from the social sphere of work.

The logic of conservation of resources provides a resource-based perspective on isolation in the workplace and inclusive leadership. Connections, acknowledgment, support, and

responsiveness of leaders are the resources that help cope with demands. Isolation takes away these resources from people, while inclusive leadership restores them by conserving energy and coping resources. Finally, the socially embedded model of thriving makes up the last part of the argument by providing insights into how resources and opportunities for agency affect vitality and learning experiences.

2.7 Hypotheses Development

Algorithmic control can also reduce the sense of agency in employees concerning the work they do. Since digital tools constantly allocate, sort, monitor, and evaluate tasks, workers can feel that assessment and discretion have left their hands. However, it does not indicate that automation is necessarily alienating; the possibility exists only if the use of algorithms is perceived as controlling. Labor process theories imply that control can distance workers from decisions concerning pace, approach, and assessment of their work. Recent studies highlight autonomy and human management involvement as key issues for workers in an algorithmic environment (Kellogg et al., 2020; Zha et al., 2026). Based on this, one should expect that high levels of algorithmic control are related to high work alienation.

H1: Algorithmic control is positively associated with work alienation.

Social isolation in the workplace may undermine the social relationships upon which work finds significance. Social interaction provides workers with an opportunity to understand how they contribute to other people's lives, get recognized, share their implicit knowledge, and identify themselves within the collective. Without these social interactions, the sense of alienation will not only be directed at coworkers but also at one's work. Research suggests that professional isolation leads to work alienation (Lagios et al., 2023) and the same is true regarding work loneliness (Amarat et al., 2019; Wright, 2025).

H2: Workplace social isolation is positively associated with work alienation.

Control through algorithms could also directly be costly to thriving. Algorithmic systems that rely on monitoring and quantification could place high demands, limit the space for experimenting, and value compliance more than exploration. This situation could rob individuals of vitality and reduce the chances for learning beyond what the system recognizes. There have been concerns about algorithmic management and well-being, which indicate the same psychological and social dangers when digital control combines with low autonomy or organizational weakness (Mbare et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2026).

H3: Algorithmic control is negatively associated with employee thriving.

Social isolation is likely to display a similar trend. Relational energy supports vitality, while learning happens through observation, interaction, and exchange of information. When the employees experience social isolation, it becomes difficult for them to gain access to these resources. The authors, D'Oliveira and Persico (2023), have shown negative effects on well-being due to workplace isolation; and according to the socially embedded theory of thriving, weak social ties limit the relational resources that support vitality and learning.

H4: Workplace social isolation is negatively associated with employee thriving.

The concepts of work alienation and thriving reflect opposite orientations towards work.

The former is related to the psychological detachment from one's work and the perception of it as meaningless and lacking opportunities for self-expression, while the latter implies vitality and learning as well as active development. The alienated worker can conserve energy instead of expending it on his job and perceive learning demands as something forced and not developmental.

H5: Work alienation is negatively associated with employee thriving.

The mediation argument comes quite naturally from the above connections. Algorithmic control can promote alienation through decreased discretion and diminishing of the employees' psychological attachment to the process of work; such alienation, in its turn, might diminish their vitality and capacity for learning. Social isolation might produce the same result through diminishing the sense of belonging and relational significance. The importance of this mediation approach is that it distinguishes between the challenging condition at work and how this condition is felt and perceived internally. Two people experiencing similar digital technologies or dispersed work environment conditions might thrive in different ways due to their different attachments to the work process.

H6a: Work alienation mediates the negative relationship between algorithmic control and employee thriving.

H6b: Work alienation mediates the negative relationship between workplace social isolation and employee thriving.

It is argued that inclusive leadership should facilitate thriving since accessible leaders offer informational, relational, and developmental resources. They encourage employees to contribute, appreciate differences, and provide real chances for engagement. Research done recently shows the link between inclusive leadership and thriving (Rosari et al., 2025; Liu, Fang, & He, 2025).

H7: Inclusive leadership is positively associated with employee thriving.

Relational resources form the essence of the moderation perspective. Alienation is more detrimental where there are fewer resources to counteract it. Inclusive leadership will help reclaim some of the lost voice, recognition, and learning even under circumstances of alienation at work. Leadership does not take away the alienating state itself, but it will help mitigate how draining and limiting of development it is. Such a buffering effect is in line with the conservation of resources theory, and research showing that inclusive leadership influences the way employees react to relational stress at work (Jadon et al., 2026).

H8: Inclusive leadership moderates the relationship between work alienation and employee thriving such that the negative relationship is weaker when inclusive leadership is high.

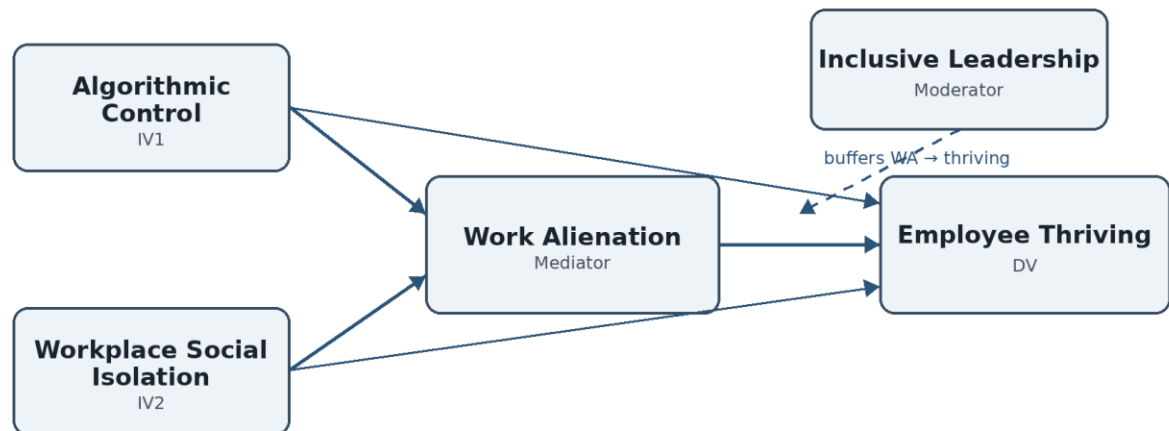


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research design and empirical context

The research design will employ quantitative methodology with a three-wave time-lagged survey. Separation of measures over time is essential since the proposed model has both process mechanisms and moderators, and use of one survey would have raised the issue of common method variance. This study will concentrate on service companies which are digitized in Pakistan including information technology and software companies, banks and financial service providers, telecommunication, ecommerce, business process outsourcing, and digitized professional service organizations. This population is suitable for this model since employees interact with digital performance systems as well as being a part of hybrid and distributed technology teams.

4.2 Population, sampling, and sample size

The population for the study comprises full-time workers with at least six months of organizational tenure whose jobs have some digital component either in allocation, control, or communication. Jobs which are predominantly manual in nature with minimal exposure to digital allocation, control, or communication will be excluded. Purposive sampling from organizations using access-based stratified quotas could be used to ensure that there is no dominance of one industry within the sample.

PLS-SEM would be appropriate for the proposed model because there are multiple predictors, mediation effect, interaction, and a predicted variable. Justification of sample size should consider power analysis and model size rather than solely relying on the 10x rule. Given the size of the model considered here, a sample of more than 350 participants would usually be sufficient for moderate standardized effects

3.3 Measurement of constructs

All constructs will be measured using previously validated multiple-item scales with a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Algorithmic control defined using select control-related items from the Algorithmic Management Scale designed by Parent-

Rocheleau et al. (2024), particularly those related to algorithmic monitoring, goal-setting, performance management, and automated direction.

Isolation at work can be operationalized with the help of questions from the literature on workplace isolation and loneliness, for instance Wright et al. (2006), and further adaptations such as D'Oliveira and Persico (2023). These items must measure limited companionship, less informal interaction, and lack of connection with co-workers but not necessarily feelings of loneliness.

The alienation at work variable is measured using the eight items scale constructed by Nair and Vohra (2009). The construct is formulated in a reflective manner. The inclusive leadership is measured using the well-established scale based on Carmeli et al. (2010), stressing leader openness, approachability, availability, and receptivity to the employee feedback. The thriving employees variable is measured by means of the ten items scale developed by Porath et al. (2012).

3.4 Data analysis strategy

Analysis is carried out in SmartPLS 4. Screening should cover missing values, careless responding, straight-lining, and weird distributions. Next comes the assessment of the measurement model based on loading, Cronbach's alpha, ρ_A , composite reliability, and average variance extracted. High values of loading (.70 or above) are preferred; however, theoretically significant constructs with lower loadings (.60 - .70) may still be used provided that reliability and AVE are not compromised. Discriminant validity is evaluated based on the heterotrait-monotrait ratio, with .85 serving as the benchmark for constructs conceptually connected.

The structural-model assessment should cover collinearity diagnostics, standardized path coefficients, bootstrapped confidence intervals, R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 , and PLSpredict when applicable. Mediation is assessed based on bootstrapped specific indirect effects instead of simply testing the significance of the paths' components. Moderation is checked with an interaction of Work Alienation x Inclusive Leadership created via two-stage modeling. Since the alienation-thriving path is negative, positive interaction value means that inclusive leadership reduces the harm.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Sample profile and preliminary screening

In this context, the analysis considers 432 matched responses in each of the three survey waves. The respondents are represented in IT/Software (28%), Banking & Financial Services (24%), Telecommunications (17%), E-Commerce & Digital Services (16%) and Business Process & Professional Services (15%). Nearly 57% of respondents are males and 43% females. The mean age is 31.8 years (SD = 6.7) and mean organizational tenure is 4.6 years (SD = 3.4). About 62% of respondents engage in hybrid work arrangements, 23% work on-site digitally mediated and 15% work in remote mode.

4.2 Measurement model

The measurement model satisfies the standards for indicators' reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. Standardized loadings are between .74 and .91. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are higher than .80 for all constructs, whereas AVE is greater than .50. Therefore, the proposed reflective measures would be included in the research. The HTMTs vary between .29 and .78, where the maximum value is found between the concepts of work

alienation and workplace social isolation and does not cross the threshold of .85. The bootstrap confidence intervals for HTMT are less than 1.00.

Table 4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Items	Loading range	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Algorithmic Control	6	.76-.89	.892	.920	.69
Workplace Social Isolation	6	.78-.90	.904	.928	.68
Work Alienation	8	.74-.88	.911	.929	.62
Inclusive Leadership	6	.79-.91	.906	.928	.68
Employee Thriving	10	.74-.89	.921	.935	.59

4.3 Structural model and direct effects

The structural model account for 52.7% of the variation in work alienation and 66.8% of the variation in thriving among employees. The Stone-Geisser Q^2 values of .413 and .501 have been found for work alienation and thriving, respectively. Thus, both measures demonstrate predictive relevance. Standardized root mean square residual is equal to .061. All VIF values of the predictors are less than 3.0. Overall, the diagnostics do not point at potential structural collinearity problem which may distort the paths.

Algorithmic control is positively associated with work alienation ($\beta = .329$, $t = 6.15$, $p < .001$), thus, H1 is supported. Higher workplace social isolation is associated with work alienation more strongly ($\beta = .412$, $t = 7.94$, $p < .001$). The pattern is consistent with the idea that both intensive control and relationship disruption are possible to increase alienation at work of employees.

Algorithmic control has been found to be negatively associated with thriving ($\beta = -.148$, $t = 3.01$, $p = .003$), thus, H3 is supported. The relationship between workplace social isolation and thriving is also negative ($\beta = -.119$, $t = 2.42$, $p = .016$). Work alienation is strongly negatively associated with thriving ($\beta = -.347$, $t = 6.82$, $p < .001$). The relationship confirms H5.

Table 4.2. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	Decision
H1	AC $\rightarrow$ WA	.329	6.15	<.001	Supported
H2	WSI $\rightarrow$ WA	.412	7.94	<.001	Supported
H3	AC $\rightarrow$ ET	-.148	3.01	.003	Supported
H4	WSI $\rightarrow$ ET	-.119	2.42	.016	Supported
H5	WA $\rightarrow$ ET	-.347	6.82	<.001	Supported
H7	IL $\rightarrow$ ET	.271	5.43	<.001	Supported

H8	WA × IL → ET	.126	2.87	.004	Supported
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4.4 Mediation analysis

Specific indirect effects bootstrapped are the mediator analysis methods utilized in this study. The results indicate a significant and negative effect of algorithmic control on thriving through work alienation ($\beta = -.114$, 95% CI [-.157, -.078]), which confirms H6a. In the presence of work alienation variable, the direct AC to ET relationship still has significance; therefore, the pattern indicates partial mediation.

The work alienation variable also has a significant indirect effect on thriving from workplace social isolation ($\beta = -.143$, 95% CI [-.191, -.101]), hence confirming H6b. While the direct relationship between WSI and ET variables is still significant, it is much lower compared to the indirect effect. The implication is that social isolation influences thriving through work alienation.

Table 4.3. Specific Indirect Effects

s	Hypothesis	Indirect path	β	95% CI	Mediation	Decision
H6a	AC → WA → ET	.114	-	[-.157, -.078]	Partial d	Supported
H6b	WSI → WA → ET	.143	-	[-.191, -.101]	Partial d	Supported

4.5 Moderation and simple-slope analysis

For the interaction between Work Alienation x Inclusive Leadership, the sign is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .126$, $t = 2.87$, $p = .004$), thereby validating H8. As the effect of work alienation on thriving is negative, the interaction implies that it serves a buffer effect. That is, inclusive leadership will weaken the negative relation, instead of reversing it. From a practical perspective, supportive leadership will reduce the amount of translation of alienation into low vitality and learning.

Simple slopes help us understand how the interaction works. For the case of low inclusive leadership ($M - 1$ SD), the relationship between work alienation and thriving is highly negative ($\beta = -.456$, $p < .001$). For the case of inclusive leadership at its mean level, the slope is $\beta = -.347$ ($p < .001$). With high inclusive leadership ($M + 1$ SD), the relationship becomes negative but less steep ($\beta = -.238$, $p < .001$).

Table 4.4 Conditional Effect of Work Alienation on Thriving

Inclusive leadership level		β	Conditional	t	p	Interpretation	
SD)	Low (M - 1		-.456	7.31	<.001	Strong	negative
	Mean		-.347	6.82	<.001	Moderate	negative

High (M + 1 SD)	-.238	4.18	<.001	Weaker effect	negative
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5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This research brings together two elements of modern work that have been traditionally analyzed independently – control and social disconnect. Alienation at work is the core element of the framework and explains the paradox of how a technically efficient system can make people tired and less willing to learn. Algorithmic control and social isolation in the workplace increase alienation, alienation increases with thriving becoming weaker, and inclusive leadership breaks this alienation-thriving connection.

Work alienation is the theoretical crux of the framework. In management literature, engagement, satisfaction, commitment, burnout, and turnover intention have been discussed more frequently than work alienation. However, these concepts are all significant, but work alienation asks a more essential question of whether the worker experiences their work as integrated into themselves, other people, and something that matters. As Liu et al. (2025) suggest, work alienation continues to be relevant since current employees can simultaneously feel autonomous and controlled, connected and detached, and have opportunities and also estrangement from the work process. Digitalization makes this tension worse since an employee will have flexibility in their working place while being strictly controlled by performance metrics, maintain constant digital communications and yet feel socially detached, and master new technologies and at the same time perceive that the work has become unimportant.

The moderation effect brings a more pragmatic component to the discussion. First, inclusive leadership cannot eliminate structural causes of alienation, and leadership development is not a replacement for changing destructive organizational structures. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the interaction between the two variables shows that leaders have the power to shape the extent of the impact of alienation on thriving. An approachable leader will be able to make explanations of digital choices, hear out cases when the rules do not apply to certain situations, defend employees, encourage participation, and maintain social connections.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Firstly, the research examines the relationship between digital management and isolation of workers in the same framework. Algorithmic management is typically considered a technical or managerial matter, while the phenomenon of isolation is generally thought to be related to remote working or a relational matter. In reality, both of these matters are two dimensions of the same shift that takes place. On one hand, it pertains to the degree of control over work, and on the other, it pertains to the extent of the worker's social integration.

Secondly, work alienation becomes a tool of explanation as opposed to simply being another negative attitude. It illustrates the way in which control and deprivation of relationships can be transformed into low levels of thriving. Thus, there becomes a clear connection between classical sociology and modern organizational behavior, proving the analytical relevance of concepts despite changes in the nature of control.

Thirdly, the model enriches the socially embedded perspective on thriving by suggesting that estrangement can be an impediment to vitality and learning. In addition to resources in general,

employees require something else – they must perceive work as something personal, relational, and meaningful. Alienation might, hence, become a crucial negative force that should be further developed in most existing models of thriving.

Finally, the current model highlights a concrete role of inclusive leadership in digitally-mediated work. Rather than considering it as a direct predictor of desirable outcomes, inclusive leadership becomes a boundary condition that can shield employees from the effects of alienation. The above interpretation is consistent with the latest findings that connect inclusive leadership with thriving, well-being, and loneliness management (Rosari et al., 2025; Liu, Fang, & He, 2025; Jadon et al., 2026). It is also consistent with a wider notion that human managers are still relevant despite the growing importance of algorithms in managing some aspects of work.

5.2 Practical implications

The first is algorithmic governance. It's important to discern whether the technology assists or controls. Technology that removes mundane tasks or gives useful information can help employees while continuous scoring, pushing, and limiting individuals for no apparent reason can create a completely different experience. Prior to implementing any algorithmic tools, the manager must clarify whose decisions these will be, whose decisions will go to the algorithm, how the employees can contest the decision made, and whether the logic of the algorithm itself is transparent.

Socialization is also something that needs to be addressed as a work design issue and not an optional element of culture. Hybrid and remote work strategies cannot assume that scheduled virtual interactions alone are sufficient. Workers need spontaneous exchanges, peer learning, mentoring, and regular social interactions. Interdependence in tasks should create real grounds for collaboration rather than pushing people into forced socialization. Managers should also take into account roles or people who are structurally disconnected from information, recognition, or other interactions.

Inclusion needs to be built into inclusive leadership, which will be a critical capability in the era of digital transformations. Leaders need to listen to workers, provide explanations about their decisions, include workers in those decisions where it is possible, and respond to exceptions to standardized digital procedures using their discretion. They should encourage worker feedback on algorithmic systems and show that this feedback was used to change such systems. In this environment, inclusion is more than just demographic diversity.

5.3 Limitations and future research

However, there are some disadvantages of this empirical design. Although the three-wave survey provides some temporal separation, it cannot confirm the causality by itself. Those employees who find it difficult to flourish can also perceive higher control and isolation. Future studies should make causal inference stronger with the help of longitudinal panel models, field experiments, and natural experiments concerning the implementation of the new algorithms.

Inclusive leadership is tested as a moderator of the alienation-thriving association in this study, yet it is not the only boundary condition that might affect this relationship. There can be other boundary conditions like coworker support, union instrumentality, procedural justice,

climate of voice, AI literacy, job autonomy, psychological safety, and perceived organizational support. The comparative models would clarify whether the leadership helps employees with flourishing primarily via relational support or through designing systems and resources.

5.4. Conclusion

Digital transformation involves rearranging work in terms of both forms of control and connections. It may entail the reinforcement of data-driven control mechanisms on one hand, and on the other hand, weaken social connections at work. The present paper suggests that the concept of work alienation is useful for understanding the effects of these changes. Algorithmic control and social disconnection are likely to lead to increased alienation, whereas alienation is likely to undermine the development of employee thriving, which requires vitality and learning.

Inclusive leadership provides an important, yet insufficient protective mechanism against the negative consequences of digital transformation. While it cannot substitute responsible and equitable work design and algorithmic governance, it can preserve important resources such as voice, recognition, and relationships that protect from alienation. The current model integrates insights from management and the sociology of work and extends the assessment of digital transformation beyond mere efficiency. Digital transformation should not be evaluated merely in terms of the extent to which it makes people measurable and productive at work, but also connected and able to learn and develop through their work.

Contribution

Muhammad Naeem Anjum: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Hafiz Ahmed Ullah: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Arroj Imtiaz: Methodology and Revision

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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