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Received: 27 April 2021 | Revised: 16 December 2021 | Accepted: 3 May 2022

DOI: 10.1111/1748-8583.12452

Human Resource Management Journal WILEY

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing the concept of leaveism: From presenteeism/absence to an emergent and expanding domain of employment?

James Richards[1] | Vaughan Ellis[2] | Jesus Canduela[1] | Toma Pustelnikovaite[3] | Siddhartha Saxena[4]

[1]Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK

[2]Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK

[3]Abertay University, Dundee, UK

[4]Ahmedabad University, Ahmedabad, India

Correspondence
James Richards, Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-watt University, Edinburgh EH14 4AS, UK.
Email: j.richards@hw.ac.uk

Abstract

The changing nature of employment has led to increased awareness of leaveism, a practice involving employees using allocated time off when unwell, taking work home, and picking up work when on annual leave. However, there are theoretical, methodological, and policy/practice-related weaknesses, apparent in current understandings. The main article aim is to develop, theoretically, the emergent notion of leaveism, drawing on concepts related to work intensification (WI) and ideal worker norms (IWNs), concepts underpinned by reference to information communication technologies (ICTs), then exploring such ideas via an electronic questionnaire (n = 959), aimed at UK-based employees performing leaveism. The main argument is leaveism is more than a lacuna between presenteeism and sickness absence; it is an unsustainable employer-driven social phenomenon sitting at the intersection of WI, IWNs and ICTs. The findings have policy/practice implications for human resource management (HRM) professionals, trade unions and governments. Recommendations for future research including exploring leaveism in an international context, and in a Covid-19 pandemic-defined era.

Abbreviations: HRM, Human resource management; ICTs, Information communication technologies; IWN, Ideal worker norms; WI, Work intensification.

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KEYWORDS
conflict, ideal worker, information communication technologies, job satisfaction, leaveism, sustainable HRM, well-being, work intensification

Practitioner notes

What is currently known?

- Leaveism is largely a managerial and professional employee-led practice, representing a research and practitioner gap between presenteeism and sickness absence.
- There are three types of leaveism: employees using allocated time off when unwell, taking work home, and picking up work when on annual leave.
- Leaveism is a response to job insecurity, lowered career opportunities, and strict sickness absence policies, and associated with poor employee well-being, job dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction with wider terms and conditions of employment.
- The majority of HRM professionals are aware of leaveism, but nearly half have taken no action regarding such practice.

What this paper adds?

- The theoretical basis of leaveism has shifted from individual action and methodological individualism towards a reflection of core features of contemporary employment, including work intensification (WI), ideal worker norms (IWNs), increased use of information communication technologies (ICTs), and debates surrounding sustainable HRM.
- A new theoretical model is presented, a model incorporating extant understandings of leaveism.
- Methodological contributions are made in establishing practice based on researching hard to access phenomenon, as well as representing the first known study to incorporate qualitative/lived experience approaches to leaveism.

The implications for practitioners

- Tackling leaveism broadly requires HRM professionals to adopt the principles of sustainable HRM more meaningfully and consistently, implementing checks and balances to prevent unsustainable forms of HRM, such as performance targets and attendance expectations, undermining such initiatives.
- HRM professionals can also tackle leaveism by introducing a range of new policies and practices, specifically in terms of guiding line managers and employees on what can be done to avoid or minimise anxiety-provoking excessive leaveism, for example, a ban on emails sent or replied to outwith regular working hours.
- Trade unions should continue to campaign around the "right to disconnect", as the stemming of employee use of ICTs is likely to reduce the incidence of and harm caused by leaveism.
- National and devolved governments need to legislate on leaveism, but if not, adapt good and fair work agendas to better regulate practices that harm all stakeholders to employment.

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I also get contacted on leave for "urgent" issues – which are far from urgent – and there is an expectation that I /others will work outside of work hours, on sick leave, annual leave, etc.

I get up at 6 am to deal with email before my child wakes, and work through all breaks, on my commute, and into the evening once my child is in bed. I never leave my work phone off… The work is relentless, and no one makes concessions for me being part time.

Even when on holidays I feel I have to check emails and respond. This has caused a constant low-level anxiety and fed into and exacerbated existing issues with depression.

(Quotes depicting the lived experience of leaveism).

1 | INTRODUCTION

The changing nature of contemporary employment has led to new challenges for HRM professionals, with more expected in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. One challenge identified pre-Covid is "leaveism". Despite gaining traction in the mainstream and practitioner press (e.g. Personnel Today, 2020; Stokel-Walker, 2019), leaveism commands limited research, although such research shares common theoretical underpinnings. Leaveism is currently commonly understood as three distinct, yet interlinked practices: Type 1, employees utilising allocated time off such as annual leave entitlements when actually unwell; Type 2, employees taking work home that cannot be completed in normal working hours; and, Type 3, employees working while on leave or holiday to catch up (Hesketh et al., 2014, pp. 207–208).

What is also currently known about leaveism follows. Key theorists (e.g. Hesketh et al., 2014) portray leaveism as an employee-led practice, representing a research and practitioner gap between presenteeism and sickness absence (Hesketh & Cooper, 2014). The majority of HRM professionals have 'observed' leaveism (70%), recognising it is an employee well-being problem, yet 47% report taking no action to manage such practice (CIPD, 2021). Leaveism is closely associated with managerial and professional employees (Hesketh et al., 2015; Houdmont, Elliott-Davis & Donnelly, 2018), and found to lower job satisfaction because of an association with job insecurity, lowered career opportunities, and ever-stricter sickness absence policies (Gerich, 2015). However, as Miller (2016) finds, more research is required to understand what can be done to reverse the effects of leaveism.

Yet more can be drawn implicitly from extant research plus the example quotes above. Firstly, current theoretical understandings give primacy to individual action, or methodological individualism (Jenkins, 1999), ignoring the distinct possibility leaveism is driven by a range of social phenomena. Such social phenomena include work intensification (WI), or employers expecting more effort and hours worked (Green, 2001). Further, leaveism appears a contemporary incarnation of ideal worker norms (IWNs), traditionally associated with consensual situations where typically managerial and professional employees display commitment and availability (Reid, 2015). Leaveism also appears driven by information communication technologies (ICTs), technologies widely adopted by contemporary organisations as a key means to drive productivity (e.g. Borle et al., 2021; Chesley, 2014). Secondly, to research leaveism is to overcome the reality of such acts occurring outwith the gaze of researchers and HRM professionals. Indeed, leaveism is practiced at what McMillan et al. (2011) refer to as the work-life-interface, non-traditional workspaces where personal life and employment invariably intersect. Thirdly, leaveism appears harmful to employee

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well-being and job satisfaction, situations indicating important gaps in HRM policy/practice. In other words, leaveism appears unsustainable, deviating from emerging sustainable HRM practices, practices aimed at cultivating employer long-term commitment to the care of employees (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2018).

As such, leaveism appears more than a lacuna between presenteeism and sickness absence, and therefore more research is required to explore such a proposition. The article ahead proposes leaveism as an emergent and expanding employer-driven social phenomenon, performed largely by employees at the work-life interface, sitting at the intersection of contemporary work-related issues based on WI, IWNs and ICTs. Such views are summarised in Figure 1 (below) and discussed further in all subsequent sections of the article. A further aim is to explore how sustainable leaveism is, given such practice not only involves working long hours, but such hours also occur in a range of spaces often conflicting with non-work life. Four questions guide the exploratory research, asking the extent leaveism is: 1) an emergent form of WI, 2) driven by IWNs, 3) dependent on ICTs, 4) a sustainable practice? Wider aims include making theoretical and methodological contributions, as well as recommendations for policy/practice regarding leaveism.

The aims are to be achieved first of all by building a prototype conceptual model of leaveism, developed out of notions of WI, IWNs and ICTs. Second, the exploratory methodology is described and discussed. Third, data drawn from an electronic questionnaire based on leaveism is analysed and discussed. A final section reflects on the research questions, contributions, research limitations and a future research agenda.

2 | DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT OF LEAVEISM

Leaveism is currently portrayed as a theoretical and practitioner gap between presenteeism and sickness absenteeism. The aim of this section is to further theorise leaveism, drawing on concepts related to WI and IWNs, weaving in how ICTs relate to WI and IWNs (see Figure 1). By highlighting the ongoing intensification of work and in particular

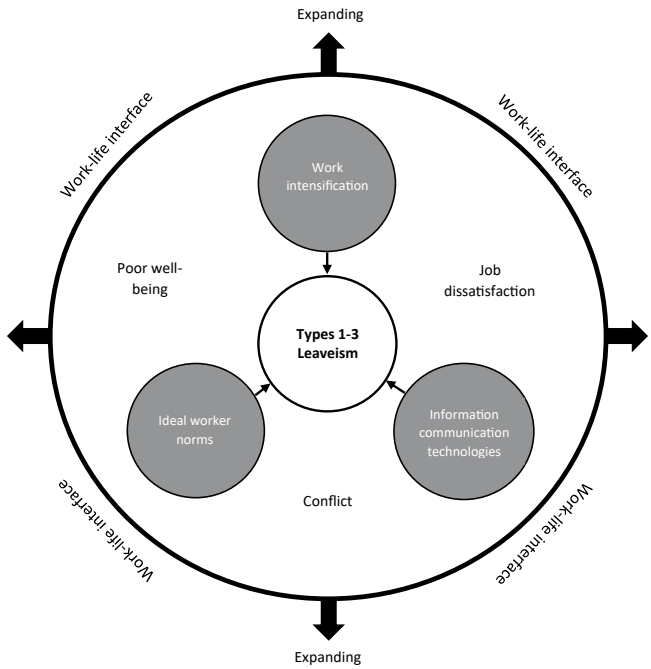


FIGURE 1 Developments in the concept of leaveism

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the role and impact of increasing use of ICTs within this, the article argues notions of the ideal worker have been redrawn to include leaveism as a core element. The prevalence of leaveism therefore, is argued to be far more widespread than argued elsewhere, which raises significant questions around the sustainability of contemporary expectations of employees. Furthermore, leaveism cannot be adequately understood without placing it within a broader context of the changing nature of work and employment.

2.1 | Work intensification

Understandings of 'WI' are somewhat contradictory. For example, managerialist perspectives see WI as increased productivity, typically extracted from labour using high performance work systems (Tregaskis et al., 2013), yet critical scholars see WI as unsustainable conditions for staff (Dupret & Pultz, 2021), work overload (Moen et al., 2013), thus identifiable as a range of practices designed to exploit employees and de-humanise employment. Green (2001) offers a definition widely cited in WI research, equating WI to increased work effort, pace of work and number of hours worked. His definition allows links to be drawn between leaveism and WI (see Figure 1), in that working remotely in the evening and weekends, or when taking sick or annual leave, represents an extension to the number of hours worked (absolute surplus value), but also an increase in the amount of effort and pace of work (relative surplus value).

Work intensification has accelerated and become widespread since the 1980s (Adăscăliței et al., 2021; Green, 2001). Key drivers of WI included 'new' management practices, such as total quality and just-in-time management, a decline of trade union power (Green, 2004), the 2008 financial crisis/rise of austerity (Smith, 2016), and the rise in non-standard employment patterns, such as agency work (Adăscăliței et al., 2021). Although WI was initially observed in the manufacturing industry and craft or low-skilled labour, it has since spread across industries and sectors (e.g. Bittman et al., 2009; Chesley, 2014; Green, 2004). Indeed, WI research increasingly focuses on managerial and professional employment (Moen et al., 2013), including academics (Sang et al., 2015), public sector professions (Hebson et al., 2003), corporate law professionals (Cavazotte et al., 2014), healthcare professionals (Hyde, Harris Boaden & Cortvriend, 2009; Li et al., 2020) and game developers (Peticca-Harris et al., 2015). Such studies reveal how WI intersects with professional identity or ethos. For example, academics absorb many of the pressures associated with WI because prioritising work, having few outside interests and being single-minded, are fundamental norms within such employment (Sang et al., 2015). However, WI has been found to threaten professional values and job satisfaction, particularly over the long-term, as it pressurises employees to make compromises over professional identity (Hebson et al., 2003; Hyde et al., 2009).

Previous research suggests WI is only 'sustainable' in cases where employees are already 'addicted to work' or a 'workaholic' (Li et al., 2020). However, research overwhelmingly, including those 'addicted' to work, highlights negative experiences and impact on well-being (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Le Fevre et al., 2015; Mackenzie et al., 2021), typically involving fatigue, stress and anxiety. Wider research suggests WI is a key ingredient in workplace conflict, linking WI to conflict and discontent (Mulholland, 2004) and dissatisfaction with overall working conditions (Neirotti, 2020). Mariappanadar (2019), moreover, found evidence to suggest WI indirectly harms family life and wider society. Further, large scale studies reveal inequalities in experiencing WI (Le Fevre et al., 2015), with professionals, women, full-time, public sector, and trade union members, disproportionately stressed, having their work-life balance disrupted, by WI.

Despite negative outcomes, WI is increasingly normalised as a feature of contemporary employment (Granter et al., 2015). Indeed, employees subjected to high levels of pressure, intensity and excessive working hours, often fail to see their experiences as extreme and harmful to personal health, despite a negative impact on their health and work-life-balance (Peticca-Harris et al., 2015). What is more, research has exposed the many difficulties employees face when attempting to resist WI. For example, employees' coping and resistance strategies, such as 'shortcuts' to

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complete a task more quickly, have themselves been found to be a new form of WI and self-discipline, as they are aimed at ensuring allocated tasks are still completed despite the lack of time (Bloom & Śliwa, 2021).

2.2 | The ideal worker

Work intensification is linked to notions of IWNs. Ideal worker norms pre-date interest in WI (Davies & Frink, 2014) and have proven to be resilient over time, gaining renewed attention during the Covid-19 pandemic, a time many employees faced the impossible task of keeping up with work, while caring and schooling 'from home' (Williams, 2020). Yet, IWNs only entered organisation studies' lexicon in the early 1990s, with Acker (1990) outlining how throughout history organisations sought to attract the most desirable types of employees, those committed to, and always available, for work. Ideal worker norms are said to comprise a ubiquitous set of ideals (Granberg, 2015). Historically, IWNs were most associated with white heterosexual men coupled to stay-at-home wives (Davies & Frink, 2014), loyalty to the culture of one's profession (Turco, 2010) and eschewing the 'militancy' of organised labour (Granberg, 2015). Ideal worker norms include being a strong leader and not 'burdened' by family (Brumley, 2014). Ideal worker norms involve prioritisation of career (Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2021), strong professional identity (Reid, 2015), and working long hours (Lupu et al., 2020). Notably, IWNs are somewhat dynamic, with the specific embodied IWN characteristics changing depending on the professional context (Adamson & Johansson, 2016).

Behind IWNs, however, lie the harsh realities of contemporary employment, with many employees failing to live up to such expectations. For instance, Kelly et al. (2010) revealed how IWNs are increasingly reflected in performance management practices, with objectives requiring employees to display 'always available' type behaviours, indicating a significant extension to working time, plus pressure to work almost anywhere at any time (see Figure 1). As the case of WI, research considers employee attempts to resist IWNs (e.g. see Croft & Fernando, 2018), although such studies typically focus on employee attempts to shape, but not reject such norms. For instance, employees fighting to have previously taboo health concerns, such as menopause, incorporated into organisational policy/practice (Atkinson et al., 2021), and women resisting systemic failures to reflect family norms (Brumley, 2014). In practice, resistance is typically individualistic and pursued without trade union support, therefore increasing the chance of employers shutting down challenges to dominant and pervasive masculine work cultures (Kelly et al., 2010). Further research highlights how IWNs conflict with flexible working arrangements, in that to request flexible working is to be seen as less committed to work (Borgkvist et al., 2021). More recently, Chung et al. (2021) found evidence casting doubt on initial predictions of flexible working adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic shaping IWNs and reducing inequalities.

2.3 | Information communication technologies

A key driver of WI and IWNs has been the expansion and accelerated use of ICTs. Although the application of ICTs need not lead to negative outcomes (Guest, 2017), ICTs are often deployed to further intensify work, both in absolute and relative terms, by providing employers with extended opportunity to monitor whether employee behaviours and performance align with those employers deem desirable (see Figure 1). For instance, contemporary IWNs are broader than employee commitment and availability alone, increasingly including being physically (Sang et al., 2015) and virtually mobile (Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018). Indeed, a work mobile phone or laptop computer may quickly turn from being a 'perk' to a sense of surveillance and harassment in private time, and often involving an inability to 'switch off' from work (Cavazotte et al., 2014; Chesley, 2014). Research highlights the 'time pressure' (Bittman et al., 2009), 'work interruption' and multitasking (Chesley, 2014), involved in being given a work smartphone or laptop computer. Additionally, studies have observed how ICTs, and social media in particular (Hurrell et al., 2017), enables employer

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monitoring of employee compliance with workplace values through surveillance of opinions and commitment to their job (Taylor & Dobbins, 2021).

As such, the increased use of ICTs has typically been to the detriment of employees. Digital WI has been found to make employees feel 'harried' (Bittman et al., 2009), curtail autonomy, and worsen mental health and work ability (Borle et al., 2021). Digital employer monitoring and related intrusions lower job satisfaction (Brown, 2012) and negatively affects employee well-being (Guest, 2017). However, while the proliferation and effects of ICT have been found to be uneven, professional employees disproportionately represent the occupational groups most affected by such changes to working practices (Holman & Rafferty, 2018).

2.4 | Summary

To date, concepts of leaveism, WI, IWNs and ICTs have been viewed as separate and largely disconnected. The links between these concepts, however, appear in part confirmed by the preceding discussion (see Figure 1). Firstly, leaveism has probably always existed at the margins of work, but come of age of late, in large part due to advances in ICTs, a long-term decline in organised labour, plus greater employer demands for work flexibility. Secondly, leaveism appears a response to WI and redrawn IWNs, particularly among managerial and professional employees. Thirdly, leaveism is facilitated by advances in ICTs, broadly the same technologies required to facilitate WI and sustain, re-validate and redraw IWNs. Fourthly, leaveism, appears unsustainable, leading to concerns with poor employee well-being, low job satisfaction and conflict (see Figure 1). Taking all such assumptions together, however, gives reason to further explore leaveism as more than a missing facet of presenteeism and sickness absenteeism.

3 | METHODOLOGY

What is currently known about the emergent, and apparent large-scale phenomenon of leaveism, is limited. Part of why leaveism may be under-researched, or underestimated by HRM professionals, is because it is practiced at the work-life interface (see Figure 1), a place not directly accessible to researchers and HRM professionals. As such, this section discusses how to explore leaveism effectively and conveniently.

3.1 | Method, sampling, participant recruitment and demographics

This is a piece of exploratory research; therefore the purpose was to investigate further the characteristics of the phenomenon and the reasons behind it, rather than assess its prevalence across the population. As such we focussed our efforts on a section of the population where previous studies identified high incidence of leaveism, that is managerial and professional employment (e.g. see Hesketh, et al., 2015; Houdmont et al., 2018), and for that qualitative and quantitative data was gathered using an electronic questionnaire.

A non-probability sampling approach in the form of homogeneous convenience sampling was favoured against a probability sampling one. There are tangible drawbacks from using a non-probability sampling approach, most notably the reduction of generalisability of the results, but there are also important benefits with the use of convenience sampling, as it can be efficient, cheap and simple to implement. A study from Bornstein et al. (2013) on the use of sampling approaches in five developmental science journals between 2007 and 2011 found probability sampling accounted only for 5.5% of the studies, while 92.5% used convenience sampling. By focussing on a specific section of the population a homogeneous convenience sampling approach was possible, increasing the generalisability relative to conventional convenience sample approaches and producing more valid estimates than conventional convenience samples (Jager et al., 2017).

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The target population was employees, over 16 years old within the UK. The sampling frame was then limited to individual managerial and professional employees, representing around 43% of employees within the UK (ONS, 2020). The research method involved an electronic self-reporting questionnaire, an inexpensive and rapid means to gather data from geographically spread prospective participants (Seak & Enderwick, 2008).

UK-based employees with experience of performing leaveism were recruited through a questionnaire link distributed via social media throughout the year 2019 (2 January to 31 December). The lead author used Twitter (@Leaveism) to recruit to the study. Recruitment involved "pinning" questionnaire details to the Twitter homepage, variously tweeting the questionnaire web-link (n = 22), tweeting news articles related to leaveism (n = 34), use of a dedicated hashtag (#Leaveism), relying on followers (n = 380) to retweet study details (questionnaire retweeted 224 times in total), as well as tweeting to key organisations, for example, trade unions, professional organisations, media outlets. Social media was chosen because higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations represent the job groups most likely to engage with such forms of communication (91%) (GOV.UK, 2020). Further, the approach adopted was expected to be effective because people performing leaveism were known to make extensive use of ICTs, including accessing social media feeds of professional bodies, trade unions, plus self-organised and informal professional-based social networks (Van Zoonen et al., 2016).

The questionnaire was administered using *Qualtrics* software. A total of 1312 responses were collected. 167 were disqualified as respondents were either self-employed, non-UK or had not completed a substantial amount of the questionnaire. 89.5% self-reported as belonging to managerial or professional occupations, leaving a dataset of 959 cases for analysis. Given the non-probability nature of our sampling approach, designing the sample via power calculation was considered inappropriate as previous research does not reveal the structure and nature of the population of those practicing leaveism.

To reflect on sampling limitations, the data was compared (Table 1) to national weighted figures from the Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey (ONS, Social Survey Division, 2020). The sample data differs from national figures, as expected, but more notably based on sex, union recognition, sector and company size. However, if national figures for only the public sector are considered, those differences are reduced. Our sample data has a larger proportion of women, union recognition, public sector and larger company respondents. Despite this, the data has valuable potential, especially when considering the aim was not to assess the incidence of leaveism, but to explore the circumstances and reasons behind the phenomenon.

3.2 | Research design

Given the newness of leaveism, key questionnaire themes were drawn from academic, grey and journalistic-styled literature (e.g. types of leaveism, reasons to perform leaveism, access to sick pay, job security, well-being, trends in leaveism, flexible working, annual leave allowances). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section, entitled 'personal experiences of leaveism', explored types of leaveism performed, why it was performed (based on 10 employer and 9 employee drivers of leaveism – see Table 2, drivers broadly reflecting themes, respectively, associated with WI and IWNs – see Figure 1), impact on well-being, changes in leaveism performed over the last 3 years. Leaveism, as defined by Hesketh et al. (2014), led the questionnaire introduction. Then on, leaveism was presented in neutral terms, allowing respondents to explore experiences with minimal guidance. The final question in the section, an open-ended option, encouraged personal experiences and views on leaveism. This question led to 48.9% of participants volunteering experiences and views on leaveism, generating 30,000 words plus of qualitative data. Such data were critical to exploring leaveism, most notably in providing rich/lived experience accounts of leaveism, that is, how in this instance, employees live through and respond to (Boylorn, 2008) performing such acts. Lived experience relates to interpretive phenomenological enquiry, that is, going beyond describing an experience and considering the significance of the experience for the person (Frechette et al., 2020). The lived experience is key to achieving research aims, especially as such an approach is likely to allow a nuanced take on sustainability, thus

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TABLE 1 Demographic profile comparison

Item	Category	Percentage	
		Study data	Annual Population Survey/Labour Force Survey
Sex	Female	68.1	47.5
	Male	31.9	52.5
Disability	Yes	14.2	14.4
	No	85.8	85.6
Age (years)	16–24	1.3	5.7
	25–34	22.9	26.4
	35–44	33.1	26.4
	45–54	31.0	25.3
	55–64	11.4	14.3
	65–74	0.3	1.9
Permanent employment	Yes	87.8	96.3
	No	12.2	3.7
Full or part time work	Full time	88.7	85.3
	Part time	11.3	14.7
Union recognition	Yes	87.5	26.4
	No	12.5	73.6
Sector	Public	78.0	33.2
	Private	22.0	66.8
Company size	1–19	3.1	21.5
	20–49	2.6	15.5
	50–499	11.9	32.1
	500 or more	82.4	26.9

aiding policy/practice related to leaveism. Importantly, such an approach revealed subjective and nuanced sides of leaveism, details more widely known to be missing from quantitative questionnaire data (Richards & Sang, 2021).

The second part, entitled 'about you', was aimed at collecting demographic and organisational data related to UK region, sex, disability, age range, job skill levels, unionisation, flexible working, well-being, annual leave, sector of employment, sick pay arrangements, contract of employment.

3.3 | Data analysis

This first paper utilising the gathered dataset aims to explore the leaveism phenomenon leaving more advanced and specific analysis for later investigations. Due to the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, two approaches to analysis were required. The analysis of the quantitative data utilised descriptive and exploratory techniques as the first stage to more advanced analyses (Jupp, 2006). Where appropriate, statistical inference was applied in the form of confidence intervals and paired samples *t*-test. The analysis focussed on the drivers of leaveism (separating them between internal and external) and their relation to the ideas of WI, IWNs, ICTs and sustainability. Qualitative data was subject to template analysis (King, 2004). Such analysis (see Table 3) involved identifying priori codes (themes and sub-themes) based around four research questions, plus key themes drawn from the literature surrounding WI,

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TABLE 2 Survey options regarding external and internal leaveism drivers

	External drivers – employer pressures to perform leaveism
1	To stop work piling up
2	Work just seems to increasingly spill-over into my private life
3	It's so easy to be in touch with work these days
4	We are short-staffed
5	It is expected of me by my employer/boss
6	I am shamed into working in this way
7	I'm required to be in touch with colleagues and/or clients who are in different time zones to me
8	I have an impairment/do not experience reasonable adjustments
9	I am a staff rep and this role creates time pressures on my job
10	I only do it when there is a new project to work on
	Internal drivers – employee pressures to perform leaveism
1	I feel insecure if I do not complete all the tasks and roles I am expected to do
2	I find it hard to balance work and non-work life
3	I love my job/my job is more than a job
4	I fear losing my job/redundancy
5	I find it hard to delegate work
6	I am disorganised/have poor time-management skills
7	I'm looking to be promoted
8	I get bored when I am not at work/taking annual leave
9	I like to impress my boss

IWNs, ICTs, and sustainability. Such codes/sub-themes were supplemented by ad hoc codes/sub-themes arising from the data analysis process (see Table 3).

3.4 | Research ethics

The study received full ethical approval from the institution of the lead author. However, in seeking ethical approval, it was important to consider a range of minor, but important ethical dilemmas. Dilemmas included expected unfamiliarity and possible confusion over the term "leaveism", as well as how respondents may have had negative experiences of such practice. Steps to overcome ethical dilemmas included clear/lay details of the study on the questionnaire's first page, plus on completion, a recommendation to speak to a line manager, HR professional or trade union representative, if negatively affected by leaveism.

3.5 | Limitations

Although, as noted earlier, a comparison of the sample composition with national figures showed important differences related to sex, union recognition and sector, such demographic characteristics are, also noted earlier, disproportionately associated with WI (Le Fevre et al., 2015). The homogeneous convenience sample approach, based on accessing the most ready, willing and able to participate (Saumure & Given, 2008) resulted in some generalisability

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TABLE 3 Qualitative coding template and research questions

Themes and research questions	Work intensification/ research question 1	Ideal worker norms/ research question 2	Information communication technologies/ research question 3	Sustainability/ research question 4
Example sub-themes	• Work effort • Pace of work • Number of hours worked • Productivity • Exploitative • De-humanisation of work • Work pacing • High commitment HRM • Performance management	• Prioritise work • Committed • Availability • Culture of profession • Long hours • Eschew organised labour • Ethos and values • Prioritise career • Not burdened by family • Work addiction/ workaholic • Long-term continuous employment • Desirable employee • Absorb pressures	• Availability (virtual) • Work interruption • Sense of being harried • Multi-tasking • Intrusion into private life • Time pressures/ mobile phone use	• Inability to switch off • Unsustainable conditions • Disrupt family and wider life • Absence • Turnover • Normalisation of overwork • Conflict • Job dissatisfaction • Discontent
Example ad-hoc themes	• Role expansion • Bottlenecks pressures • Conflicting pressures and deadlines • Emotional labour • Hidden expectations of job • Teamwork	• Personal reputation • Personal choice • Boredom • Ableist norms • Social capital	• Emails building up during meetings • Job demands use of social media • Use of personal ICT equipment	• Bullying and harassment • Impact on physical and mental health • Under-staffed • Working when in hospital • Working on maternity leave • Burnout • Work spill-over • Weak legislation/ unions • Under-funded • Anxiety

Abbreviation: HRM, human resource management.

limitations and therefore the limited statistical inference applied should be taken as indicative results. Nevertheless, the relatively large sample size of 959 cases allowed an exploration of the main reasons behind the phenomenon for those in managerial or professional occupations.

4 | ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section is based around core research themes, that of WI, IWNs, ICTs and sustainability. The section provides an analysis and discussion of quantitative and qualitative primary data set out to explore the theoretical model illustrated through Figure 1. A broader aim is to perform a crucial step in filling theoretical, methodological and policy/ practice gaps related to leaveism.

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4.1 | Work intensification and leaveism

Analysis revealed many links between WI and leaveism (see Figure 1). For instance, 88.1% of respondents experienced at least two types of leaveism. Indeed, Type 2 (taking work home) and Type 3 of leaveism (working when on annual leave) were almost universally performed (94.3% and 88.7% respectively), with 35.0% using official time off to be unwell (Type 1). Such figures reveal working time extended into spaces usually reserved for family life, leisure or ill-health.

In terms of drivers (see Table 2), Table 4 (below) displays their occurrence within the sample as percentages of occurrence, together with their confidence intervals. It seems organisational pressures related to WI represent the top four leaveism drivers – stop work piling up (89.9%), work spilling into private life (61.7%), ease of staying in touch (52.9%) and short-staffing (44.2%). Such findings indicate use of coping mechanisms (Bloom & Śliwa, 2021), advancements in the use of mobile technologies for work (Bittman et al., 2009) and downsizing initiatives (Boxall & Macky, 2014), as key in leaveism. Further links exist between leaveism and WI. For example, while 98.6% reported at least one external influence, only 80.7% reported at least one internal. In other words, 19.3% reported no internal influences, while 1.4% reported no external influences. Of note, however, is how respondents reported a larger number of external (3069) than internal influences (1789). Indeed, the number of reported external influences was

TABLE 4 Leaveism drivers ordered by reported level of occurrence

	Yes			
	Count	Row N %	95.0% Lower class limits for row N %	95.0% Upper class limits for row N %
To stop work piling up	862	89.9%	87.9%	91.7%
Work just seems to increasingly spill-over into my private life	592	61.7%	58.6%	64.8%
It's so easy to be in touch with work these days	507	52.9%	49.7%	56.0%
We are short-staffed	424	44.2%	41.1%	47.4%
I feel insecure if I do not complete all the tasks and roles I am expected to do	406	42.3%	39.2%	45.5%
I find it hard to balance work and non-work life	375	39.1%	36.1%	42.2%
I love my job/my job is more than a job	330	34.4%	31.5%	37.5%
It is expected of me by my employer/boss	329	34.3%	31.4%	37.4%
I fear losing my job/redundancy	229	23.9%	21.3%	26.7%
I am shamed into working in this way	122	12.7%	10.7%	14.9%
I find it hard to delegate work	122	12.7%	10.7%	14.9%
I'm required to be in touch with colleagues and/or clients who are in different time zones to me	116	12.1%	10.1%	14.3%
I'm looking to be promoted	99	10.3%	8.5%	12.4%
I am disorganised/have poor time-management sk0693ills	97	10.1%	8.3%	12.1%
I get bored when I am not at work/taking annual leave	70	7.3%	5.8%	9.1%
I like to impress my boss	61	6.4%	4.9%	8.0%
I have an impairment/do not experience reasonable adjustments	56	5.8%	4.5%	7.5%
I am a staff rep and this role creates time pressures on my job	46	4.8%	3.6%	6.3%
I only do it when there is a new project to work on	15	1.6%	0.9%	2.5%

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71.5% higher than internal ones. Importantly, respondents reported on average 3.2 external influences versus 1.9 internal (paired samples *t*-test, one sided $p < 0.001$), further strengthening links between WI and leaveism. In short, while IWNs link to WI, the data in this instance is indicative of leaveism equating more readily to what has previously been referred to as work overload (Moen et al., 2013).

Analysis revealed additional reasons to link WI with leaveism. For instance, 67.0% reported over the last 3 years the amount of leaveism has somehow increased. Findings suggest 12.6% of respondents felt the amount of leaveism they perform in such time increased slightly, 22.3% moderately, and 32.0% significantly. Work intensification is further evident in terms of annual leave uptake. In this instance, while 26.2% always take their full annual leave, the rest variously do not. Overall, while there is no baseline to explore precise amounts of leaveism performed or annual leave uptake, open comments provide wider insights into such matters. Summing up, our results in relation to WI show that, when leaveism is performed by an individual it is mostly of more than one type, organisational pressures top the list of leaveism drivers, external influences are much more common drivers of leaveism than internal ones, most respondents reported an increase on the amount of leaveism throughout the last 3 years and only a fourth reported taking their full annual leave.

Work intensification featured widely in respondent comments. Comments ranged from mild annoyance to distress of excessive working, providing initial primary data evidence to link leaveism with a notion of unsustainability (see Figure 1). While effort and pace of work was periodically implied, the number of hours involved in leaveism dominated (Green, 2001):

> I feel on the cusp of burnout every day… I no longer feel like the person I used to be… Anytime I try to stop either through choice or health my work is not reallocated and piles up until I come back. My family all hate my employer (Civil Servant).

> Before I was in a teaching-specialist role I could switch off during holidays. Now it's just impossible - even when students are mailing I am concerned as to whether they have everything they need/I am expected to give them (Academic).

> … I also don't mind working the odd weekend when an important task is particularly pressing. I really resent regular weekend working - it stops me from recovering and enjoying hobbies. I really, really resent losing holiday time to work (Senior Manager).

Analysis not only revealed lived experience, but also sets out how leaveism can encroach, colonise and damage working and non-working life. Added to this is leaveism appears far from an intermittent commitment, or demands for such practice will recede. Importantly, such experience links well to stress caused by WI (Le Fevre et al., 2015) and harm beyond the workplace (Mariappanadar, 2019). Further, those performing leaveism equate such acts with a sense of harassment and being harried (Bittman et al., 2009; Cavazotte et al., 2014; Chesley, 2014), leading to conflict (Mulholland, 2004), low job satisfaction (Brown, 2012; Gerich, 2015), and punished for being virtually mobile (Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018).

4.2 | Ideal worker norms and leaveism

Despite many participants reporting increased experiences of leaveism, including sacrifice of annual leave, managerial and professional employees also appear wedded to leaveism, suggesting such acts are a new way for employees to express commitment and availability (Reid, 2015). As such, this sub-section explores internal drivers (see Tables 2 and 4), further comparing data with the conceptual development in Figure 1.

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When considering internal drivers, not all such drivers can be associated with IWNs. Indeed, the internal drivers closest linked to IWNs number 1, 3, 7-9 in Table 2, with further analysis (see Figure 2, below) indicating two internal drivers resonating widely with respondents. Indeed, 42.3% perform leaveism because of a sense of insecurity if work remains unfinished. Such sentiments appear indicative of managerial and professional employee commitment to work (Acker, 1990). Analysis also revealed 34.4% perform leaveism because of "love" for their job, indicating strong levels of job loyalty (Turco, 2010). Such bonding indicates de-prioritisation of non-work interests (Sang et al., 2015) and few problems committing to long hours (Lupu et al., 2020). Similarly so, but less commonly reported, analysis revealed how 7.3% relieve boredom by performing leaveism, a sign of how central work can be for some managerial and professional employees. Further internal drivers include 10.3% performing leaveism as a promotion strategy, while 6.4% do extra work at home to "impress the boss". However, the data seems to indicate internal drivers are informed to an extent by employer demands, providing indirect links between leaveism and WI, but also suggesting IWNs are being redrawn around leaveism.

Importantly, analysis of qualitative findings revealed further links between IWNs and leaveism, although the quotes indicate how WI can co-exist with such expectations. Critical to note from lived experiences is how managerial and professional employees frequently have to navigate a range of work-related dilemmas, with employees attempting to reconcile excessive demands in relation to professional values or IWNs:

> … The only way I could complete my tasks in normal working hours is if I worked to a poor standard, which I am not prepared to do (Academic).

> … I work in public service and have a public service mentality. I find it hard not to help… (Civil Servant).

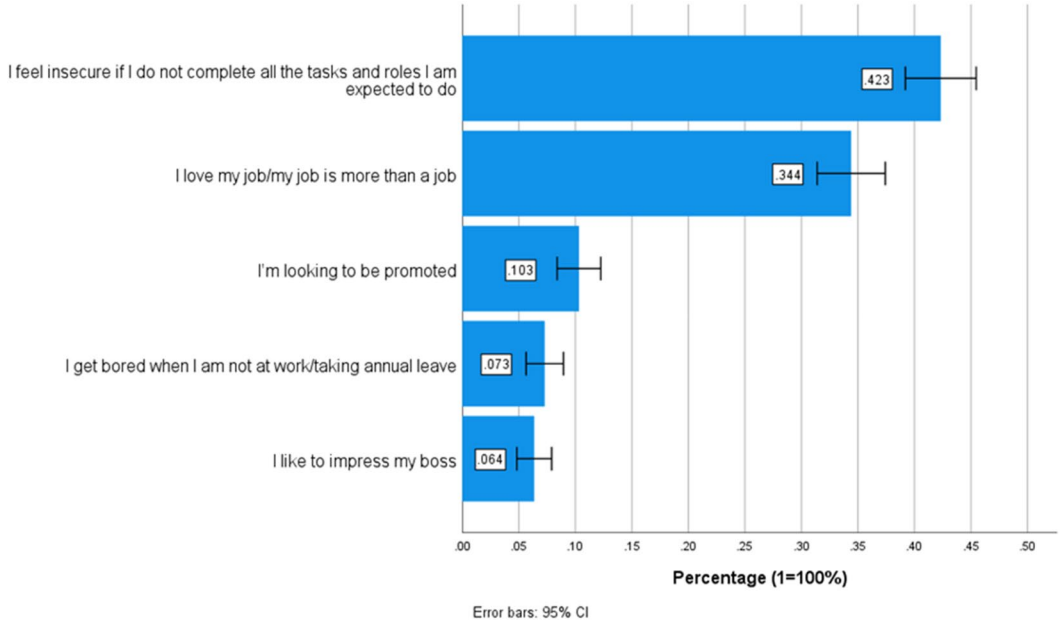


FIGURE 2 Leaveism drivers related to ideal worker norms (IWNs) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

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Further analysis linking leaveism with IWNs involved managerial and professional employees "buying into" employer expectations:

> Generally, as a senior manager, the expectation is to be responsive. We have live products (games) that may need support or attention out of working hours. The company likes to encourage passion and commitment (Senior Manager).

> … As a small organisation there is an expectation to put in a bit more than the usual work week with a "we"re all in this together" mentality… (Accountant).

Such quotes not only link IWNs to leaveism, but they also further link WI to leaveism, with WI largely arising out of expectations to do more, and such expectations accommodated by renewing IWNs. Importantly, there appears tension between leaveism and IWNs, with WI prominent in such tensions. For instance, commitment to leaveism can compromise professional identities (Sang et al., 2015) and a sense of service (Hebsen et al., 2003; Hyde et al., 2009). Further, on one hand, leaveism appears a trigger for resistance, yet typically, resistance does not happen (Kelly et al., 2010), or is severely inhibited or rarely imagined (Peticca-Harris et al., 2015). However, the lack of resistance is unsurprising given it is already known how IWNs moderate appetite for organised resistance (Granberg, 2015).

4.3 | Information communication technologies and leaveism

Analysis has already indicated links between leaveism and ICTs. Specifically, the notion and nature of contemporary work being universally accessible is apparent in that a majority of respondents (52.9%) perform leaveism because it is a "click", "swipe" or "tap" away (see Table 4). A further dimension is in terms of 12.1% of respondents performing leaveism via ICTs because of a need to be in touch with colleagues in different time zones, signifying increased business internationalisation as a key driver of such practice.

Analysis identified a wide-range of ICT signifiers, such as WhatsApp, Twitter, phone, Internet, Cloud, technology, ShareDrive. However, such analysis mainly attributed leaveism to dealing with emails from colleagues, clients or customers. Interestingly, analysis revealed links between use of ICTs and IWNs, demonstrable via common quotes such as: 'killing time', 'staying in the loop', 'getting ahead', being 'lost' without work, and making use of 'commuting time'. Analysis revealed further links between ICTs and WI. Such links appeared via quotes featuring widely in the qualitative dataset, typically linking such acts with poor well-being, job dissatisfaction, conflict, unable to switch off from work, long-term irreconcilable work pressures. Commonly, emails formed the basis by which employees were available beyond the physical work setting and regular working hours and days:

> … [O]utside of the week between Christmas and New Year"s it would be unacceptable for me to not check my email at least once a day, even if I were on vacation… (Academic).

Crucially, lack of time to answer emails during the regular working day left a pressure for emails to be picked at almost any other time, as typified by the following quote:

> Time spent in meetings during the day every day decreases time to complete tasks, deal with emails during normal working hours (Senior Manager).

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Ultimately, employers may secure short-term benefits from such employee commitment, but in the longer-term, no one appears to benefit:

> I check emails and work outside normal office hours to manage anxiety about what is stacking up (Senior Manager).

While the findings further link ICTs to leaveism, ICTs alone do not drive leaveism. Indeed, the emergent picture is of a universal expectation of managerial and professional employees to use ICTs, an expectation created by extending the reach of HRM policies based on high commitment (Green, 2004) and attendance (Gerich, 2015), to incorporate increasingly advanced ICTs, as well as the new spaces for work opened up by such technologies. Further, the findings seem to indicate, as seen in previous research, how HRM policies designed to curb excessive working and demands typically fail (Chillakuri & Vanka, 2021). Except in this instance, such policies fail to curb the damage done by leaveism.

4.4 | Sustainability and leaveism

As noted earlier, a core feature of sustainable HRM is the long-term commitment to the care of employees (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2018). Initial analysis suggests a good majority of participants were employed by organisations characterised by sustainable HRM practice. The current research equates and explores sustainable HRM with policies related to well-being, flexible working, sickness absence, and trade union recognition (see Table 5). Indeed, the vast majority of participants are employed by an employer recognising a trade union (87.5%). Further, sustainable HRM practice is captured by the questionnaire in terms of where participants were aware organisational policy, a clear majority reported access to full sick pay (74.0%), a policy on well-being (59.7%) and flexible working (75.7%). That said, analysis revealed sizeable minorities of participants lacking awareness of such employer policy, with 30.3% unaware of a well-being policy where they are employed, 16.1% unaware of a flexible working policy, 16.3% unaware of sickness arrangements, 5.3% unaware if a trade union is recognised or not.

Such observations intensified further when the analysis revealed 61.1% believed leaveism had a negative or very negative impact on their well-being, and when adding the slightly negative category, this went up to 86.7%. Such figures contrasts sharply with just 6.3% variously reporting a positive impact, evidence further questioning HRM policy/practice against WI (Chillakuri & Vanka, 2021). Moreover, 73.8% of participants did not take their full annual leave allowance, further exposing the limitations of sustainable HRM policies. In broader terms, the findings also point towards widespread employment relations practice and policy failure, as recognising a trade union appears to have limited impact on the proliferation of leaveism.

The qualitative findings mirror their quantitative equivalents, but provide more nuanced links between leaveism and poor well-being (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Le Fevre et al., 2015; Mackenzie et al., 2021), job dissatisfaction (Brown, 2012; Gerich, 2015) and conflict (Mulholland, 2004). Further, such analysis reveals (typically individualistic

TABLE 5 Employer sustainable HRM practices

	Yes			
	Count	Row N %	95.0% lower class limits for row N %	95.0% Upper class limits for row N %
Does your employer have a well-being policy?	570	59.7%	56.6%	62.8%
Does your employer have a policy on flexible working?	723	75.7%	72.9%	78.3%
What do you receive from your employer if you are off work unwell?	701	74.0%	71.2%	76.7%
Does your employer recognise a trade union?	791	87.5%	85.2%	89.5%

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and often hard to sustain) employee resistance (Atkinson et al., 2021; Brumley, 2014; Kelly et al., 2010). However, the most striking conclusions drawn from the lived experience is how employer expectations of leaveism appear to undermine their own attempts to curb such practice. Collectively, while limited quotes point towards well-being benefits, leaveism is substantially more associable with ill-health, conflict, job dissatisfaction, bullying and harassment, working during maternity leave, coping behaviour, domestic conflict, discrimination, and career damage. However, the following quotes not only provide further insight into how leaveism undermines notions of sustainable employment, but how the volume of and spaces for leaveism to proliferate, gives weight to a wider notion of such acts as a distinct, emergent and expanding domain of employment, separate but very much linked to employment associated with the physical work setting:

> Evening and weekend working is the norm for me. I often, though not always, take work on holiday (and will answer emails while away). I rarely take public holidays (Senior Manager).

> I am an academic, so overwork is normal part of the job, however I am not doing it for the right reasons… we overwork because a lot of administrative/clerical/menial tasks have been dumped on us… my work diaries show that I spend over 500 hours a year doing emails. I am spending less and less on my time doing the right things… (Academic).

Overall, for a group of employees traditionally and outwardly perceived to be well paid, in secure employment, having high organisational status, job satisfaction and privilege, when the spotlight shifts to a growing, hidden domain of work only found at the work-life-interface, a largely dystopian image of contemporary managerial and professional employment emerges.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the article was to develop the emergent notion of leaveism via four research questions. The approach involved proposing a new conceptual model on situating current understandings of leaveism within a wider, emergent, yet expanding domain of employment found at the work-life-interface, a place where WI, IWNs and ICTs increasingly intersect in relation to managerial and professional employment (see Figure 1). The proposed model also critiques the sustainability of such practice. Importantly, the approach involved exploring such ideas via quantitative and qualitative data provided by employees presently known to disproportionately practice leaveism. The article ends with a reflection on key achievements from the research.

5.1 | Research questions revisited

The research questions were partly addressed through a literature review designed to differently theorise leaveism. Such questions were further addressed via an analysis and discussion of data captured by a questionnaire completed by UK-based managerial and professional employees.

It seems reasonable to conclude leaveism represents an existing and emergent form of WI (creating absolute and relative value). Concretely, the questionnaire provided data to equate a substantial part of leaveism to what Green (2001) identified as extra effort and hours of work. How leaveism extends notions of WI involves how ICTs facilitate extra hours of work when employees are at home, commuting, taking leisure time, holidaying, ill, or in some cases undertaking caring responsibilities. Importantly, while a small minority declared positive experiences of leaveism, the vast majority reported negative impacts on experience of work and work-life-balance.

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The findings appear to validate the notion of leaveism as driven by IWNs, principally because, as noted by Lupu et al. (2020), IWNs involve working long hours – and so does leaveism. A key difference, however, is in terms of how leaveism appears to represent a redrawing and extension of what is currently known about IWNs, a change made possible with the rapid, widespread and largely unregulated embeddedness of ICTs in contemporary managerial and professional employment.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence was provided in relation to the least challenging of the research questions, proposing leaveism as highly dependent on ICTs. What appears key is how ICTs provide a crucial, yet inconspicuous means for employers to further expand WI and redraw IWNs, shifting employee working practices and behaviour perhaps unimaginable just a decade or so ago. Crucially, this aspect of the findings helps further justify current trade union (e.g. see Prospect, 2020) calls for legislation to allow employees a "right to disconnect", or the legal means for employees to refuse to perform leaveism. What is more, linking leaveism with ICTs exposes seemingly contradictory HRM professional policy initiatives regarding leaveism, that is showing concern for the rise of leaveism (e.g. see CIPD, 2021), but concurrently resisting legislation proposed as a means to curb it (e.g. see Parkinson, 2021).

Finally, the findings backed notions of leaveism departing substantially from what key theorists, such as Mariappanadar (2019) and Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė (2018), refer to as sustainable HRM. Indeed, the findings provided evidence to equate leaveism with new and emergent threats to employee well-being (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Le Fevre et al., 2015; Mackenzie et al., 2021), job satisfaction (Brown, 2012), and contentment with working conditions (Neirotti, 2020). What this may mean in a practical sense, is leaveism could be an unrecognised reason for poor well-being, job dissatisfaction and broader dissatisfaction with working conditions, in as many as half of the UK's workplaces.

5.2 | Contributions

The article began by problematising the leaveism literature, resulting in a proposed need to overcome theoretical, methodological, and policy/practice-related weaknesses. As such, a key aim was to make a wide-range of contributions to understandings of leaveism.

Indeed, the findings contribute to the small, yet ground-breaking body of literature surrounding leaveism (e.g. Gerich, 2015; Hesketh et al., 2014; Houdmont et al., 2018). Except the current research has taken theoretical understandings in a new and fresh direction, a direction encapsulated by Figure 1. The contribution noted by Figure 1 appears crucial to understandings of leaveism, principally because Figure 1 makes centre stage core features of contemporary employment. The findings also lead to contributions to a range of debates surrounding, for example, WI, IWNs, ICTs in relation to the workplace, well-being, mainstream and sustainable HRM, conflict, and managerial and professional employment.

The research makes a range of methodological contributions, not least in providing a replicable means to access and gather data on a hard to observe phenomenon. The contribution comes in terms of designing an approach to overcoming inherent challenges associated with the nature of leaveism. A second methodological contribution involves the first known research to gather qualitative data related to leaveism. More specifically, the contribution involved securing lived experiences of leaveism, an approach adding and strengthening what is known about such practice.

The findings contribute to policy/practice surrounding leaveism. As a minimum, the findings add to current recommendations for HRM professional practice surrounding leaveism. Specifically, the findings draw HRM professional attention to how IWNs are key drivers of work-related anxiety, and how leaveism needs to be regulated far more to reduce such negative effects on employee well-being. Similarly, with the Covid-19 pandemic in mind, a time seeing further and wider uses for ICTs than captured by the current research, should be a clear and unequivocal cue to HRM professionals to update and draw up a range of new policies and practices to guide line managers and employees on leaveism. This could include, for example, a ban on sending and responding to work emails outwith core working hours. Wider HRM policy/practice implications arise in terms of highlighting an imbalance between organisational time, resources and efforts put into performance and attendance policy/practice, and the time, resources and efforts

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put into well-being, work-life-balance, sickness absence and employment relations policy/practice. As such, addressing leaveism points towards a major restructuring of HRM policy/practice, a restructuring propelling the notion of sustainable HRM far higher up employer and governmental agendas.

It seems the findings strengthen the case for trade union calls to regulate the use of ICTs in the modern workplace, as well as weaken the governmental case to resist trade union ideas for related employment legislative reform. Governments, as such, should take note of the immediate, as well as apparent growing damage building up by a largely unchecked and unregulated rise in leaveism. For example, national and devolved governments could consider revising current policy agendas based on "good work" (e.g. Taylor, 2017) and "fair work" (e.g. Scottish Government, 2021) to incorporate new HRM challenges such as leaveism.

5.3 | Limitations and future research

More could have been made of the current quantitative dataset, including teasing out further nuanced understandings of leaveism, especially related to well-being. Future research should consider ways to generate further datasets, quantitative and qualitative, that are designed to test out the new proposed take on leaveism, as well as drilling deeper and wider than is the case of the current research, such as considering differences, amounts and effects of leaveism performed by employees defined by a wider set of (protected) characteristics and job groups. Given the current research is UK-focussed, future research should consider how leaveism is practiced, understood and managed in competing international contexts, an approach that may expose best practice. Further, while convenience sampling paved the way for a range of contributions, such limitations restrict the extent to which the findings can be generalised. As such, future research should adopt representative over convenience or purposive sampling. There is also substantial scope to build understandings of leaveism based on ethnographical and longitudinal approaches. Future research would benefit from the input of wider stakeholders, such as HRM professionals, line managers, trade union officials and activists, as well as government figures responsible for employment code and legislative reforms. A final, but by no means least suggestion for future research, includes researching leaveism in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings from the current research have the potential to act as a benchmark for leaveism prior to such times, but there is evidently a need to explore leaveism at a time when the nature of work has changed so much, a change facilitated mainly by wider and intensified use of ICTs, and a change noted by work performed increasingly at the work-life-interface.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the respondents who took time to complete a survey on a matter the vast majority appeared to have negative experiences of. The authors would also like to show appreciation to the reviewers who offered a wide-range of suggestions leading to important improvements to the finished paper. The research was funded internally by the lead author's institution – Heriot-Watt University.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict 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.

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ORCID

James Richards https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3664-2884
Vaughan Ellis https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1696-5328
Jesus Canduela https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9898-5367
Toma Pustelnikovaite https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3278-1369
Siddhartha Saxena https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6878-1486

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How to cite this article: Richards, J., Ellis, V., Canduela, J., Pustelnikovaite, T., & Saxena, S. (2023). Developing the concept of leaveism: From presenteeism/absence to an emergent and expanding domain of employment? *Human Resource Management Journal*, *33*(2), 384–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12452

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