

TECH-LIFE BALANCE – BETWEEN IDEA AND PRACTICE. ENTREPRENEURS ON TECHNOLOGY AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract: The socialization of technology brings various consequences for people, society, the economy, and the environment, introducing, on the one hand, the possibility of widespread use of information technology systems, improving the work efficiency and productivity of people employed in various economic sectors. On the other hand, it contributes to phenomena such as *techno-overload*, *techno-invasion*, and the blurring of boundaries between professional and private life, which necessitates a search for tech-life balance. The results of preliminary research with entrepreneurs will be presented, examining their approach to maintaining balance in a world saturated with technology, and the significant difference between the assumptions made in their strategic documents and the reality. The topics covered in the study included:

1. documents from the surveyed entities containing references to tech-life balance activities (type, key assumptions, substantive content),
2. respondents' opinions on the main reasons for the successes and failures of the surveyed entities in maintaining a balanced approach to new technologies,
3. respondents' opinions on the role of tech-life balance principles in shaping the image of the surveyed companies/entities,
4. areas of difference between the activities declared in the surveyed entities' documents and the assessments expressed during interviews,
5. the most significant differences in the approach to tech-life balance by sector, resulting from the analyzed documents and respondents' statements.

The study was conducted from December 2024 to the end of May 2025. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 entrepreneurs. The selection criterion was their representation of a specific type of business sector from among the 21 categories in the Polish Classification of Activities (PKD).

Keywords: tech-life balance, new technology, entrepreneurs, socialization of technology, work efficiency,

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the industry so far proves that technologies have already revolutionized the socio-economic conditions three times, and contemporary forecasts regarding the development of Industry 4.0 are a premise for implementing new work patterns and thus



changing the paradigm of the concept of human resources management (Towers et al. 2006, Teagarden et al. 2008, Bahishti 2017, Khalash et al. 2022). The new reality requires the correct definition of technological potential and the possibility of implementing new, intelligent technologies and finding a balance with employee well-being (Suchacka, 2020). A particularly dramatic example of such actions was the time of the Covid-19 epidemic and the lockdown of the economy. Such a crisis has shown that an enterprise is 4.0 only when it manages to connect and integrate all activities in the field of supply chain and people management (Kamińska-Berezowska and Suchacka, 2022).

Even before the pandemic, due to changes and experiences of global crises, there was a need for a balanced approach to work, as a result of which the concept of work-life balance gained popularity (Khateeb, 2021). Initially, it was aimed at separating private life from work to limit the impact of work on the private life of employees. In the next phase, the need to harmoniously combine professional and family spheres through work-life and work-family programs was emphasized. With the development of the Internet and smart technology and the development of e-business and e-commerce, we are dealing with the third phase - tech-life (Gajdzik, 2018, 26, Lobschat et al. 2021, Mahajan and Guleria, 2022).

The interaction between technology and professional life can take various forms:

- techno-overload: intensifying the pace of work and extending the time of performing professional duties,
- techno-invasion: reaching users at any place and time, which may contribute to blurring the boundaries between work and other domains life,
- techno-complexity: cases where the complexity of ICT poses a challenge to employees; this is accompanied by a feeling of incompetence and the need to devote time and effort to learning and understanding various aspects of ICT,
- techno-insecurity: a sense of threat of losing one's job to new technologies or fear of better qualified employees,
- techno-uncertainty: a feeling of uncertainty in connection with the ongoing development ICT - knowledge quickly becomes outdated and must be constantly supplemented with current solutions (Tarafdar et al. 2008; Dragano and Lunau, 2020).

Previous research considering the importance of new technologies in shaping human activity in the private and professional spheres (Gajdzik, 2018, Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2020, Guleria, 2022, Popovici & Popovici, 2020) brings contradictory conclusions (Currie, Eveline 2011, Fernback, 2018, Heijstra, Rafndsottir, 2010). There are a lack of both conceptual clarity and a coherent concept of tech-life balance. The research focuses on selected sectors of the economy: academia (Adisa et al. 2022, Heiden et al. 2021, Potter et al. 2022) private organizations in the electricity sector (Mahajan and Guleria, 2022); banking sector (Rahaman et al., 2020) health care or fire service (Chen, 2024, Skorek, 2024), which makes it difficult to conduct comparative analyzes or formulate generalizing conclusions.

Therefore, there is a justification for a multi-sectoral study of whether and how a balance between the professional and private spheres can be maintained in the context of the use of new technologies in both spheres of life, and the introduction of the concept of tech-life balance into the research will allow for taking into account new factors that have not been analyzed so far.

2. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The main goal of the presented research is to create a set of key assumptions present in the documents of companies/entities declaring a tech-life balance policy and to compare them with practice based on interviews with representatives of specific economic sectors identified by the Polish Classification of Activities (PKD). The research was sociological in nature and based on a qualitative analysis of the collected material. Aware that qualitative research does not formulate hypotheses, the project author was guided solely by the general premise of examining the nature of discrepancies between the concept and practice of tech-life balance.

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The study was conducted from December 2024 to the end of May 2025. In-depth interviews (IDI as a research technique) were conducted with 15 entrepreneurs. The selection criterion was their representation of a specific type of business sector from among the 21 categories in the Polish Classification of Activities (PKD). Three interviews were conducted in each of the five identified sectors. An additional criterion was holding a function or taking up a position related to having knowledge in the field of tech-life balance (CEOs, directors, owners, HR, development, KM or PR directors).

3. RESULTS

Based on the analyzed interviews, references to tech-life balance (TLB) initiatives appear in various types of documents and practices depending on the economic sector. The following categories can be distinguished:

- Work regulations - in many sectors (e.g., forestry, processing, mining), regulations cover ergonomics, screen breaks, glasses reimbursement, and sometimes remote work (e.g., logistics, processing).
- HR policies and documents - for example, in forestry and finance, there are provisions on employee well-being, work-life balance, and digital hygiene training.
- Internal procedures and regulations - for example, in municipal services (clean desk policy, IT security procedures), and in processing (remote work procedures, cost accounting, breaks).
- Codes of ethics/lack of formalization - some sectors (agriculture - zoos, healthcare, education) do not have written codes of ethics or formal TLB documents. Balance is ensured through organizational practice rather than regulations.
- Collective agreements/external regulations - in fishing or trade, references arise from industry-specific regulations (e.g., catch reporting, trade monitoring) or statutory requirements for hybrid work.

- Occupational health and safety training and procedures - common in many industries (logistics, education, finance), include breaks from screens, ergonomic equipment adjustments, and digital hygiene.
- Organizational solutions - chillout rooms, offline rooms (finance, logistics, education - e.g., a phone-free garden), communication groups (WhatsApp at the zoo), and after-hours contact reduction policies.

In various economic sectors, activities related to tech-life balance are implemented through a variety of documents and practices. In some industries, formalization of these activities is minimal and relies primarily on organizational practices, while in others - such as finance or logistics - more formalized procedures and policies exist.

„In our company (mining industry), we don't yet have any documentation specifying specific activities in the area of tech life balance. We rely on work regulations, contracts, guidelines, or orders. More verbally, and here, actually, if necessary, if those eyes start to hurt, because sometimes it's like working non-stop, time slips away, so to speak, and at some point, those eyes themselves tell us, oh no, we need to step away from the computer, stretch, take a few steps, I don't know, and even grab a cup of tea or water. The awareness that technology is overwhelming us is growing in our company.” S2-R1

Some sectors utilize external regulations or collective agreements, while initiatives promoting digital hygiene and limiting contact after work hours are becoming increasingly common.

„Our fundamental document is the work regulations. As an occupational health and safety officer, I try to adhere to these recommendations regarding workplace equipment. (...) Occupational health and safety procedures and documentation regarding work ergonomics may include elements related to digital hygiene, such as breaks from screens or managing screen time.” S1-R11

Generally, the approach to tech-life balance depends on the specific industry and the degree of formalization of documents and practices.

Considering the second research question analyzed, namely, the reasons for companies' successes and failures in ensuring balance in their approach to new technologies, respondents point to several aspects as the main reasons for success. Primarily, employee openness to change and new solutions is related to the entry of a younger generation into the labor market, prepared to use new technological offerings.

„It seems to me that the employees are of varying ages. We definitely have a mixed staff, as this is a company that will soon be operating for 20 years. There are people with a lot of experience with the company, but there are also people in their forties, and I think they're already in their fifties. There are also very young people. We have interns, meaning you can start with an intern, so I think interns are usually in their second or third year of studies. We have a mixed staff, with young people and those already very experienced. Yes, and I think that attitude means a lot to us. It's hard for me to express it for others. I think that to the extent that we get it, we simply have the opportunity to use it.” S4-R1

Another important issue is training and support in technology implementation - companies that provide implementation training and have competent staff are more successful. This facilitates adaptation to the market and customers, and the use of technology in marketing and customer service brings tangible results. Another advantage is efficient compliance

¹ „S” denotes the sector according to the Polish Classification of Activities, and R1 ...R2 denotes the next respondent

with laws and regulations - anticipating and implementing legally compliant solutions builds trust and image.

"It depends on our commitment, our familiarity with the tool, and our full utilization. To this day, I assume that not everyone is 100% proficient with Word and Excel, so I don't think everyone knows Facebook's features either, because we tend to repeat things, repeat patterns. Unless someone discovers something new, and then we actually need it. However, I don't see this as a failure; I see failure in not fully understanding the program's instructions, that's how I would put it. Chaos, panic, terror, the kind of fear that accompanies the introduction of all these regulations, because GDPR was the same. After all, everyone was terrified at first, but today it's become commonplace, until someone is affected and faces a court judgment." S3-R2

A clear strategic vision is also a clear source of success - organizations that treat technology as a tool supporting business goals, not as an end in itself (e.g., processing). Among the most common causes of failure, interviewees cited resistance from some employees - especially older ones, who prefer existing solutions and struggle to adapt (e.g., forestry, fishing, zoos, logistics). Technology costs are also a problem - in some industries (e.g., fishing, construction), equipment is very expensive, limiting the pace of modernization. Lack of integration and the purchase of systems that are not used in practice (processing) - "technology that is an end in itself" - were also cited. Interviewees also emphasized regulatory chaos and fear of change - for example, the implementation of GDPR or new regulations initially sparked panic and concern (municipal services, trade). Incompetent implementations and delays also became a problem - introducing solutions too late or lack of professional training (administration/education).

Taking into account respondents' opinions on the role of tech-life balance principles in shaping the image of the companies/entities studied, the study verified whether the companies had a dedicated office/department/person dedicated to tech-life balance.

„We don't have an office, department, unit, or even a single person who specifically deals with digital issues, i.e., digital hygiene. Not a single person who ensures all of this is up-to-date, training, ongoing work on equipment arrivals, ensuring employees know what's going on and how, protecting it... As you say, I'm a bit of me, a bit of an IT specialist, and—depending on the department—that person from that department handles it. We don't typically have positions for that. So, it's like a behavioral health specialist, an IT specialist, plus a manager for each department, who, I don't know, is having their equipment or software replaced." S1-R1

Interviews indicate that in most sectors, there are no formal offices or positions dedicated solely to TLB.

„We have a hybrid, and that's mostly how it is, fortunately/unfortunately, it depends on the company's structure. It's a hybrid, meaning one woman handles it, someone from health and safety handles it, the HR woman comes in, and then an IT specialist. So we have a team of people here, and we're planning, I don't know, a technology change or a system change. But it's probably even advisable for it to look like this, because these needs stem from different organizational units, different people, and different work styles." S2-R1

Responsibilities are dispersed, and TLB-related tasks are shared among various individuals (OSH, HR, HR, IT, department managers). Some companies have project groups - partially separate solutions - with individuals in the HR/HR or training departments responsible for TLB issues (e.g., logistics, processing, finance, healthcare).

More comprehensive solutions appear sporadically (e.g., in the financial or healthcare sectors).

"We have people here who are responsible for tech life balance, meaning training, implementing all kinds of innovations, and supervising cybersecurity. As for everything else, meaning the work culture—what's involved with translation, conversations, and the psychologist—I'm the one responsible for that." S5-R3

Furthermore, respondents were asked whether they saw a connection between applying TLB principles and shaping the company's image. It should be emphasized that companies treat TLB activities as part of employee care - although in practice, it is often implemented ad hoc, alongside other activities. Building a positive image by implementing TLB initiatives (training, ergonomics, psychological support, and digital hygiene monitoring) fosters the image of a modern and socially responsible company. However, the lack of separate structures may indicate that TLB is not yet treated as a strategic priority, but rather as an addition or an image element.

A significant element of the interviews was the interviewees' identification of the main areas of difference between the declarations contained in organizational documents and the TLB policy statements made during the interviews. As interviewees noted, the documents often declare a "no email/phone after hours" policy, yet in practice, many employees answer phone calls or check work emails out of loyalty to their superiors or out of habit.

"The CEO calls on Saturday – I can, I don't have to, but I want to, I want to, and I'll answer. It's the same principle, because, as I said, it's not about overwhelming you with unknown tasks, but maybe asking for something or something. I don't know. The CEO is also a very empathetic person, and I can't say that he treats us here... I'll put it another way: he treats us well. So I guess that means it's not a problem, right? For us, for example, to answer the phone, because it's not necessary either. Well, he'll send an email, because it actually happened to me this time, but I didn't even know it had arrived. I read it when I returned to work on Monday. So, it wasn't sent specifically to be read when I was at work." S2-R1

The interviews indicate that formally there is no such obligation, but the actual practices differ - contact after work is accepted or even expected. Furthermore, the documents emphasize the existence of procedures, regulations, and tools supporting remote work and flexible working hours. However, the interviews reveal a discrepancy: some employees feel genuine support, while others report difficulties, a lack of control, or resistance to new technologies.

„Sometimes it happens that these modern technologies get in the way. Some lady, Krysia, says: 'I'm already close to retirement, or I should be,' and then they give me some new program, a new computer, and sometimes the company can fail because the employees' attitude towards modern technologies can be such that we won't learn it." S2-R3

Companies profess to care for tech-life balance by introducing screen breaks, regulating working hours, and implementing other related procedural and organizational measures. Employees emphasize that in practice, much depends on personal relationships and the "goodwill" of management, not on formal policies. In company documents, they present the implementation of modern tools and solutions as part of their strategy. In practice, some employees (especially older ones) experience resistance to new technologies, and the pace of implementation is slower than advertised.

The last important point in the analysis of the empirical material was to identify the most significant differences in the approach to the balance between technology and private life in individual sectors, resulting from the analyzed documents and respondents' statements. The main differences in the existing documents can be summarised in a few observations. In traditional sectors (agriculture, fishing, forestry, construction, mining), there are no formal documents dedicated to the TLB; activities are dispersed, based on work regulations, health and safety procedures, and organizational practices. Service and office sectors (finance, trade, logistics, administration) are characterized by stronger formalization: hybrid work, HR policies, remote work and monitoring procedures, and regular training. Public and educational sectors (schools, healthcare, administration) use less formalized provisions, but practical measures for digital hygiene are visible (task diversification, phone bans, offline spaces). In modern sectors (processing, finance, logistics), the TLB is becoming part of the employee well-being management strategy and is incorporated into annual appraisals, HR procedures, and IT tools. In summary, in traditional sectors, TLB is more a result of practice and common sense measures (breaks, ergonomics, flexibility), while in the office and service sectors there is more formalization in HR documents, remote work procedures, organizational policies and training.

Among the most significant differences between economic sectors, it's worth emphasizing that in traditional sectors (forestry, fishing, agriculture), the main challenges are employee age and attitude, as well as high equipment costs. Success is linked to adapting to the market and gradually overcoming resistance. In industrial and processing sectors, digital culture, integrating technology into processes, and anticipating regulatory changes are crucial. In service sectors (logistics, trade, utilities), employee competencies and their psychological approach (anxiety, resistance to new things) dominate. Meanwhile, in sectors related to finance and administration/education, greater emphasis is placed on safety, legal compliance, reputation, and image certifications. Success stems from the professionalization of implementation and quality control. Therefore, it can be concluded that human factors (attitude, age, openness), costs, and the pace of technological change determine successes and failures. Sectoral differences result from the nature of the work - in traditional industries the problem is adaptation, in services and finance - regulations and image, and in processing - integration of technology with processes.

In traditional sectors (forestry, agriculture, fisheries), TLB activities are undertaken incidentally and dispersed across various functions, lacking dedicated units. However, in the industrial and service sectors, hybrid solutions are present, where tasks are divided between HR, occupational health and safety, and IT specialists; there is a greater need for coordination. In professional and social sectors (finance, healthcare, and partially education), the separation of activities and individuals responsible for TLB is more evident; there is also a greater awareness of the link between these activities and work quality and image. In summary, companies typically do not have dedicated TLB offices, but rather hybrid and distributed solutions. From an image perspective, implementing TLB serves to demonstrate employee care, but sectoral differences indicate that the more modern/service-oriented the sector, the greater the tendency to institutionalize TLB.

Pointing out the main differences between sectors regarding the discrepancies between TLB declarations and practices, it is worth emphasizing that the public and education sectors more often declare formal rules (e.g., prohibition of after-hours contact, remote work regulations), but in practice, compliance with them can be selective; building the institution's image as employee-friendly is more important. In the private sector

(manufacturing, services), greater emphasis is placed on efficiency and flexibility. Documents emphasize procedures and tools, but actual actions depend on financial capabilities and practical needs (e.g., customer service, seasonality). Smaller organizations more often indicate that formal regulations are limited, and practices are based on intuition and relationships. Larger and more dispersed organizations, on the other hand, implement formalized rules (remote work procedures, digital hygiene), but in practice, pressure for after-hours availability still arises.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this qualitative study reveal complex and uneven interpretations and operationalizations of the concept of technology-life balance (TLB) across various economic sectors in Poland. Empirical evidence, derived from interviews with organizational leaders and analysis of internal documents, indicates a clear discrepancy between declared policies and everyday practices. From a sociological perspective, these findings shed light on the dynamic interplay between technological rationalization, organizational culture, and human agency in shaping the actual experience of using technology at work.

First, the observed differences between declared TLB policies and their practical implementation can be interpreted through the lens of institutional theory and symbolic interactionism. Documents and codes of conduct act as institutional artifacts - symbolic markers of modernity, responsibility, and concern for employees. However, everyday practices often reveal a process of "decoupling" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), in which formal structures exist primarily for legitimization and image-building purposes rather than actual behavioral change. Employees' continued use of technology for work after hours, despite formal "no-contact" policies, suggests that organizational norms and micro-interactions shape actual behavior more than written rules. Symbolically, responding to work communications outside of working hours often functions as a sign of loyalty or professional commitment, reproducing a culture of accessibility that contradicts formal rules of balance.

Second, sectoral differences in TLB implementation reflect structural variations in work environments and varying degrees of digitalization within individual sectors. Traditional industries - such as forestry, agriculture, and fishing - rely on informal practices and common-sense solutions rather than codified rules. In these cases, organizational practices are shaped by a craft-based work culture and limited technological infrastructure. In contrast, service-oriented and administrative sectors, where knowledge and communication technologies play a key role, demonstrate a stronger formalization of TLB initiatives. This finding is consistent with systems theory, which posits that an organization's adaptation to technology depends on the co-evolution of technical and social subsystems. In highly digitalized sectors, TLB becomes a management strategy aimed at maintaining employee well-being, productivity, and company reputation - rather than simply an ethical issue.

A third important finding concerns the role of human factors in mediating technological change. (Grebski and Mazur, 2022). Respondents repeatedly highlighted generational differences, employee attitudes, and resistance to new technologies as key factors in both success and failure in implementing TLB principles. These observations are consistent with recent quantitative studies on Polish enterprises, which identify the need for employee adaptation to new skills and concerns about technology implementation costs

as significant barriers to digital transformation (Ślusarczyk & Wiśniewska 2024). From a work sociology perspective, this points to a persistent tension between the pressures of modernization and employee identity. Older workers, raised in less digitalized work environments, often perceive new technological procedures as invasive or destabilizing. This is consistent with research on digital work and technostress, which emphasizes that the subjective experience of technology depends not only on access and competence but also on the cultural meanings attached to work, autonomy, and time.

Furthermore, the lack of dedicated TLB units in most organizations demonstrates the fragmentation of the institutionalization process. Responsibility for TLB is often distributed among HR, health and safety, and IT departments, leading to hybrid management. From an organizational sociology perspective, this hybridization reflects the early stage of institutional maturity of TLB practices. Companies are implementing partial measures - ergonomics training, digital hygiene programs, and after-hours communication policies - but these remain peripheral to core strategic management. The discourse of "employee well-being" thus functions as an emerging form of organizational legitimization, particularly visible in the financial and service sectors.

The practical implications of these findings are significant. For organizational leaders, TLB should not be limited to symbolic declarations or image-building tools. Instead, it requires commitment, managerial accountability, and clear integration with HR and IT systems. Creating dedicated TLB coordinators or cross-departmental teams could ensure continuity and consistency in implementation. Furthermore, training programs focused on digital self-regulation and time management should be adapted to generational differences in technological competencies. At the policy level, the research demonstrates how the boundary between work and private life is negotiated in organizational contexts. The findings support the notion that TLB is not merely an individual responsibility but a collective and institutional process shaped by power relations, organizational hierarchies, and sectoral norms. Future research could deepen understanding of the interplay between the symbolic and material dimensions of digitalization - analyzing, for example, how technologies aimed at enhancing well-being (e.g., monitoring apps, digital detox initiatives) simultaneously enhance managerial control and self-control.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, the qualitative design and small sample size (15 interviews across five sectors) limit the generalizability of the results. Second, the study relies on self-report data from management representatives, which may introduce bias and downplay informal practices that contradict official policies. Third, the time frame of the study (six months) reflects only a snapshot of organizational dynamics. Longitudinal studies could reveal whether TLB initiatives evolve or stagnate over time.

Nevertheless, the study provides valuable insights into how organizations articulate, negotiate, and implement technology-life balance in different socioeconomic contexts. The findings encourage further comparative research across countries and organizational sizes, as well as in-depth ethnographic analysis of everyday TLB implementation in the workplace. Understanding how technological boundaries are collectively maintained - or blurred - remains crucial for both sociological theory and the practice of responsible digitalization.

5. CONCLUSION

The study examined how organizations across different economic sectors interpret and apply the principles of tech-life balance (TLB) in their internal policies and everyday practices. Based on qualitative analysis of company documents and interviews with organizational representatives, the research identified significant discrepancies between declared strategies and actual implementation. While most entities formally refer to employee well-being, digital hygiene, or after-hours disconnection, in practice these rules are often informal, inconsistently applied, or subordinated to productivity pressures. Traditional sectors tend to rely on intuitive, non-documented solutions, whereas service-oriented and financial sectors show higher degrees of institutionalization and integration of TLB principles into HR and IT systems. The study highlights that organizational culture, generational differences, and leadership attitudes strongly shape the real experience of balance between technology and private life.

The results demonstrate that TLB is still at an early stage of organizational institutionalization, functioning primarily as a symbolic expression of care and modernity. Effective implementation requires structural integration, clear accountability, and cross-departmental coordination. The findings contribute to sociological understanding of how digitalization transforms work and organizational norms, showing that tech-life balance is not merely an individual issue but a collective and institutional process. Future research should extend these findings through comparative and longitudinal approaches to explore how organizations can develop sustainable, inclusive, and genuinely balanced technological cultures.

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