

Work-Life Balance in Home-Office Contexts Exploring Productivity, Stress, and Boundary Management in Remote Work

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of home-office arrangement on work-life balance (WLB) with reference to productivity, stress, and boundary management. The study makes use of the answers of 112 participants that were collected from an online questionnaire and concludes that both the positives and negatives of working remotely prevail. While 65.2% of sample members felt more WLB and 71.5% were more productive, availability-all-the-time-causing-stress was the major issue experienced, primarily by caregivers. The study highlights the importance of technical infrastructure, boundary management tactics, and organizational support in ensuring the full potential of WLB benefits. Such conclusions guide theoretical models like Boundary Theory and the Job Demands-Resources Model and offer practical recommendations to employers and policy-makers.

Keywords

work-life balance, home-office, remote work, productivity, stress management

Introduction

Increased telework popularity, driven by the global COVID-19 pandemic, has reorganized traditional workplace hierarchies in a number of significant ways. Maybe most noteworthy has been the trend toward home office arrangements, which have benefited and harmed employees and organizations alike. One of the most significant problems in this context is the potential impact on work-life balance (WLB), which is widely accepted to be at the core of employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and performance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Allen et al., 2020).

Work-life balance refers to the balance between work life and personal life, including the capacity to manage work demands without compromising personal needs (Clark, 2000). While independence that arises from home-office arrangements might enable higher numbers of freedom in terms of time management, it has also helped blur the lines between work and life. This dualism has necessitated exploring WLB in remote working contexts a pertinent topic of theoretical and practical research (Allen et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021).

With growing attention, empirical evidence of WLB in home-offices is sporadic. Much of what exists treats isolated topics, such as stress through permanent availability or impacts of technological support, and does not paint a picture (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Messenger, 2019). Demographic factors such as age, gender, and household structure are under-developed, but ought to inform variation in individuals' remote work experience (Chung et al., 2021).

The present study is trying to bridge these gaps by studying the work-life balance of employees who are operating home-office setups, with particular emphasis on the interrelationship of demographic variables, work-related variables, and psychosocial variables. Specifically, the present study is trying to answer the following research questions:

1. How does working from home influence employees' ability to maintain work-life balance compared to traditional office settings?
2. What demographic and situational factors moderate the relationship between home-office work and WLB?
3. What are the implications of these findings for organizational policies and employee well-being initiatives?

This study contributes to the growing body of literature by bringing together a high number of variables within a single empirical model. It is quantitative from the data of 112 respondents, gathered through an online questionnaire. Statistical analyses like correlation and factor analyses explain the relationship between home-office settings, WLB, and resultant outcomes like stress and productivity. By placing these findings within contemporary theoretical models, the Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this article not only provides a theoretical contribution, but also offers practice guidelines to employers and policymakers. The implications are likely to guide hybrid work environment design in response to flexibility and boundary and support mechanisms needs.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical underpinnings of this current research draw upon well-proven theories and constructs explaining work-life balance (WLB) in the framework of home-office organizations. This section's discussion presents a compilation of the most pertinent theories and empirical research substantiating the study, with its focus on the application to telework.

Work-life balance has also been termed a state of affairs where one can actually balance work and personal requirements without the dynamic interplay between either context having a major influence (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The paradigm is a call for the dynamic interplay between work requirements and personal life and includes both external (e.g., working time) and internal factors (e.g., feeling in control of one's time). In the home office situation, WLB becomes most significantly across role boundaries. Teleworking will blur work and private time-space boundaries so that one needs to develop cognition and behavior habits for balance attainment (Clark, 2000). It is particularly pertinent under the present trends of using digital communication technology application, which can increase the issue of "being always available" (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

Boundary Theory, contended by Ashforth et al. (2000), is a salient conceptual scheme under which WLB may be explored in home-office environments. The theory contends that individuals shuttle among varying roles (e.g., parent, employee) through boundary-making and boundary-maintenance. Boundaries can either be segmented, such that differences are pronounced among the various roles, or integrated, where roles blur together. Though flexibility can be achieved through role integration, it tends to increase the frequency of role conflict, particularly for home-office work where spatial and temporal boundaries essentially become nonexistent (Allen et al., 2014). Empirical evidence has indeed shown that the degree of segmentation or integration of roles has a tangible effect on the results of WLB. For instance, research by Kossek et al. (2012) revealed that employees with high reported segmentation strategies had lower work-family conflict, highlighting boundary management in order to maintain WLB.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) offers a complementary model by viewing WLB as a function of work demands and resources. Job demands are framed as the aspects of work that require ongoing effort, i.e., extended working hours or high performance demands, and may lead to burnout and stress. On the other hand, job resources, such as flexible working hours or supportive management, evoke motivation and buffer demand's negative effects. In the context of home-office work, the JD-R Model emphasizes the two-faced nature of technology. While digital technologies can function as job resources by enabling flexibility and productivity, they can also function as job demands by promoting permanent connectivity and intrusion into personal time (Messenger, 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that the availability of supportive resources, such as good communication policies and adequate technical infrastructure, can significantly enhance employees' ability to achieve WLB (Wang et al., 2021).

Earlier work has produced inconclusive evidence about the influence of home-office behavior on WLB. Felstead and Henseke (2017) observed that telework tends to enhance perceived autonomy and thus enhance

WLB in workers able to effectively regulate their timetables. Wang et al. (2021) suggested that absence of clear-cut boundaries between job and non-work roles is destined to enhance stress and conflict of roles, particularly for caregivers. Demographic variables such as age, sex, and domestic composition are also responsible connection between work-life balance and home-office work. Chung et al. (2021) set up the fact that females, particularly when they have small children, report higher role conflict with working at home. Age-old employees would also struggle in mastering computer packages, reducing the benefit of work-from-home activities (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020). Although reflective comments are found in the literature, several gaps are illustrated. First, research is relatively rare into the ways in which individuals' characteristics interact with situational and organizational factors to influence WLB in home-office settings. Second, little systematic research has investigated the role of moderating variables, for instance, the technical infrastructure quality or the organizational culture, to offset the remote work challenges.

Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to investigate the association between home-office work and WLB. Demographic factors, organizational support, and psychosocial conditions as predictors of WLB were aimed at determining significant in a diverse group of participants. Methodological decisions were made in parallel with the research aims to obtain a valid and practicable set of findings.

Recruitment occurred through professional networks, social media, and organizational membership to target individuals with remote working experience for over six months. Of 128 individuals contacted, 112 completed the survey, giving a response rate of 87.5%. The sample was demographically and professionally diverse, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the study. Average participant age was 41.3 years, roughly evenly divided between the four broad age groups: 20–30 years (21.4%), 31–40 years (33.9%), 41–50 years (28.6%), 51–60 years (16.1%). Gender distribution had a higher proportion of female participants (51.8%), followed by men (42.9%), and fewer individuals as non-binary or varied (5.3%). From family set-up, 55.4% were married, 25% were single, 14.3% separated or divorced, and 5.3% were widowed. For offspring, 62.5% had one or more offspring, while the rest did not have dependents.

The data collection instrument was an online survey done between January and February 2024. The four-section questionnaire collected demographic information on variables such as age, gender, marital status, education, and residence. The second section of the questionnaire measured WLB based on adapted items from Clark's (2000) Work-Life Balance scale where

the respondents answered on a five-point Likert scale to indicate how much they agreed with the statements. Sample items were: "I am able to more clearly separate work and personal life in the home-office than when working in the office." The third dimension assessed work environment and productivity with items from the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Examples included: "My productivity is enhanced by working at home" and "Technical equipment provided by my employer assists me well at work.". Finally, the questionnaire also tested stress and boundary management theory from Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), in the way that instances of statements included, e.g., "I have trouble establishing boundaries between professional and private life at home-office."

Ten participants were pre-tested for the reason of cross-checking validity and clarity. Minor changes were made because of feedback to improve readability on some items.

SPSS (Version 28) was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics was utilized in reporting participant response, for instance means and standard deviations of primary variables. Correlation analysis was utilized in investigating inter-relationship of variables, for instance how the household number of children relates with perceived stress ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Group differences were analyzed with independent samples t-tests and ANOVA to identify WLB outcomes for demographic categories, such as gender and age.

WLB determinants were established using principal component analysis. Five principal components arose through the analysis and accounted for 75% of variance. These were technical infrastructure (18%), social integration (16%), work-life balance (15%), productivity (14%), and stress management (12%). The results supported the multidimensional construct of WLB in home-office setups.

Ethical considerations were of utmost concern during the study. Volunteers provided informed consent and were promised confidentiality and anonymity of response. Ethical clearance was provided by the respective institutional review board. While the research design enabled the collection of huge amounts of quantitative data, limitations existed in terms of use of self-report measures and the inherent limitations of cross-sectional analysis, precluding causal inference.

Results

Participants were asked to judge whether they could perform better in separating work and home life in the home-office than in a standard office. The results indicated that the majority of 65.2% agreed or strongly agreed that they could do so better, which indicates potential for teleworking to facilitate WLB by many. Response category scale is presented in **Figure 1** below:

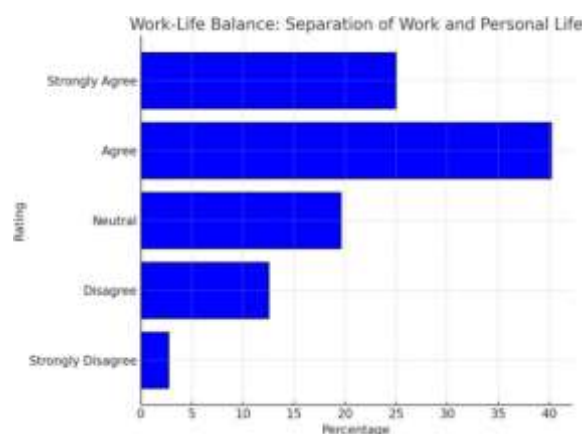


Figure 1. Perceived Ability to Separate Work and Personal Life in Home-Office Settings

The second most significant characteristic of WLB being examined in this study was stress caused by constant availability in teleworking settings. Responses revealed a polarized opinion with 37.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that stress increased through constant availability. The highest percentage of 33.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating diversity in coping and individual experience. This diversity is evident in **Figure 2**.

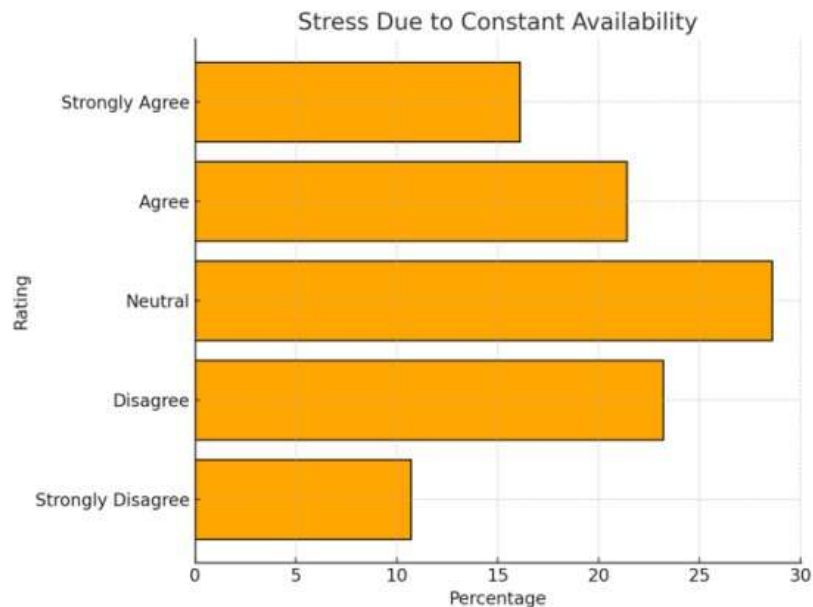


Figure 2. Reported Stress Due to Constant Availability While Teleworking (in %)

The majority of the respondents thought that they were more productive at home, and 71.5% of them were strong on agreement on the fact that their productivity was greater in the home office than in the traditional office. This is one of the most common advantages mentioned as a result of working from home. The frequency distribution is illustrated in **Figure 3**.

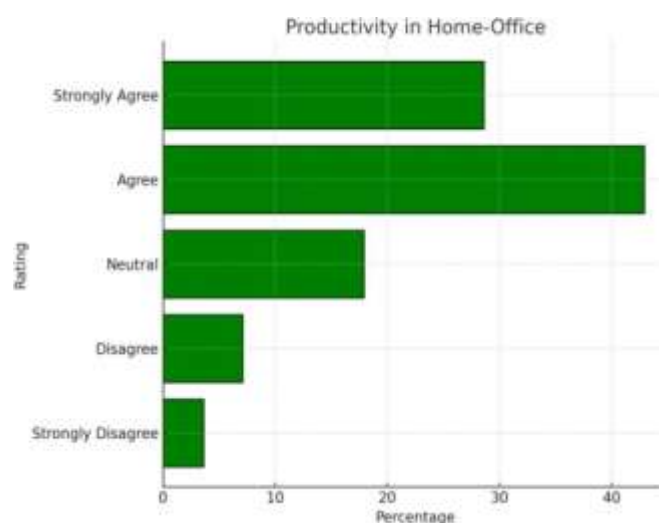


Figure 3. Self-Assessed Productivity in Home-Office Compared to Traditional Office (in %)

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant correlations among main variables:

- Strong positive correlation between home-office frequency and perceived productivity ($r=0.68$, $p<0.001$; $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$; $r=0.68$, $p<0.001$).
- Moderate positive correlation between the number of children in the household and stress levels ($r=0.54$, $p<0.001$; $r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$; $r=0.54$, $p<0.001$).
- Moderate negative correlation between age and digital competence ($r=-0.42$, $p<0.01$; $r = -0.42$, $p<0.01$; $r=-0.42$, $p<0.01$).

These findings suggest that the occurrence of telework, family care responsibilities, and age-based e-skills are significant predictors of WLB and productivity outcomes.

A principal component analysis identified five main factors explaining 75% of the variance in WLB outcomes. These were:

1. Technical Infrastructure (18%)
2. Social Integration (16%)
3. Work-Life Balance (15%)
4. Productivity (14%)
5. Stress Management (12%)

These highlight the multidimensionality of WLB in home offices where organizational and individual resources are significant.

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide intriguing information about the intricate work-life balance (WLB) dynamics of home-office arrangements, both positive and negative.

One of the most robust outcomes of the study was the participants' self-report that work-life balance enhanced at home-office. The majority (65.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that working from home enhanced their WLB, showing that flexibility of home-office setting can successfully allow workers to more effectively balance work and personal requirements. These are results that are in line with previous research carried out by Allen et al. (2014), indicating time flexibility as the basis for improving WLB in remote work situations. Such results also vary from the research that is aimed at fuzzy boundary issues, e.g., dealing with caregiving employees or poor physical workspaces to work in (Wang et al., 2021). The variation is likely attributable to variations in boundary management styles, according to Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000). According to this theory, individual differences in the propensity for compartmentalization or blurring of work and non-work spheres are at the heart. Participants who successfully established clear boundaries between their home-offices likely benefited more from telecommuting than participants with role conflict. Follow-up studies can examine how specific arrangements, e.g., proper work areas or scheduled calendars, support the connection between telecommuting and WLB.

Though a majority of the respondents reported favorable WLB, stress was an area of concern of substance for a notable share. Approximately 37.5% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that being constantly connected increased their stress level. The observation substantiates Felstead and Henseke (2017) findings, which captured the psychological stress of connectivity in virtual working setups. According to the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), chronic connectivity is one of the most important job demands that can raise stress and undermine WLB. Contrary to expectations, the correlation analysis revealed that the respondents with children at home reported higher levels of stress ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$), which is the double burden of caregivers. These findings are consistent with those of Chung et al. (2021), which measured the extent to which women, in general, experience increased role conflict in attempting to balance caregiving responsibilities and teleworking. The

gender gap in household labor remains a common barrier to achieving gender-balanced WLB outcomes. Policymakers and institutions must correct these structural imbalances by adopting family-friendly policies, such as subsidized child care or extended leave for caregivers, to reduce stress and increase productivity.

The 71.5% agreement or strong agreement of the respondents that productivity is higher in the home-office is one of the main advantages of telecommuting. The findings are in agreement with Bloom et al. (2015), where there is higher productivity among teleworkers because there is less distraction in offices and shorter traveling times. But the positive relationship between home-office frequency and productivity ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that adjustment is warranted. Remote workers on a daily basis can be more good habits and technical proficiency, which amount to higher productivity. There were productivity differences by gender, with men receiving a marginally higher productivity rating than women. This can be explained by deeply rooted gendered tendencies, where women still bear an inordinate amount of household labor even in two-income families (Chung et al., 2021). These tendencies might lead women to discount themselves as being able to wring out the maximum amount of remote work productivity. These inequalities must be met by both organizational support in the form of fair distribution of workload and societal reforms overturning conventional gender roles.

Technical infrastructure and social integration were also found to be predictors of WLB according to the factor analysis. Technical infrastructure explained 18% of the variance and was most critical in enabling employees to excel at their job. This is supported by a study that was conducted by Messenger (2019), where it emphasized the significance of efficient digital tools and training in enabling remote work performance. People who enjoyed stable internet, ergonomic machinery, and effective communication devices were less disrupted and more job-satisfied. Social integration, accounting for 16% of variance, highlights the importance of inter-human relations in alleviating the loneliness prevalent in telecommuting. Home-office offers greater control, but also reduces the probability of impromptu social encounters and group cohesion. This conclusion is supported by van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020), who claimed that the lack of spontaneous social contact in online workplaces can be negatively affecting staff wellbeing. Organizations should thus emphasize building virtual teaming and virtual space for rich connections, like arranging virtual team-building activities or planned one-on-ones.

The findings of this study contribute to the external validity of relevant theoretical models. Boundary Theory is supported by variation in boundary management strategies discovered across demographic groups and work environments. The study contributes to the Job Demands-Resources Model by specifying certain demands (e.g., constant availability) and resources (e.g., technical hardware, social coherence) influencing WLB in home-office environments. These findings suggest that the two models are still very relevant but require further refinement to account for the unique dynamics of telework. The research also suggests that intersectional factors, such as gender, age, and household structure, must be incorporated into WLB research. The high correlations among these variables and significant outcomes such as stress and productivity justify a systems approach with the inclusion of individual, organizational, and societal factors.

These results have important practical implications. It is important that organizations recognize that while remote work provides a huge benefit, it does place the employees under some special stresses that need to be taken care of intentionally. Formal communication strategies, e.g., "off-hours," can help reduce burdens of perpetual on-line availability. Technological facilities investment, e.g., training programs, can also propel productivity and curtail digital competency shortages, most particularly for older members of staff. Policymakers can consider implementing more extensive structural changes, such as tax rebates for home-

office setups or caregiver allowances, to make remote work institutionalized at the societal level. These policies can reduce disparities and allow the advantages of remote work to be accessible to all segments of society.

Despite its strengths, this research is not without its limitations. Causal inference is limited by the cross-sectional design, and the reliance on self-reported data carries the risk of bias. Further, while the sample was diverse, it is possible that it did not reflect every industry or occupational function. Longitudinal designs would be required for future research to be in a position to examine WLB as it evolves over time and in response to organizational policy changes. Qualitative methods, such as focus groups or interviews, can provide more profound insight into the life experiences of specific demographic segments. Further, an exploration of how organizational culture impacts remote work experiences would also be an interesting subject for further research. Generally, this study accentuates the multidimensionality of WLB within the home-office setting, contributing to both theory and practice. The findings underscore the need for personalized responses to workers' diverse needs in a way that accommodates flexibility, equity, and well-being.

Conclusion

This study highlights complex work-life balance (WLB) processes of home-office settings. While flexibility in remote working enhances WLB and performance for the majority of workers, stressful elements such as perpetual availability and boundary management exist, particularly for caregivers and those with poor technical competence. Results affirm organizational and societal support as the main determinants to enhance remote working benefits to the maximum. Investment in technology skills, equitable workload, and communication policy is most important in transcending the identified challenges. Possibly even more important, however, is the need for sensitivity to differences along demographic lines of gender and family caregiving roles. Future studies will have to control for these dynamics longitudinally and with qualitative and intersectional approaches to create more insight into the ways that remote work is impacting varied groups. By surpassing these, policymakers and organizations can establish work patterns that comprise flexibility and fairness and well-being.

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