

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Digitalisation has transformed how work is organised, managed, and experienced in recent years. These changes, reflected in emerging digital workplace environments, have blurred the boundaries between professional and private life, making work-life balance a critical aspect of sustainable employment. This study reviews and synthesises recent academic research on work-life balance in digital workplace environments to identify key research trends and gaps. A systematic literature review is used as a method to achieve the research objective. Fifty-six articles were identified as relevant using the PRISMA method and then grouped into four clusters based on the research streams – technology, telework and work-life balance, organisational and managerial factors, individual resources and coping mechanisms, and structural and contextual trends. The findings will contribute to both academic and practical debate by clarifying current research trends and highlighting opportunities to develop more sustainable, human-centred approaches to digital work.

Keywords: Digital Workplace, Work-Life Balance, Technostress, Remote Work, Management

<https://doi.org/10.11118/978-80-7701-082-5-0130>

JEL Code: J22, M15, M54, O33

Introduction

The digital workplace has become the defining context of modern employment, transforming how, where, and when people work. It represents an integrated socio-technical ecosystem of communication platforms, collaborative software, cloud services, and mobile devices that extend organisational activity beyond the traditional office (Williams, 2019; Dery, 2017). Within this environment, digitalisation enables greater flexibility and real-time collaboration, yet also reconfigures the boundaries between professional and private life.

The global expansion of digital workplace systems accelerated sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, when large-scale telework and hybrid arrangements became essential for business continuity (Wang *et al.*, 2021; OECD, 2021). As these models persisted beyond the crisis, the digital workplace evolved from a temporary adaptation into an enduring infrastructure of knowledge work. Research shows, however, that constant connectivity and asynchronous communication have blurred distinctions between work and personal time, generating both new freedoms and new forms of strain (Messenger, 2019; Marsh *et al.*, 2024).

This duality lies at the centre of current debates on work-life balance (WLB). Technology offers autonomy, mobility, and time control, but it also amplifies the pressure to remain permanently available. Scholars describe this tension as the autonomy paradox – workers gain flexibility yet experience increased expectations for responsiveness (Mazmanian, 2013; Tarafdar *et al.*, 2019). When digital engagement extends beyond contractual hours, recovery and psychological detachment become limited, undermining well-being and performance (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Barber and Santuzzi, 2014).

At the same time, organisational cultures and leadership practices critically shape these outcomes. Supportive digital leadership behaviours, clear communication norms, and right-to-disconnect policies can protect boundaries and mitigate technostress, whereas unregulated communication climates intensify overload (McDowall and Kinman, 2017; Lerouge and Pons, 2022). Yet, as recent reviews emphasise, research on these mechanisms remains fragmented. Studies tend to isolate individual coping strategies, organisational interventions, or policy frameworks instead of examining how they interact within the broader digital workplace system (Eurofound, 2021; WRC, 2021).

This review addresses that gap by synthesising contemporary research on work-life balance in digital workplace environments published between 2020 and 2025. It aims to identify the dominant research streams, highlight their intersections, and propose directions for future inquiry.

Work-Life Balance in the Digital Workplace

The digital transformation of work over the past decade has reshaped where, when, and how employees perform their roles. The term digital workplace describes an ecosystem of interconnected technologies – communication platforms, collaborative software, cloud storage, and mobile devices – that extend organisational activity beyond physical offices (Williams, 2019; Dery, 2017). Once considered complementary to face-to-face collaboration, digital tools have become the primary infrastructure of work. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, making telework and hybrid models enduring components of employment systems (Wang, 2021; OECD, 2021).

Digitalisation has altered the temporal and spatial structures of work, as constant connectivity and asynchronous communication blur the traditional distinctions between paid and private time (Messenger, 2019; Marsh *et al.*, 2024). Employees increasingly navigate what Wajcman (2008) called “families without borders,” households in which digital technology integrates professional obligations into domestic routines. While these arrangements offer greater autonomy and time flexibility, they also generate new expectations of continuous availability.

At the organisational level, digitalisation demands new forms of coordination and leadership. Williams (2019) identifies the digital workplace as both a technical and social design challenge, requiring a balance between connectivity and focus. Flexible, technology-enabled work environments promote collaboration and innovation (Dery, 2017) but also intensify information flow and cognitive load (Barley *et al.*, 2011). Research from Eurofound (2021) indicates that EU organisations differ markedly in how they regulate digital communication. Recent policy initiatives, such as Ireland’s Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect (WRC, 2021), illustrate growing institutional recognition that unbounded digital work can threaten employee well-being and equity.

While digitalisation has expanded flexibility and autonomy, it has also introduced new forms of strain collectively conceptualised as technostress. Tarafdar *et al.* (2007, 2019) define technostress as the stress experienced by individuals due to their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), characterised by technostress creators such as overload, invasion, complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty. Spagnoli *et al.* (2020) and Dettmers (2017) extend this framework by demonstrating that constant connectivity amplifies perceived workload and fatigue, particularly when employees are unable to psychologically detach after work hours.

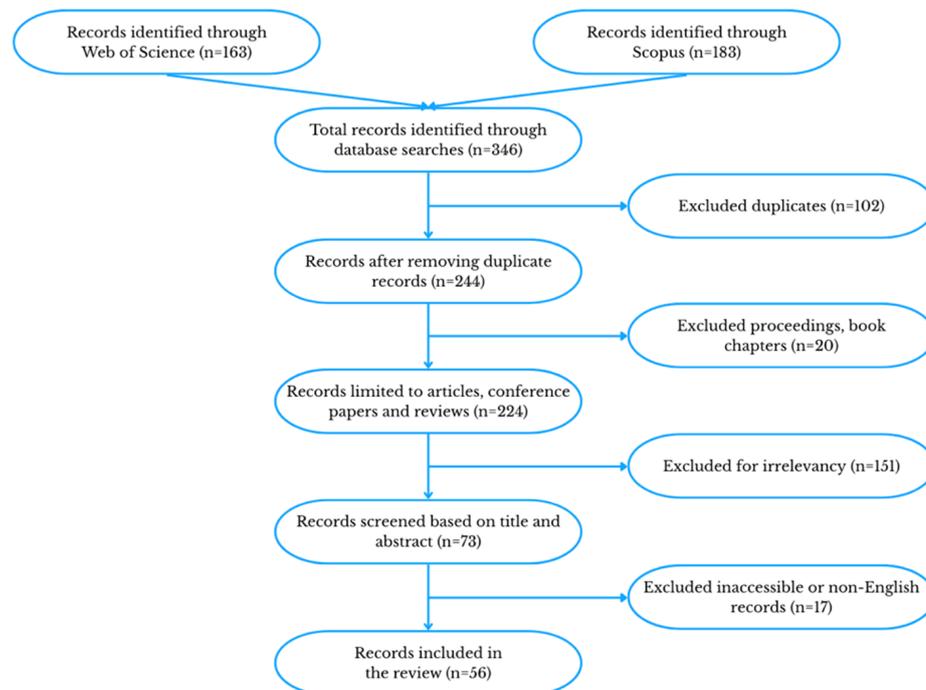
The autonomy paradox captures the experience of workers who gain flexibility through mobile technologies but feel pressure to be constantly available at the same time (Mazmanian, 2013). Barley *et al.* (2011) and Barber and Santuzzi (2014) conceptualise this as telepressure. This behavioural pattern erodes the recovery processes essential for sustainable performance. Closely connected, recovery theory, as developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007), provides a framework for understanding the consequences of this continuous engagement. Effective recovery relies on psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control experiences during non-work time. When digital connectivity invades these restorative periods, employees experience chronic strain, diminished well-being, and lower productivity.

Building on these conceptual foundations, three directions dominate the contemporary scientific debate. The first concerns the institutionalisation of digital work through national and corporate policies. Comparative analyses by Eurofound (2021) and OECD (2021) highlight the uneven diffusion of telework rights and digital communication norms across Europe, with Northern countries embedding stronger cultural and legal protections for disconnection. The second direction involves the integration of psychological and technological perspectives. As McDowall and Kinman (2017) and Mazmanian (2013) observe, the “always-on” culture cannot be explained solely by device availability; it is shaped by identity, habit, and social expectation. Emerging interdisciplinary work links technostress, boundary control, and recovery processes with constructs such as mindfulness, resilience, and digital competence (Derks and Bakker, 2014; Marsh *et al.*, 2024). The third emerging stream addresses equity and diversity in digital work. Studies by Wajcman (2008) and Marsh *et al.* (2024) point to persistent gender and occupational inequalities in access to flexibility and digital autonomy. The capacity to manage boundaries and recover from work-related strain is not distributed evenly but depends on job type, domestic context, and cultural expectations.

Despite significant progress, conceptual fragmentation remains a challenge. Technostress, boundary management, and digital well-being are often studied as separate constructs, limiting theoretical integration and comparability across studies. Building unified frameworks that connect technological design, managerial behaviour, and psychological outcomes represents a critical task for future research. For that reason, this review categorises the contemporary literature and highlights the main research streams to inform future studies.

Methodology

The literature search was conducted in the Web of Science and Scopus databases using keywords such as “digital workplace”, “work-life balance”, “wellbeing”, and “digital stress”. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and reviews in English published between 2020 and 2025. The search resulted in 346 records. This review mainly focuses on works related to the digital workplace environment and its effects on work-life balance. The detailed flow of the study is presented in Fig. 1.



1: Detailed flow of the study

Source: developed by authors, 2025

Results

The literature search identified a total of 346 records from the Web of Science and Scopus databases. Duplicates, non-peer-reviewed items, and records lacking a direct focus on work-life balance in digital workplace contexts were excluded. Therefore, 56 studies were selected for the final analysis. These publications, released between 2020 and 2025, appeared across various journals in management, psychology, and information systems, such as *Sustainability*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, and *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Tab. I summarises the key characteristics of the reviewed studies.

The current body of research on the digital workplace and work-life balance can be organised into four major thematic clusters: Technology, telework intensity, and work-life balance; Organisational and managerial factors; Individual resources and coping mechanisms; and Structural and contextual trends. The discussion of each cluster is provided below.

Technology, Telework Intensity, and Work-Life Balance

The first and quantitatively strongest cluster of studies examines how digitalisation, telework, and the intensity of information communication technology (ICT) use influence employees' work-life balance (WLB). These studies establish technology as the central determinant of contemporary work experiences but also reveal a duality in its effects. On one hand, digital tools and remote-work systems provide new degrees of autonomy, flexibility, and time control that can strengthen balance and job satisfaction; on the other hand, the same tools introduce pressure for constant connectivity, rapid responsiveness, and availability beyond contractual hours, thus undermining psychological recovery and family life.

Most studies agree that telework intensity plays a crucial role. Employees with moderate levels of telework exposure report the highest levels of perceived balance and lowest conflict. This allows individuals to exploit the flexibility of remote work without losing social contact or role clarity. Conversely, both

I: Key characteristics of the reviewed studies

Thematic cluster	Sub-topics covered	Number of studies
Technology, telework intensity, and work-life balance (n = 17)	Telework intensity and optimal frequency	5
	Technostress and ICT strain	6
	After-hours availability and digital boundaries	3
	Digital resilience and adaptation over time	3
	Perceived organisational support	4
Organisational and managerial factors (n = 14)	Leadership and digital leadership competencies	3
	Communication climate and message overload	3
	Flexitime and hybrid-work policies	2
	Strategic approach to digital well-being and CSR	2
Individual resources and coping mechanisms (n = 13)	Self-regulation and boundary control	4
	Mindfulness and attention management	3
	Resilience and digital competence	3
	Social and emotional support	2
	Routine recovery and detachment strategies	1
Structural and contextual trends (n = 12)	Gender and caregiving responsibilities	3
	Age and career-stage differences	2
	National and organisational culture	3
	Sectoral or occupational variation	2
	Temporal evolution of hybrid work	2

Source: developed by authors, 2025

extremes (full-time remote and fully on-site work) tend to correlate with higher work-family conflict and stress. The reviewed evidence identifies technostress creators – overload, invasion, complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty – are key explanatory mechanisms behind the digital-work paradox. In particular, techno-invasion (pressure to stay connected after hours) and techno-overload (too many digital demands within a limited time) consistently predict strain-based conflict and reduced psychological detachment.

A central insight emerging from this cluster is that technology itself is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful; its impact depends on how it is embedded in work practices, social norms, and temporal structures. Moreover, recent surveys and experimental follow-ups indicate an adaptation process: employees initially overwhelmed by digitalisation tend to stabilise their WLB once they establish personal boundaries and structured routines for digital engagement. This suggests a learning curve of digital resilience, which may serve as an important predictor of sustainable telework performance. Balance in the digital era is defined less by physical presence and more by the ability to regulate attention, connectivity, and recovery within technologically dense environments. The challenge for future research and practice lies not in reducing technology use but in designing autonomy-supportive digital ecosystems that enable flexibility alongside genuine psychological detachment.

Future research should clarify the mechanisms through which employees develop digital resilience and sustainable boundary strategies as technological intensity increases, identifying which behavioural adjustments lead to long-term balance rather than short-term coping.

Organisation and Managerial Factors

The second cluster focuses on the organisational and managerial conditions that shape how technology and telework affect work-life balance. The underlying premise across the literature is that the digital workplace does not operate in a vacuum – employees' ability to achieve balance depends largely on the organisational culture, leadership practices, structural policies, and communication norms that govern digital work.

A consistent pattern in the reviewed studies is the central role of perceived organisational support (POS) and leadership behaviour. Empirical evidence shows that employees who feel their organisation acknowledges their needs and respects their boundaries report significantly lower levels of work-family conflict and technostress. This connection is particularly strong in hybrid or fully remote environments, where physical distance often reduces informal support. When supervisors maintain open communication,

encourage self-care, and model boundary-respecting behaviour, employees experience a stronger sense of psychological safety and belonging. Several studies conceptualise these managerial capabilities as digital leadership competencies (Cioffi *et al.*, 2025). Effective digital leaders demonstrate supportive ICT-mediated interaction and avoid abusive ICT adoption (for example, non-urgent after-hours requests), both of which are associated with higher role clarity and job control.

Closely related is the role of organisational communication climate. Multiple studies indicate that digital overload and boundary violations often stem less from technology itself than from communication culture – the unspoken norms determining when, why, and how people communicate. Workplaces characterised by constant messaging across multiple platforms (email, chat, and video) tend to show higher stress and confusion. In contrast, organisations that establish clear communication hierarchies and expectations enable employees to engage more deliberately with digital channels, preserving attention and reducing fragmentation.

At a broader level, organisational interventions such as flexible scheduling frameworks and digital well-being training show measurable benefits in the literature. For instance, studies highlight that flexibility in working hours improves work-life balance and reduces fatigue, while combining telework with formal flexitime arrangements yields better outcomes than telework alone. Emerging evidence also points to the positive influence of structured hybrid-work guidelines, which help stabilise workloads and restore predictability in daily routines. Although the dataset reviewed here does not include direct policy-evaluation studies, the broader European context suggests that right-to-disconnect regulations may complement these internal initiatives.

Finally, recent studies (2024–2025) signal a growing awareness among executives of the strategic importance of digital well-being for employer branding and talent retention. Organisations that integrate work-life balance principles into their digital-transformation agendas – and align them with broader sustainability or corporate social responsibility objectives – tend to report lower turnover intentions and stronger organisational commitment. This reflects a shift from viewing digital well-being as a narrow HR concern to recognising it as a component of long-term organisational resilience.

Further inquiry is needed into how strategic initiatives in digital transformation can be better integrated with cultural and behavioural change, ensuring that policies promoting flexibility and well-being become embedded in daily organisational practice.

Individual Resources and Coping Mechanisms

The third cluster of research focuses on the individual-level capacities and strategies that help employees maintain balance in a digital workplace. While organisational culture and managerial support form the outer framework for sustainable hybrid work, the reviewed literature repeatedly emphasises that the ability to cope, adapt, and self-regulate determines whether digital work becomes empowering or exhausting.

A dominant theme is the concept of self-regulation in managing boundaries and digital engagement. Employees capable of controlling when and how they interact with technology show significantly better balance and lower emotional exhaustion. Self-regulation manifests through micro-behaviours such as setting response schedules, disabling notifications after hours, and designating focus periods for deep work. Experimental and follow-up evidence shows that these practices reduce work-to-family spill-over and improve satisfaction with both work and private life. A closely related resource is mindfulness, which acts as a counterbalance to the constant cognitive fragmentation, leading to lower technostress and higher perceived balance.

Another strong sub-theme is resilience – the psychological capacity to adapt positively to adversity. Within the context of remote and hybrid work, resilience denotes flexibility in dealing with ambiguity, uncertainty, and fluctuating workloads. Resilience operates not by eliminating stressors but by altering their interpretation; in cross-sectional surveys, resilient employees typically perceive technological change as an opportunity for skill growth rather than a threat to stability. Closely connected is digital confidence and competence. Workers who feel competent in navigating digital platforms experience lower anxiety and fewer interruptions caused by technical issues. Studies confirm that low digital literacy amplifies technostress creators – particularly complexity and uncertainty.

Emotional and social resources represent another important dimension. Social support networks moderate the impact of digital overload. Remote employees who maintain meaningful peer communication and family interaction report higher vitality and better boundary recovery. Several qualitative papers describe informal rituals, such as end-of-day debrief calls or shared online coffee breaks, that act as symbolic transitions between work and personal time. These seemingly minor practices contribute to role segmentation and reinforce identity coherence, mitigating the sense of isolation often associated with telework.

Subsequent studies could adopt longitudinal or diary-based designs to capture how employees' boundary-management habits and self-regulatory skills evolve over time, particularly during extended periods of remote or hybrid work.

Structural and Contextual Trends

The final cluster synthesises the broader structural, demographic, and contextual dimensions that influence work-life balance in digital work environments. This group of studies situates digital-work experiences within their societal, cultural, and institutional frameworks, showing that balance outcomes are not universal but contingent on social norms, gender roles, welfare systems, and sectoral characteristics.

A consistent gendered pattern emerges across the reviewed literature: women—particularly those with dependent children—report higher levels of work–family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and reduced recovery time than men under comparable conditions. In the Poland–Ukraine study and broader European workforce surveys, parents of young children and women generally experienced stronger spill-over between work and home domains. While remote work was initially viewed as a family-friendly innovation, evidence suggests it sometimes reinforced traditional divisions of domestic labour, with caregiving and household duties falling disproportionately on women. Some Northern European research points to the potential mitigating role of robust parental-leave systems and subsidised childcare, yet the dataset analysed here does not contain direct policy-comparative evidence. Overall, gender and caregiving responsibilities remain key determinants of balance outcomes in digital work environments.

- Age and career stage also matter. In digitally intensive roles, younger workers often report lower technostress and higher digital proficiency, while seniors may struggle when organisational digitalisation outpaces skills. At the same time, some surveys note younger workers' concerns about visibility and progression when remote. These findings point to heterogeneous age effects shaped by role and skill profile rather than age alone.

Another important contextual dimension is national and organisational culture, which shapes norms of working time, communication, and boundary permeability. Evidence from multi-country European workforce surveys indicates that organisational trust, autonomy, and transparent communication predict better balance and lower distress under hybrid arrangements. Conversely, environments where availability and responsiveness are culturally expected tend to prolong working hours and blur boundaries.

Structural perspectives also include the temporal evolution of digital work. Early pandemic research largely portrayed telework as a crisis adaptation, while studies from 2023 onward interpret it as a normalised element of the employment landscape. This shift shows a conceptual transition from emergency flexibility to institutionalised hybridity—a work mode embedded within long-term organisational systems.

Future research should further examine how national labour policies, welfare frameworks, and gender norms shape equitable access to hybrid work arrangements and sustainable work-life balance across different social groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to review recent academic research on work-life balance in digital workplace environments. It aimed to identify the dominant research streams, highlight their intersections, and propose directions for future inquiry. To achieve this objective, a systematic review of selected articles from Web of Science and Scopus databases was conducted. The reviewed research confirms that digitalisation has transformed the conditions of work-life balance, creating both opportunities and risks. Four main thematic streams were identified. The first, technology, telework intensity, and work-life balance, shows that moderate levels of remote work and ICT use can enhance flexibility and satisfaction, while excessive connectivity and technostress undermine recovery and well-being.

Future research should examine long-term adaptation processes and how digital resilience develops over time. The cluster of organisational and managerial factors highlights the importance of leadership, organisational support, and communication culture in shaping digital work outcomes. Further studies could focus on how digital leadership competencies and right-to-disconnect policies translate into daily practice across sectors. The third stream, individual resources and coping mechanisms, underlines the value of self-regulation, mindfulness, and resilience in maintaining balance under digital demands. Future work may explore how these psychological capacities can be strengthened through training and organisational design. Finally, structural and contextual trends cluster situates digital work within broader demographic and cultural contexts, showing persistent gender inequalities and cross-national differences in boundary control.

Comparative research is needed to clarify how welfare systems, policy frameworks, and cultural norms moderate these outcomes. Overall, the reviewed evidence points to the need for integrated, multilevel approaches that connect technological design, managerial practice, and individual coping in building sustainable digital workplaces.

Acknowledgements

This paper was supported by the Institutional project of the Department of Management: Sustainable approaches for the Development of the Business Environment. Resolved at the Department of Management, Faculty of Business and Management, Brno University of Technology under the number: FP-S-25-8781.

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