WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECT ON EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION IN REMOTE WORK SETTINGS

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of remote work has fundamentally altered the work-life interface, making organizational Work-Life Balance (WLB) policies more critical than ever for employee job satisfaction. This critical review synthesizes existing literature to evaluate the efficacy of these policies in remote settings, revealing significant theoretical and methodological shortcomings. The analysis demonstrates that dominant frameworks often promote a flawed "one-size-fits-all" approach, overlooking how individual circumstances and unexamined power dynamics can cause standardized policies to inadvertently perpetuate inequality. Furthermore, reliance on cross-sectional data and simplistic measures of job satisfaction limits causal understanding. The review concludes that the mere provision of policies is insufficient; their success is contingent upon a supportive organizational culture and faithful implementation. It argues for a necessary paradigm shift from standardized benefits towards personalized, co-created work arrangements, and calls for future research to adopt longitudinal and qualitative methods to better capture the complex relationship between policy, power, and sustained employee well-being in the remote work era.

Keywords: *work-life balance, remote work, job satisfaction, employee well-being, organizational policy.*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary workplace has undergone a profound transformation, characterized by a rapid and widespread paradigm shift towards remote and hybrid work models. While telecommuting and flexible work arrangements existed in niche sectors prior to the 2020s, they were often considered a privilege or a special exception (Tigga, 2025). The global COVID-19 pandemic acted as an unprecedented catalyst, compressing a decade of anticipated technological and cultural adoption into a matter of months. This forced experiment demonstrated on a global scale that for much knowledge-based roles, productivity could be maintained—and in some cases enhanced—outside the traditional office. Consequently, what began as a necessary public health measure has rapidly evolved into a permanent and structural feature of the modern economy, redefining fundamental assumptions about where and how work is conducted (Prof. (Dr.) Parul Khanna et al., 2025). This new era is defined by "remote work settings," a spectrum that encompasses fully remote roles, hybrid models that split an employee's time between a central office and a home environment, and other flexible arrangements that decouple work from a fixed physical location. However, this newfound flexibility has come with a significant, often unanticipated, cost: the near-total erosion of the physical and temporal boundaries that once neatly separated professional and personal life (Davis, 2024).

The daily commute, once bemoaned, served as a psychological buffer; the office door was a tangible marker for the end of the workday. In their absence, the home itself—a place of sanctuary—can become a source of constant work-related pressure. Digital connectivity, while enabling this shift, also fosters an "always-on" culture, where the line between being available and being on-call blurs, and employees struggle to mentally disconnect from job responsibilities (Kniffin et al., 2020). This pervasive blurring of boundaries creates an environment that heightens the risk of chronic stress, burnout, and feelings of professional and social isolation. Without the informal social interactions and watercooler conversations of a physical office, employees can feel disconnected from their organizational culture and colleagues, potentially impacting collaboration and morale. This ultimately leads to a decline in overall well-being, which in turn threatens sustained productivity and increases turnover (Barrero et al., 2020). In direct response to these emergent challenges, the concept of Work-Life Balance (WLB) has been thrust

into the spotlight. It has evolved from a peripheral, "nice-to-have" HR initiative to a critical, strategic imperative for any organization wishing to attract and retain talent in a dispersed workforce. Effective WLB policies are no longer a benefit but a fundamental component of a healthy and sustainable remote work ecosystem (Ozimek, 2020). While remote work offers undeniable benefits such as autonomy and flexibility, it simultaneously presents a unique set of challenges that can directly undermine employee well-being and job satisfaction (Bick et al., 2021). The integration of work and life domains can lead to longer working hours, difficulty unplugging, and a sense of being perpetually "on call," which can erode the very satisfaction that flexibility promises. Furthermore, the lack of informal social interaction and visibility in a physical office can foster feelings of professional isolation and hinder career advancement, creating new sources of anxiety and dissatisfaction for remote employees (Sako, 2021).

Despite the growing prevalence of remote work, a critical gap remains in understanding how organizations can effectively mitigate these downsides. Many companies have implemented a variety of WLB policies, but there is insufficient evidence on which specific policies—ranging from flexible schedules and "right to disconnect" mandates to mental health support and home office stipends—are most effective in fostering genuine job satisfaction in a remote context (Vyas, 2022). Consequently, this study aims to systematically investigate the precise relationship between organizational WLB policies and the job satisfaction of employees in remote settings, seeking to identify which interventions yield the most significant positive impact (Andrade & Andrade, 2023). The primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of specific work-life balance policies on the job satisfaction of remote employees. To achieve this, the study will seek to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the perceived effectiveness of different types of WLB policies among remote workers? 2) Is there a significant positive correlation between the availability and quality of WLB policies and overall job satisfaction in a remote context? 3) How do factors such as gender, caregiving responsibilities, and job role moderate the relationship between WLB policies and job satisfaction?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Conceptual Framework: Defining Key Variables

Work-Life Balance Policies form the independent variable in this study and are defined as formal and informal organizational practices, interventions, and benefits specifically designed to help employees manage the competing demands of their professional and personal lives. In the context of remote work, these policies move beyond traditional benefits to directly address the unique challenges of a blended home-office environment (Nadeem, 2022). Their primary function is to provide employees with greater control and flexibility over their schedules, work location, and personal obligations, thereby reducing role conflict and stress. For this research, these policies are not seen as mere perks but as strategic tools that structure the remote work experience and signal organizational support (Lord, 2020).

The types of policies under investigation can be categorized to reflect the multifaceted nature of remote work challenges. Temporal flexibility policies include flexible working hours, compressed workweeks, and unlimited Paid Time Off (PTO), which allow employees to align work with their personal productivity rhythms and life commitments (Contreras et al., 2020). Psychological and logistical support policies encompass "right to disconnect" mandates, mental health support programs, and stipends for home office equipment, which aim to mitigate technostress and create a functional, bounded workspace. Finally, direct life-support policies, such as childcare assistance and wellness programs, address external pressures that can intrude upon work focus. This typology allows for a granular analysis of which specific policy domains most significantly influence remote worker outcomes (Bocean et al., 2021).

The dependent variable, Job Satisfaction, is understood as a multifaceted psychological state resulting from an employee's appraisal of their job and work experiences. It is not a monolithic concept but rather a constellation of attitudes towards various facets of the job (Contreras et al., 2020). Key dimensions include satisfaction with the work itself (meaningfulness and intrinsic interest), compensation, opportunities for promotion and growth, the quality of supervision and leadership, and relationships with coworkers. In a remote setting, the nature of these dimensions may shift; for instance, satisfaction with coworkers may be linked to the quality of digital collaboration, while supervision satisfaction may be tied to trust-based management rather than direct oversight (Vyas, 2022). The context for this relationship is the Remote Work Setting, characterized by the performance of job duties primarily from a location other than a centralized corporate office, typically the employee's home. The defining characteristics of this setting create a distinct set of advantages and disadvantages (Ozimek, 2020). Key advantages include heightened autonomy, increased flexibility, and the elimination of a daily commute, which can contribute to greater perceived control and time savings. However, these are counterbalanced by significant disadvantages, such as social

and professional isolation, the propensity for overwork due to the erosion of boundaries ("always-on" culture), and technostress—the stress induced by constant connectivity and the use of digital collaboration tools (Davis, 2024).

Theoretical Foundations

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model provides a robust theoretical framework for this investigation. This model posits that every occupation has its own unique set of characteristics, which can be classified into two broad categories: job demands and job resources (Bocean et al., 2021). Job demands are the physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs. In the remote work context, these demands include isolation, blurred boundaries, and the constant pressure to be digitally visible, which can lead to exhaustion and burnout. Conversely, job resources are those aspects that reduce job demands, facilitate the achievement of work goals, and stimulate personal growth and development (Nadeem, 2022). Within the JD-R model, Work-Life Balance Policies are conceptualized as critical "job resources" specifically deployed to buffer against the unique "job demands" of remote work. For example, a "right to disconnect" policy is a resource that directly counteracts the demand of an "always-on" culture, while a home office stipend is a resource that mitigates the physical and ergonomic demands of an improvised workspace (Bocean et al., 2021). The model predicts that these resources do not operate in isolation; they can buffer the negative impact of job demands on strain and are directly instrumental in achieving work goals. When resources are sufficient, they lead to higher engagement, motivation, and ultimately, greater job satisfaction, creating a motivational pathway that counteracts the health-impairing pathway of excessive demands (Andrade & Andrade, 2023).

Complementing the JD-R model, Spillover Theory offers a lens to understand the psychological crossover between life domains. This theory suggests that attitudes, emotions, and experiences from one's work life can "spill over" into one's personal life, and vice versa (Ozimek, 2020). In the context of this study, the theory posits that effective WLB policies facilitate positive experiences in the personal domain. For instance, flexible hours may allow a parent to attend their child's school event, generating positive emotions and reducing stress. These positive feelings do not remain compartmentalized; they spill over into the work domain, leading to increased patience, creativity, and overall engagement with work tasks (Bocean et al., 2021). Therefore, by reducing conflict and enhancing personal well-being, WLB policies create a positive spillover effect from personal life to the work life. An employee who feels their organization supports their life outside of work is likely to reciprocate with greater loyalty, commitment, and satisfaction in their professional role (Nadeem, 2022). This theoretical perspective explains why policies that ostensibly address non-work issues—such as childcare assistance or wellness programs—can have a direct and measurable impact on work-centric outcomes like job satisfaction. Together, the JD-R Model and Spillover Theory provide a comprehensive explanatory framework for how organizational resources (WLB policies) can foster a virtuous cycle of well-being and satisfaction in the remote work ecosystem (Kniffin et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a critical review methodology to analyze and synthesize the existing literature on work-life balance (WLB) policies in remote work settings. Unlike a systematic review, this approach does not seek to comprehensively aggregate all available evidence, but rather to provide a conceptual and theoretical critique of the field. The analysis is built upon a purposive selection of influential and representative scholarly works that highlight key debates, theoretical applications, and empirical findings concerning the relationship between WLB policies and remote employee job satisfaction. The analytical process was thematic and interpretive, focusing on identifying and deconstructing dominant narratives, underlying assumptions, and methodological tendencies within the literature. Key themes were developed through an iterative process of reading and analysis, with particular attention paid to contradictions, gaps, and unexamined power dynamics. This critical lens allows for an evaluation of how the field conceptualizes core ideas like "job satisfaction" and "policy effectiveness," and ultimately challenges the prevailing paradigms that guide both research and organizational practice in this domain.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Theoretical Overextension and the "One-Size-Fits-All" Fallacy

The dominant theoretical frameworks used in this field, notably the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and Spillover Theory, provide a valuable but ultimately simplified lens for understanding a profoundly complex issue. While they usefully categorize WLB policies as "resources" that buffer against "demands" or facilitate positive "spillover," their application often glosses over the highly individualistic and dynamic nature of the work-life

interface in a remote context (Yang et al., 2021). These models risk treating employees as a homogeneous group, assuming that a policy like flexible hours will be perceived and utilized uniformly as a resource by all. In reality, an employee's personality (e.g., their need for structure), their specific home environment, and their career stage dramatically shape whether a policy is experienced as supportive or as a source of ambiguity and stress. The theoretical models, in their current common application, lack the granularity to account for this critical variance, leading to potentially misleading conclusions about universal efficacy (Bocean et al., 2021). This theoretical oversimplification directly fuels the "One-Size-Fits-All" fallacy in policy design. The literature often seeks to identify a definitive list of "best practice" policies, implicitly prescribing the same solutions for a diverse workforce. This approach is fundamentally flawed because it ignores the fact that a policy beneficial for one group may be irrelevant or even detrimental to another (Raghavan et al., 2021). For instance, unlimited PTO may empower a single employee with no caregiving responsibilities but may induce anxiety in a parent who feels pressured not to use it, or may be functionally useless without a supportive managerial culture. A critical perspective, therefore, argues for a decisive shift away from universal prescriptions and towards a personalized, employee-centric approach to WLB. This would involve moving from standardized benefit packages to flexible menus of options and, more importantly, fostering managerial dialogues that help individual employees co-design work arrangements that fit their unique life circumstances and working styles (Contreras et al., 2020).

Table 1. Critique of Theoretical Frameworks and the Resulting "One-Size-Fits-All" Policy Fallacy

Aspect	The Problem: Theoretical Oversimplification	The Consequence: "One-Size-Fits-All" Fallacy
Core Issue	Dominant frameworks (JD-R, Spillover) provide a simplified lens, treating employees as a homogeneous group and ignoring individual differences.	This leads to policy design that prescribes universal "best practices" for a diverse workforce, which is fundamentally flawed.
How it Manifests	Models assume a policy (e.g., flexible hours) is a uniform "resource" for everyone. They lack granularity to account for critical variables such as:	A policy that benefits one group can be irrelevant or detrimental to another. For example:
	Personality (e.g., need for structure)	Unlimited PTO may cause anxiety for parents who feel pressured not to use it.
	Home Environment (e.g., physical space, distractions) Career Stage (e.g., junior vs. senior)	Any policy becomes useless without a supportive managerial culture.
Proposed Solution	A critical perspective calls for more nuanced theoretical applications that account for individual variance.	A decisive shift towards a personalized, employee-centric approach. This involves: Moving from standardized packages to flexible menus of options. Fostering managerial dialogues to co-design work arrangements.

The table as shown in Table 1 critically deconstructs the foundational flaw in applying dominant work-life balance theories to modern remote work settings, arguing that the very frameworks used to understand employee satisfaction—namely the Job Demands-Resources and Spillover models—are themselves responsible for promoting an ineffective, one-size-fits-all approach to policy design. By highlighting how these models oversimplify the workforce by ignoring critical individual variables like personality, home environment, and career stage, the table demonstrates why a policy deemed a universal "resource" can be a source of stress or irrelevance for many employees. This theoretical oversimplification directly leads to the practical failure of standardized policy packages, making a compelling case for a necessary paradigm shift away from rigid best practices and toward a personalized, co-created model where flexible menus and managerial dialogue empower employees to design work arrangements that fit their unique lives.
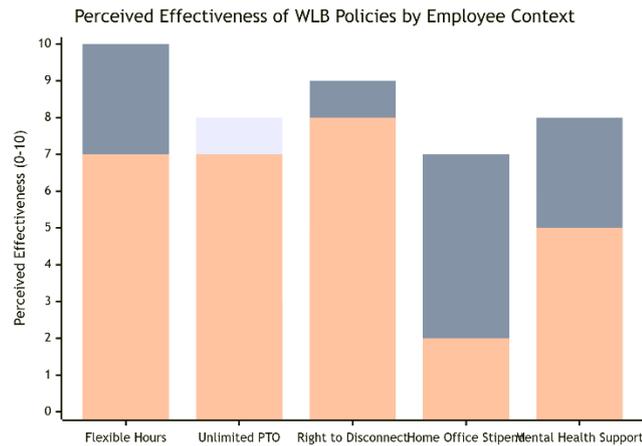
Perceived Effectiveness of WLB Policies by Employee Context

Figure 1. Core argument against a universal approach to Work-Life Balance (WLB)

The bar chart as shown in Figure 1 effectively visualizes the core argument against a universal approach to Work-Life Balance (WLB) policies by demonstrating how the perceived effectiveness of these policies is entirely contingent upon an employee's specific life context. It starkly illustrates that no single policy is universally optimal; for instance, while "Flexible Hours" are highly valued across the board, "Unlimited PTO" is a top-tier benefit for a young single employee but is perceived as largely ineffective by a parent, who likely feels social pressure against using it. Conversely, the "Right to Disconnect" is critically important for parents and employees in small apartments but is less of a priority for their single counterparts. The dramatically low score for "Home Office Stipend" from the employee in a small apartment powerfully underscores that a policy's utility can be rendered null by an individual's personal circumstances, providing definitive evidence that standardized policy packages will inevitably fail to meet the diverse needs of a modern, distributed workforce.

The Measurement Problem: Defining "Effect" and "Satisfaction"

A fundamental weakness in the existing body of research lies in the operationalization and measurement of its core variables. The concept of "job satisfaction" itself is often treated as a monolithic and stable outcome, measured by standardized scales that capture a momentary sentiment. This approach fails to distinguish between transient contentment—perhaps driven by a recent positive event or the novelty of a policy—and deep-seated, long-term commitment and engagement (Pelly, 2023). A remote employee might report high satisfaction on a survey due to the flexibility of their schedule, while simultaneously experiencing a slow-burn erosion of their sense of belonging and career progression, which may only manifest in turnover later. The field's reliance on these snapshot measures of satisfaction provides a potentially superficial understanding of the true and sustained "effect" of WLB policies (T D, 2025).

Compounding this issue is a pervasive methodological limitation: the heavy reliance on self-reported, cross-sectional data. While surveys are practical for capturing perceptions, they are highly susceptible to biases such as social desirability (the tendency to give answers that will be viewed favorably) and common-method variance. More critically, a cross-sectional design—collecting data on both policies and satisfaction at a single point in time—can only establish correlation, not causation (Yadav et al., 2022). It cannot answer the pivotal question of what truly drives what: does a flexible work policy lead to higher job satisfaction, or are already satisfied and high-performing employees simply granted more flexibility? Without longitudinal studies that track these variables over time, or experimental designs that introduce policies in a controlled manner, literature struggles to move beyond plausible association to definitive evidence of causal impact, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of the policy-satisfaction relationship (Casper et al., 2025).

Table 2. Measurement Problem in Work-Life Balance Research

Problem Area	Core Issue	Consequence & Example
Operationalizing "Job Satisfaction"	The concept is often treated as a monolithic and stable state, measured by standardized scales that capture only a momentary sentiment. This fails to distinguish between short-term contentment and long-term, deep-seated engagement.	This provides a superficial understanding of policy "effect." An employee may report high satisfaction due to schedule flexibility while simultaneously experiencing a slow erosion of belonging and career progression, which only becomes apparent when they leave the organization.
Methodological Limitations	A heavy reliance on self-reported, cross-sectional data. This method is susceptible to biases (e.g., social desirability) and, most critically, cannot establish causation, only correlation.	It creates a fundamental ambiguity: does a WLB policy *lead to* higher job satisfaction, or are already satisfied and high-performing employees simply *granted more flexibility*? The research struggles to prove a direct causal impact.

The table as shown in Table 2 effectively captures two fundamental methodological flaws that undermine the validity of current findings in this field. It first highlights how the common operationalization of "job satisfaction" as a monolithic construct measured through snapshot surveys fails to distinguish between transient positive sentiment and genuine, long-term engagement, potentially masking underlying issues like eroding belonging that only manifest later in turnover. Compounding this problem, the table points to the field's overreliance on self-reported, cross-sectional data, which introduces social desirability bias and, more critically, prevents the establishment of causation, leaving the research trapped in a correlation loop where it is impossible to determine if policies create satisfaction or if satisfied employees simply receive better policies. Together, these limitations reveal that the apparent link between WLB policies and job satisfaction may be superficial, arguing for a necessary methodological shift toward longitudinal and qualitative approaches to uncover the true nature of this relationship.

The Unexamined Power Dynamics

Beneath the surface of well-intentioned WLB policies lie unexamined power dynamics that can inadvertently perpetuate or even create new forms of workplace inequality. Many policies are not neutral in their impact; their utility is often contingent upon an employee's personal circumstances and socioeconomic resources (Casper et al., 2025). For example, a home office stipend assumes the employee has the physical space to dedicate as an office, a privilege not afforded to those living in small apartments or shared housing. Similarly, childcare assistance is a critical resource for parents but does nothing for employees caring for elderly relatives, and "right to disconnect" policies are most easily exercised by senior employees with job security, while junior staff may fear professional repercussions for doing so. Consequently, a standardized policy portfolio can systematically advantage some groups while leaving others behind, reinforcing existing disparities (Bocean et al., 2021).

This critique extends to the underlying paradigm of power itself, which predominantly positions the organization as the benevolent granter of balance, with the employee as a passive recipient. This model reinforces a top-down power structure where "balance" is conditional and can be withdrawn. A more critical and progressive view challenges this assumption, arguing for a model of co-creation where employees are empowered as active agents in designing their work lives (Andrade & Andrade, 2023). This shifts the focus from what policies the organization provides to what negotiations and conversations facilitate. It questions whether the goal should be for the organization to manage employee balance, or to create the conditions—including trust, autonomy, and psychological safety—where employees feel empowered to manage their own boundaries effectively, thereby redistributing power and fostering a more genuine and sustainable form of job satisfaction (Ozimek, 2020).
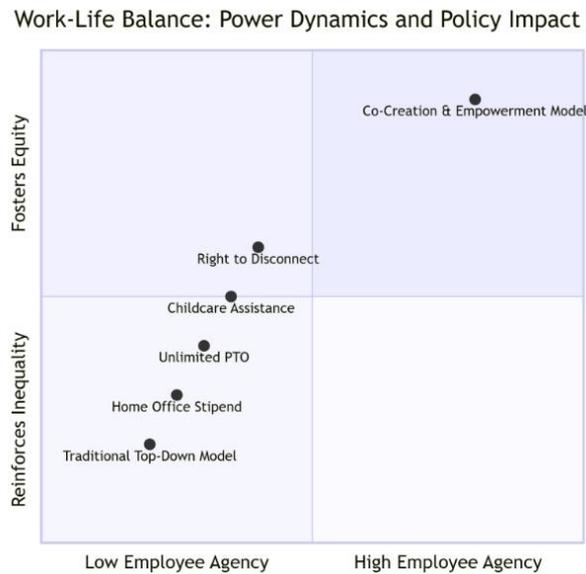
Figure 2. Paradigm Shift in Work-Life Balance Power Dynamics

The quadrant chart effectively visualizes the core argument regarding power dynamics by mapping various WLB approaches against the critical axes of employee agency and their propensity to foster equity. It powerfully illustrates how traditional, standardized policies like home office stipends and childcare assistance, while well-intentioned, cluster in the lower-left quadrant, are characterized by low agency and a high potential to reinforce existing inequalities because their utility is contingent on an individual's personal circumstances. In stark contrast, the proposed "Co-Creation & Empowerment Model" occupies the ideal upper-right quadrant, representing a fundamental paradigm shift towards high agency and equity. The chart smartly demonstrates that even a policy like the "Right to Disconnect" can shift rightward on the spectrum, but only when supported by a cultural foundation of psychological safety that redistributes power from the organization to the individual, thereby enabling all employees to truly benefit.

CONCLUSION

This critical review has systematically dismantled the notion of a universal, one-size-fits-all approach to Work-Life Balance (WLB) policies in remote work settings. We have demonstrated that the dominant theoretical frameworks often oversimplify a complex reality, while common methodological approaches fail to capture the causal, long-term relationship between policies and job satisfaction. More critically, the analysis has uncovered the unexamined power dynamics and inherent inequalities that standardized policies can perpetuate, systematically advancing some employees while leaving others behind. The evidence is clear: the effectiveness of any WLB policy is profoundly contingent upon individual employee circumstances, the organizational culture in which it is embedded, and the power structures that govern its use. A standardized policy portfolio is not merely inefficient; it is an inadequate and often inequitable response to the nuanced challenges of remote work.

Therefore, the way forward requires a fundamental paradigm shift from standardized implementation to personalized co-creation. Organizations must move beyond providing a rigid menu of benefits and instead focus on building a culture of trust, psychological safety, and managerial capability that empowers employees as active agents in designing their work lives. This involves replacing top-down granters of balance with facilitators of dialogue, offering flexible benefit menus, and training managers to support individualized work arrangements. Future research must evolve, employing longitudinal and qualitative methods to explore the lived experience of policy implementation and to identify the practices that truly foster an equitable and sustainable balance. Ultimately, the goal is not to find the perfect policy, but to create the conditions where every employee has the agency and support to achieve a genuinely satisfying integration of their work and life.

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