

Digital reliance in the hybrid work era: A review of its impact on work-life balance

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Abstract - The hybrid working model has transformed the workplace as we know it, and increased reliance on digital technologies for communication, collaboration and task completion. The use of digital tools is increasing flexibility, autonomy and efficiency, while also creating new opportunities to challenge employees' work-life balance. In this review, we will examine how digital dependency affects employees' capacity to balance work and leisure in the hybrid working world. The review follows a recent empirical and theoretical literature and draws on the evidence with regard to the four factors: digital connectivity intensity, techno-stress, boundary blurring, and organizational support. The outcomes show a double-sided dependency when using digital media. In addition, digital technologies provide flexible work, decrease travel, improve coordination and employee satisfaction and well-being. In contrast, over-connectivity, technology stress, and reduced work/personal boundaries are linked to burnout, work/family conflict and poor well-being. The review also highlights the value of boundary management, digital literacy, or organizational support in either helping or hindering the positive or negative consequences of digital reliance. It is concluded that human-centred digital strategies are needed to support sustainable hybrid working – they need to be flexible, productive and make employees happy. Supportive policies, healthy digital habits, regular review and adaptation of employees' experiences are crucial to enable organizations to continue to depend on digital tools without compromising or reducing work-life balance.

Keywords: Digital Reliance, Hybrid Work, Work-Life Balance, Techno-Stress, and Organizational Support.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of hybrid work models, which combine remote and on-site work, has transformed how work is organized, experienced, and supported by digital technologies in the post-COVID-19 era. Digital communication tools, cloud-based collaboration tools, and mobile technologies have become essential to organizations in all fields to maintain distributed workflows, and thus, digital reliance has become a characteristic of modern work practices instead of a crisis solution attempt [1], [2]. Although this change means that employees are now exposed to greater flexibility, autonomy, and spatial-temporal freedom, it also leads to greater exposure to screen time, continuous connectivity, and technology-compelled job demands that may redefine the work and family life boundaries [3].

There is an increasing amount of literature that hybrid work could also contribute to a better work-life integration, since it necessitates less commuting time, more ability to control the schedule of work, and improved flexibility of how the work is associated with other family duties [4], [5]. The empirical evidence suggests that flexibility and autonomy in hybrid environments are linked to increased job satisfaction, enhanced well-being, and a sense of life compatibility, especially in combination with supportive organizational policies and sufficient digital infrastructure [6], [7], [8].

Nonetheless, new strains may also be created by the same digital affordances that facilitate flexibility. Unrelenting access to the Internet, the large amount of virtual meetings, and the inability to turn off the work process have been associated with techno-stress, digital burnout, and the threat of work-life disruption and work burnout [3], [9]. The conflicting results highlight the duality of digital dependence in hybrid work: it is both a highly important resource that can bring flexibility and productivity, and a possible driver of increased demands that can jeopardize sustainable work-life integration [3], [4].

In response to these gaps, the present review article analyses the role of digital reliance in the hybrid work era and the effects it has on work-life balance. Based on the empirical, theoretical, and methodical literature on the various organizational and national settings, the review seeks to explain the processes by which digital tools and connectivity affect work-life boundary in the hybrid settings; synthesize the evidence on the enabling and limiting conditions related to organizational support; managing boundaries, and digital maturity that characterize the effect of such balance; and draw conclusions on the theoretical and practical implications of designing human-centered hybrid work and sustainable digital engagement strategies. The article attempts to augment a more sophisticated insight into how organizations can exploit digital dependence to facilitate, instead of undermine, the work-life integration of employees in the setting of hybrid work.

II. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The idea of work-life balance has become the key topic of modern employment, as technological change, the increased level of competitiveness, and the models of flexible working reshape the way individuals spend time and energy in the professional and personal spheres of life [10], [11]. In theory, work-life balance is a state where people are able to successfully balance professional work and personal work activities, i.e., family, leisure, and self-care activities, such that no single part of the balance is continuously neglected and both bring sufficient satisfaction and functioning to the individual [12], [13]. It is not a fixed balance and changes

throughout life, types of work, and culture, and is heavily impacted by organizational activities and social environments at large [12], [14].

An extensive body of empirical studies associates a healthy work-life balance with better well-being of employees, such as reduced stress, mental and physical wellness, and decreased burnout [11], [15], [16]. Balanced employees generally report better job satisfaction and motivation, as well as commitment to the organization, reduced absenteeism, and lower turnover intentions [17], [18], [19]. Several determinants of work-life balance are also found to be at the individual, organizational, and environmental levels. Better balance is facilitated by individual resources (time, stress management skills, and resilience), hampered by overcommitment and long working hours [12].

Organizational characteristics such as flexibility, remote/hybrid work, supporting leadership, achievable workload, and wellness programs on a regular basis are all found to be essential facilitators of balance and other associated results, such as productivity and satisfaction [10], [20], [21]. Familial support, equal distribution of household labour, and protective labour policies also enable employees to combine professional work and personal work roles. Gender expectations add more pressure to women and caregivers [12], [17]. Simultaneously, remote and hybrid work has also presented opportunities and threats to work-life balance. The perceived balance and performance of many employees could be enhanced with the help of flexible work arrangements and digital tools that can decrease commuting time and enhance autonomy [10], [16], [22].

III. DIGITAL RELIANCE IN THE HYBRID WORK

Digital reliance has become one of the most characteristic features of modern work as more and more organizations rely on digital platforms, cloud services, and connectivity to organise activities, communication, and decision-making. The need increased significantly in the post-COVID-19 context as lockdowns and social distancing forced the swift transition to remote and hybrid work, making the digital tools, previously the supportive infrastructure, the main channel of organizing work and collaboration [23], [24]. A study conducted from 2020 to 2025 marks the contradictory implications of an increasing dependence on digital technologies. Among the benefits, digital technologies can improve coordination, the exchange of knowledge, and communication, which, in turn, increases job performance and makes working more flexible and distributed [1], [25].

Systematic reviews of digital connectivity indicate that digital tools facilitate efficiency, flexibility, and continuity of operation, especially in times of crisis, though they can be utilized to drive innovation and novel ways of organizing [26], [27]. Simultaneously, researchers note that the strengthened digital interconnection poses new threats, both personal and systemic. Techno-stress, increased workloads, work and family conflict, and psychobiological stress reactions have been attributed to the growth of digital work and are a cause of anxiety about mental health and sustainable work design [26], [28], [29].

Digital reliance is a fundamental aspect of hybrid work, through which coordination, collaboration, and supervision are digitally mediated in co-located and remote environments. The hybrid work models rely on well-developed digital platforms, including collaboration platforms, cloud-based systems, and communication tools, to sustain the productivity level, work-life integration, and organizational sustainability in the post-pandemic period [30], [31].

The important aspect of digital dependency in hybrid employment is performance and productivity. Online meeting and communication tools, collaborative work, and workflow management enable employees to organize work regardless of their location, enabling both time and space flexibility [31]. In the knowledge-intensive industries, including IT, digital tools and digital transformation initiatives mediate or enhance the positive effect of hybrid models on productivity [32], [33]. Increasing dependence on digital technologies can create risks, stress, and management challenges. Research on remote work indicates that the continuous use of both work-related and personal digital technologies may contribute to techno-stress, digital fatigue, and lower levels of well-being, especially when employees experience blurred boundaries between their professional and personal lives [34].

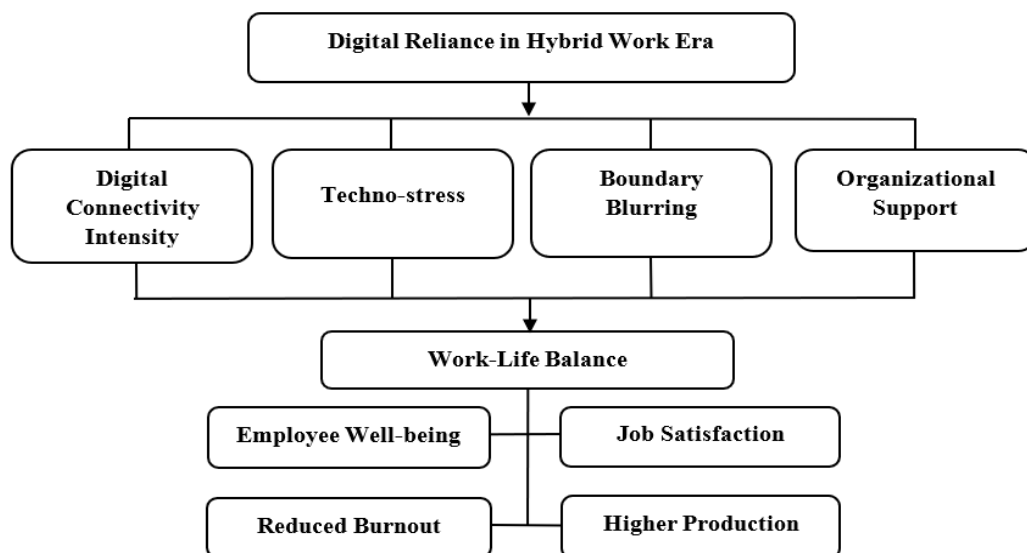


Figure. Conceptual Framework

IV. FACTORS

This review examines the impact of digital reliance on work-life balance in the hybrid work era by focusing on four key factors: digital connectivity intensity, techno-stress, boundary blurring, and organizational support. These factors influence how employees manage their work and personal lives while relying on digital technologies in a hybrid work environment.

Digital Connectivity Intensity

Digital connectivity intensity measures the pervasive, intrusive, and frequent use of digital tools to work across time by employees, and research indicates that it is a key cause of strain and balance in hybrid work [35], [36]. Digital exhaustion, techno-stress, self-control depletion, and burnout are associated with high levels of connectivity, which includes after-hours messaging and exhausting e-communication [37], [38]. Meanwhile, a moderate level of digital connectivity may positively affect coordination, social capital, knowledge sharing, flexibility, and perceived autonomy, facilitating the support of work-life balance and productivity to a certain extent, and beyond which further connectivity is detrimental to it [9], [39].

Based on the qualitative and quantitative evidence, the authors note that new job demands that contribute to hyperconnectivity, cognitive overload, digital fatigue, and weak boundaries include such aspects as digital workplace technology intensity and perpetual connectivity in telework and hybrid working environments [35], [36].

In contrast, the negative impact of high intensity of connectivity can be mitigated through proactive boundary management, job resources (supportive policies, autonomy, digital skills), organizational practices (such as right to disconnect policies, organized communication conventions, and digital detox policies), and can be transformed into digital balance instead of digital exhaustion [38], [40].

Techno-Stress

Techno-stress has become one of the main predictors of digital dependence and work-life balance during the hybrid work period. With the increased application of ICT and digital platforms to facilitate remote and hybrid work, organizations have subjected employees to techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-uncertainty, and complexity, which overwhelm and burn cognitive and emotional resources, blur work and home boundaries [41], [42]. Mixed-method and survey research have provided evidence that stress caused by too much technology use in remote and hybrid workplaces is a primary contributor to work-family conflict and perceived ineffectiveness and well-being, despite organizations trying to facilitate the transition [34], [43].

Techno-stress in IT and other digital-intensive industries diminishes work-life balance both directly and indirectly by causing psychological distress, burnout, and technology exhaustion, and partially buffers such effects through resilience and psychological capital [44], [45]. Meanwhile, the techno-stress is closely connected with the digital reliance: the frequent connectivity and use of the platform may maintain the engagement and performance, but when the techno-stress increases, it lowers the well-being and job performance and demonstrates digital connectivity as a resource and a demand [26], [46].

Research indicates that organizational resources that make work-life interface more sustainable, which include perceived organizational support, flexible and boundary-respecting policies, work-based learning, digital leadership, as well as right to disconnect or mental health programs, can limit the adverse effects of techno-stress and contribute to a more sustainable digital work-life interface [47], [48]. In general, techno-stress is the primary psychological agent that converts high digital dependence in hybrid work into burnout, lower well-being, and poor work-life balance. Its control becomes the key to designing digital-intensive workplaces in a human way.

Boundary Blurring

The concept of hybrid and remote work is more closely associated with boundary blurring because employees rely on communication platforms that allow them to be constantly connected and adopt an always-on culture, which is linked to a strained work-life balance [49], [50]. Physical distance between the office and home gets removed, making boundaries more permeable and flexible, allowing professional work and personal work to entangle over time and space, which may cause overworking, inability to psychologically shut down, and increased stress and burnout [51], [52].

Hybrid work and integration across boundaries may lead to more autonomy, life satisfaction, and balance when employees adjust their boundary preferences and when the flexibility is complemented by the favourable conditions that may include clear expectations, manageable workloads, and spousal or organizational support [53], [54].

In general, however, it is clear that boundary blurring, as a phenomenon, requires and supports digital dependence during the hybrid period: when boundaries are not managed well and with the lack of supportive policies, this arrangement erodes work-life balance, but when norms, skills, and relational support are established properly, it can offer desired flexibility with less adverse effects on well-being.

Organizational Support

One of the key predictors of employee experience of digital reliance and work-life balance in hybrid work is organizational support. The perceived organizational support of well-being, such as flexible working hours, mental health programs, and effective communication, mitigates the adverse effects of excessive screen time and digital burnout on job satisfaction and allows employees to have a satisfying work-life balance in spite of the high-intensity demands of digital work [55]. It has been demonstrated quantitatively that perceived organizational support in hybrid environments is positively related to well-being, job satisfaction, and performance, partly by promoting healthier work-life balance and more sustainable digital engagement [56].

Simultaneously, the studies of techno-stress in virtual and hybrid environments reveal that organizational support is a job resource, which may reduce stress, but in many cases, it is not enough on its own in the case when work-family conflict and digital

demands are extremely high, which means that the supportive policies are to be combined with workload and boundary management to protect engagement and balance [57].

The work on systematic review also reveals that the organizational support is a central moderating variable that can reinforce the positive relationship between the work-life balance and employee performance during the digital and hybrid age, which explains why HR practices that are directly targeted at digital overload and boundary control are required [58].

V. IMPACTS ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

There is a two-fold influence of digital reliance in the hybrid work period on work-life balance. Digital tools and hybrid arrangements can increase work-life balance by making work more flexible and controllable, as well as by lessening the commuting time and enabling employees to better balance work with family duties and coordination during work, and sharing knowledge [1], [8]. Research indicates that hybrid and digital work, when they have a supportive environment in the form of specific policies and organizational support, is linked to a better perceived balance, increased job satisfaction, and greater well-being [55], [59], [60]. Simultaneously, excessive digital connectivity enhances techno-stress, digital burnout, and breaking work-family boundaries, contributing to work-family conflict, stress, and lower work-life balance [57], [61].

The idea that constant connectivity, addiction to screen time, and video conference overload may destroy the time of rest, increase the risk of burnout, and disrupt personal life is highlighted by systematic reviews and conceptual papers [26], [62]. In general, the effects of digital dependence on work-life balance on hybrid work can be both positive and negative: positive when combined with flexibility, boundary management, and supportive leadership, but negative when resulting in hyper connectivity, role conflict, and uncontrolled digital stress [63], [64].

VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The review has practical implications on digital reliance in the hybrid work era, which include the necessity of organizations to create human-centred hybrid policies that utilize digital tools to gain flexibility, productivity, and proactively monitor burnout and boundary erosion. Organizations ought to invest in effective, user-friendly communication and collaboration technologies, and utilize them to facilitate better coordination and knowledge sharing instead of establishing an always-on connected and digital fatigue [1], [9]. Clear availability, after-hours contact, and right to disconnect norms are necessary to ensure that work-life balance is safeguarded, and also to reduce techno-stress, where blurring of boundaries and technological overload is the norm [58], [63].

The adverse impact of high screen time on work-related satisfaction and well-being in higher-risk groups and sectors can be mitigated by enhancing perceived organizational support by means of flexible schedules, mental health and digital detox programs, and frequent check-ins [55]. HR and the leadership need to be trained in empathetic and digitally competent management and advised to develop individualized hybrid arrangements and boundary management strategies with employees, integrating organizational-level structures (e.g., flexibility policies, technological support) with personal strategies (e.g., time blocking and turning off notifications) [56], [65].

Lastly, the work-life balance, techno-stress, and engagement should be monitored continuously and used to make iterative changes to hybrid and digital work practices, with the intention of keeping organizations running and protecting the health and family life of the employees [31], [60].

VII. CONCLUSION

The rise of hybrid work has made digital technology a central part of employees' daily work lives. As organizations increasingly depend on digital platforms for communication, collaboration, and task management, employees have gained greater flexibility in where and when they work. This flexibility can improve work-life balance by reducing commuting time, increasing autonomy, and helping individuals better manage their professional and personal responsibilities. When supported by effective workplace policies and reliable digital infrastructure, these benefits can lead to higher job satisfaction, improved well-being, and better organizational outcomes. At the same time, this review shows that heavy reliance on digital technologies can also create challenges. Constant connectivity, frequent online interactions, and the expectation of being available outside regular working hours can blur the boundaries between work and personal life. As a result, employees may experience techno-stress, digital fatigue, burnout, and increased work-family conflict, all of which can negatively affect their overall well-being.

The findings suggest that technology itself is neither entirely beneficial nor harmful. Instead, its impact largely depends on how it is used and managed within organizations. Among the factors examined, organizational support plays a particularly important role in helping employees maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life. Supportive practices such as flexible scheduling, clear communication expectations, digital wellness initiatives, leadership support, and policies that encourage employees to disconnect from work after hours can significantly reduce the negative effects of digital work demands.

In conclusion, digital reliance in hybrid work should be viewed as both an opportunity and a challenge. While digital technologies can enhance flexibility and productivity, they can also increase stress and boundary-related difficulties if not managed carefully. Therefore, organizations should adopt human-centred approaches that prioritize employee well-being alongside performance goals.

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