

Literature review on theories of work-life balance

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 March 2024

Revised 13 June 2024

Accepted 18 June 2024

Published 30 June 2024

Keywords:

Work-Life Balance

Work-Life Balance Strategies

Business Management

Interpersonal Conflict

DOI:

10.24191/jeeir.v12i2.1678

ABSTRACT

Work-life balance reflects the equilibrium between career and family responsibilities. Individuals often face challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, such as inter-role conflict between professional duties and family obligations. This study aims to analyze the literature review on various theories essential for understanding work-life balance concepts. Methodological articles analyzing literature reviews from journal articles on work-life balance discuss the theories commonly employed by researchers in this field. By analyzing works indexed in the Scopus database from 2022 to 2024, we employed thematic analysis to identify the common theories employed within the extant literature. Among the widely-used theories that were grounded to study work-life balance are identified namely Spillover Theory, Social Action Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Boundary Theory, Role Theory, and Compensation Theory. The findings suggest that work-life balance is a multidimensional construct that includes the perceived ability to balance work and non-work responsibilities and the feelings of satisfaction and fulfilment that result from navigating these competing priorities in modern life.

1. Introduction

Work-life balance refers to the degree to which an individual, regardless of gender, can successfully juggle the demands of their professional and personal lives. According to Wheatley (2012), work refers to labour conducted for compensation outside the house. (Haar et al., 2014). Research has shown that when parents can strike a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives, they report higher levels of life satisfaction, which in turn has a beneficial effect on their mental and physical health. In recent years, there has been a shift in the structure of the family as an institution, including the makeup of families as well as the functions played by the genders, and each member of the family now has a more nuanced set of responsibilities.

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The tactics of maintaining a healthy work-life balance have been addressed and implemented by many researchers to investigate the strategies for managing the issues of work-life balance. According to Priya and Christopher (2024), an increasing number of scholars who study the relationship between work and family have found dominant themes relating to work–family and the conflict of life. Most research that focuses on the conflicting viewpoint operates under the assumption that people who participate in numerous roles, such as job and family, would unavoidably suffer conflict and stress, both of which will affect their quality of life. On the other hand, the issue of balancing responsibilities between family and work becomes trickier for those with dual responsibilities. In this paper, we discuss the importance of understanding the fundamentals of work-life balance from several theories that will help an individual or organisation to find the best solution in managing the work-life balance in their lives.

2. Literature Review

The concept of work-life balance holds considerable significance, particularly for individuals who frequently encounter the task of harmonising their professional obligations with their responsibilities at home. Recently, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the distinct difficulties issues encountered in attaining equilibrium between their professional and personal lives, prompting the need to formulate approaches to tackle these obstacles. A literature review is crucial in thoroughly comprehending particular theories to explain work-life balance. Researchers can assess and understand all pertinent studies accessible in the theories by adhering to the comprehensive literature review technique. By implementing a literature review, researchers can ascertain that their grounded theories in a comprehensive assessment of pertinent studies are consistent with theories of work-life balance.

2.1 Definition of Work-Life Balance

The notion of work-life balance has garnered much attention in recent years. By the end of 2000, *work-life balance* was defined as being content and efficient at work and home while experiencing minimal friction between different roles. Most individuals prefer maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between their personal and professional lives. They desire personal time away from work and time to spend with their spouse, children, family, and friends and engage in social activities. Achieving a favourable work-life balance enhances an individual's dedication to their profession and overall contentment with their home life.

Conversely, scholars have acknowledged the significance of attaining a harmonious equilibrium between professional and personal life, not only for the welfare of individuals but also for the prosperity and efficiency of organisations (Uzman et al., 2022). Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between domestic obligations and various professional tasks, including those in entrepreneurship and organisational contexts. The term was coined to describe the unhealthy lifestyle that individuals are leading, prioritising work above their personal lives and neglecting other important aspects such as relationships, family, and hobbies. It involves effectively balancing the demands of work and other obligations. The term is akin to Kalliath and Brough (2008), who define *work-life balance* as an individual's sense that work and nonwork activities are harmonious and contribute to personal development in line with their current life objectives.

Furthermore, Sheikh (2022) highlighted that the revised concept of work-life balance involves adapting to personal circumstances to fulfil one's obligations and promote the collective well-being of the individual, organisation, and society. According to Kirchmeyer (2000), work-life balance is achieved by allocating more time to personal activities, ultimately leading to well-being. While people prioritise work-life balance, their desire to thrive in their careers leads them to participate in excessive work hours, negatively impacting their ability to maintain a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives. In contrast to current studies, work-life balance refers to an individual's subjective view of achieving equilibrium between work and personal life, fostering personal development aligned with one's life priorities (Nugroho et al., 2023).

Alternatively, work-life balance, as understood by other academics, encompasses an individual's capacity to effectively fulfil their job and family obligations, together with additional non-work duties, activities, and roles across several domains of life (Sheikh, 2022). This entails achieving an optimal equilibrium between work and personal life commitments, ensuring that individuals can efficiently meet their job obligations while still having sufficient time and vitality to dedicate to their non-work-related activities. According to Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021), work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage job and family responsibilities. Table 1 displays multiple definitions of work-life balance derived from previous scholars.

Table 1. Definitions of work-life balance

No	Definitions	Sources
1.	Work-life balance as the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities	Kalliath & Brough, (2008)
2.	Work-life balance results from more personal time, which eventually brings well-being	Kirchmeyer (2000)
3.	Obtaining a sufficient degree of satisfaction at both home and work	Clark (2000)
4.	Work-life balance reflects the perceptions of striking a balance between employees' work and personal life, including sensitivities about social life and leisure time	Chan et al. (2020) Weale et al. (2020)
5.	Define work-life balance as an individual ability to coordinate work and family obligations successfully.	Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021)
6.	The definition of work-life balance is about responding to individual circumstances to help them accomplish their responsibilities and work toward the mutual benefit of the individual, business, and society.	Sheikh (2022)
7.	An individual's ability to meet their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities, activities, and roles in different areas of life.	Sheikh (2022)
8.	Work-life balance has become a dynamic phenomenon affecting an individual's perception of work and non-work activities to assess compatibility between both, which can promote growth in accordance with their present life priorities. The extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role.	Rashmi and Kataria (2022)
9.	Work-life balance is an individual's perception where activities in work and personal life can be balanced, which will encourage personal growth in accordance with individual life priorities	Nugroho et al. (2023)
10.	Work-life balance is also a personal level of involvement that is satisfactory to fit well between the multiple roles in his/her life, simultaneously maintaining an overall sense of harmony or equilibrium	Chandran and Abukhalifeh (2021)

According to the findings presented in Table 1, the current study seeks to expand the understanding of work-life balance as highlighted by several researchers that (i) work balance is related to an individual perception of balance between work and family (Weale et al., 2020), (ii) satisfied and balance of work and family, (Chandran & Abukhalifeh, 2021) (iii) individual ability to balance between work and family (Sheikh, 2022), (iv) fit-in the dual or multiple careers (Rashmi & Kataria, 2022).

3. Methodology

Thematic analysis is a useful method for performing literature evaluations since it enables the identification of patterns and themes within the chosen topic matter (Riebschleger et al., 2017). This method enables researchers to obtain a thorough comprehension of the subject matter by extracting essential concepts and ideas from many journal articles. The procedure of performing a thematic analysis for a

literature review generally encompasses multiple stages (Ishak et al., 2021). Initially, researchers need to establish the precise theme or subject they intend to investigate. This can be centred around a particular discipline or topic of study, or it can encompass a broader theme that extends across numerous fields. The subject of this study is the theories of work-life balance explained by previous researchers. Once the research focus has been identified, the next step is comprehensively reviewing the existing literature.

The literature review process should involve a systematic search for relevant publications, critically appraise their content, and synthesise the major themes identified (Fàbregues et al., 2024). The literature review not only helps researchers understand the current state of knowledge on the topic but also allows them to identify gaps or areas that require further investigation, refine the research questions, and develop a strong theoretical or conceptual framework to guide the study (Fàbregues et al., 2024) (Guidelines for how to choose research paper topics, 2022).

Next, after identifying the theme, researchers perform a comprehensive literature search to collect pertinent articles. This approach entails a methodical process of assigning codes and organising the data into categories (Lai et al., 2021). The objective of this technique is to detect and analyse repetitive theories of work-life balance in various articles. As a result, this paper examines ten journal articles obtained from the Emerald and SCOPUS library databases between 2022 to 2024. The data presented in Table 1 illustrates the sources of information extraction and several metrics used to assess social anxiety in university students. The findings were discussed. Relevant research from various sources was examined to comprehensively understand the topic. The results of other findings were also discussed in detail, offering insights into the main research issues and opportunities surrounding work-life balance. The literature indicates that the concept of work-life balance is inherently complex, with various interrelated dimensions that shape an individual's ability to effectively manage the demands of their professional and personal responsibilities.

4. Findings

The literature review analysis found several theories used to explain the fundamentals of work-life balance. As shown in Table 2, most recent studies applied Spillover Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Boundary Theory, Role Theory, and Compensation Theory.

4.1.1 *Spillover theory*

While much of the literature primarily discusses the negative consequences of role spillover from work to life and life to work, there is evidence that social and family support can have positive implications on an individual's job commitment, satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). The spillover idea suggests that one's pleasure with life might impact one's satisfaction in other areas (Sirgy et al., 2001). Spillover can be categorised into two types: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal spillover is where incentives, energies, and emotions from work and home experiences influence one another (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Vertical spillover requires an internal hierarchy where an individual prioritises one life domain over another, and the impact of pleasure in higher-valued domains on lower-valued ones is examined (Sirgy et al., 2001). Extensive research spanning twenty years demonstrates that the occurrence of family problems affecting work (family-work conflict) and work-related problems impacting family life (work-family conflict) is widespread (Eby et al., 2010).

The spillover theory posits that the work and non-work domains are interconnected and can have a mutual impact on each other, either in a positive or negative manner (Naithani, 2010). Hence, personal experiences that happen in one area might influence the other (whether it is job affecting home life or vice versa). Prior research, such as the study conducted by Du et al. in 2018, has demonstrated how individuals utilise limited psychological resources, such as mental energy, mood, feelings, and emotions. The repeated demands of one's role, such as work obligations, deplete these resources, thereby restricting the amount available for optimal functioning in other roles. Although the depletion of psychological resources caused

by conflicts between different domains vying for attention seems to be a common occurrence, the cultural and social context significantly influences work-life imbalances and other factors contributing to conflict experiences. Clearly, the work-life experiences of individuals are influenced by specific factors related to their context. These factors include societal expectations regarding gender roles, the influence of patriarchy on the work-life balance of female professionals, cultural attitudes towards work-life balance, and the amount of equality. It is important to note that these factors differ from one country to another. There is a scarcity of research in the literature on work-life studies that specifically investigate these contextual issues, particularly within the setting of the black race.

4.1.2 *Social exchange theory*

The notion of social exchange theory emerged from the junction of psychology, sociology, and economics to study human behaviour and exchange processes in an organisational environment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Blau's thesis, proposed in 1964, suggests that interactions between diverse parties are determined by give-and-take or cost-benefit connections. When establishing ties, individuals or organisations frequently anticipate mutual advantages. Organisations anticipate that by offering work-life balance amenities, their employees would experience increased satisfaction and have a longer tenure. Social exchange theory is an important theoretical framework for comprehending people's responses. Sequences of messages in social interaction give rise to obligations.

Based on social exchange theory, employees are provided with compensation, which includes pay and benefits, as a reciprocal arrangement for their contributions to the organisation. Studies have demonstrated that the advantages impact employees' attitudes (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1992) and their behaviours (Martocchio, 1998). In order to analyse the benefits of work-life balance, we can utilise a theoretical framework based on social exchange theory. The primary objective is to analyse employees' rewards in return for the work-life balance. These benefits enable individuals to more effectively manage their professional commitments and personal aspirations or duties (Lambert, 2000; Milkovich & Newman, 2008). WLB perks, such as flexible work hours, 24-hour telecommuting, childcare support, elderly care aid, vacation, and educational assistance, are some of the rewards (Milkovich & Newman, 2008).

The initial inception of social exchange theory (Malinowski, 1922) was to elucidate social interactions that occur beyond economic transactions (Molm, 2006). Subsequently, several scholars have expanded the theory. The field of social psychology was developed in the late 1950s by researchers such as Thibaut and Kelly (1959), Blau (1964), and Homans (1961). Social exchange theory encompasses four fundamental concepts. The ideas discussed include the participation of individuals in the transaction, the transfer of resources, the establishment of relationships within the transaction's framework, and the transaction's dynamic nature (Molm, 2006). The initial concept pertains to the perspective from which the actors involved in the exchange are observed. Certain theorists analyse actors as autonomous entities, while others argue they function as collectives collaborating in their actions.

The variations in how the actor is perceived can be attributed to the limited assumptions made by social exchange theories on the attributes of actors (Molm, 2006). The initial concept pertains to the perspective from which the actors involved in the trade are perceived. Certain theorists analyse actors as autonomous entities, while others argue they function as collectives collaborating in their actions. The variations in how the actor is perceived can be attributed to the limited assumptions made by social exchange theories on the attributes of actors (Molm, 2006). Actors are commonly believed to be motivated by self-interest and tend to accept results they perceive as beneficial while rejecting those they perceive as undesirable. Communication can influence the value individuals assign to a reward by enhancing their awareness of the availability and value of resources. This knowledge strengthens the impact of the rewards and makes employees more aware of the resources offered. In theories involving an individual, the term "actor" can refer to a particular individual or someone occupying a specific position at a given time.

Similarly, in other theories, the term "actor" might denote either a particular group or the present group consisting of a committee. This enables transactions involving either a particular entity or a substitutable entity. Any exchange theories can be categorised based on adopting either a rational model actor or a learning model approach to actors. Some theories, such as those proposed by Bienenstock and Bonacich (1992), adopt a rational model actor. On the other hand, theories put forth by Homans (1961), Blau (1964), Thibaut and Kelly (1959), and Molm (2006) use a learning model approach to actors. These two theories are interconnected because, as time passes, an individual can anticipate particular results in a continuous relationship. The rational actor method posits that the actor consciously evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of a transaction in order to optimise results (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). This method presupposes that players, driven by their desires and objectives, must make deliberate choices from a limited pool of chances due to scarcity. When individuals make rational decisions, they choose the alternative that best satisfies their desires or objectives most efficiently or with satisfactory conditions. Bienenstock and Bonacich (1992) have all adopted the rational actor approach.

Conversely, a learning model method operates under the idea that the actor's behaviour is influenced by the outcomes of their past rational decisions. This implies that the actor responds to stimuli the same way as they did, influenced by the previous reward they received. Thus, with the learning model approach, the actor must consciously contemplate the options, leading to suboptimal outcomes. According to the social exchange perspective, actors behave in their own self-interest and strive to obtain desirable advantages (Molm, 2006). Thibaut and Kelly (1959), Homans (1961), and Blau (1964) adopted a learning model method. Nevertheless, social exchange theorists concur that a trade will occur solely if all individuals participating in the exchange experience a more significant benefit than not engaging. Regardless of the decision between the learning model or rational choice model, social exchange theorists perceive actors as self-interested, meaning their behaviour is driven by their desire to obtain valuable resources (Molm, 2006).

4.1.3 Conservation of resources theory

Several studies utilised the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) to examine the impact of work-life balance (WLB) on well-being. This theoretical framework is widely recognised and utilised in WLB, as evidenced by previous studies (e.g., Haar & Harris, 2023; Haar & Brougham, 2022). The COR model is a comprehensive framework for understanding stress that emphasises the importance of employee resources. According to this model, individuals are driven to acquire and preserve resources and motivated to protect themselves against resource depletion (Hobfoll, 1989). In his work, Hobfoll (2001) defined *resources* as "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that hold intrinsic value or are valued because they facilitate the acquisition or preservation of other valuable resources" (p. 339). Hobfoll (2001) presents an extensive range of resources, such as work time, meaningful time spent with family, vitality, sound physical health and financial stability in retirement. Haar and Brougham (2022) emphasised the strong correspondence between COR theory and work-life balance (WLB), suggesting that high levels of WLB serve as a source or reserve of psychological resources that can be utilised in the workplace. The COR theory posits that individuals with more considerable resources would experience higher levels of well-being due to their enhanced ability to handle work-related stressors effectively, thanks to the superior resources at their disposal.

The conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) is utilised to create a model that establishes a connection between authentic leadership and followers' job happiness by considering the work-life balance of both leaders and followers. COR-based studies involve implementing a crossover procedure to address views of work-life balance. Crossover refers to transmitting stress and strain between individuals when they share the same social context (Bolger et al., 1989). Crossover is believed to happen due to shared stressors, indirect processes mediating the effect (such as coping techniques, social support, and social undermining), or direct empathic crossover (Westman & Vinokur, 1998). The concept of COR is commonly applied to examining work-life balance and job satisfaction, which are explored from the perspectives of both employers and employees.

4.1.4 *Boundary theory*

In recent decades, the interest in better understanding the limits of work and life and managing them has increased and stimulated a lot of research in different directions (Adkins & Premeaux, 2014; Chen & Karahanna, 2018). Unfortunately, certain concepts lack clarity due to terminological confusion, inconsistent names, and inadequate definitions. McCloskey (2018) in theorising the boundaries between work and private life. According to the theory of limits (McCloskey, 2016), boundaries can exist according to the dimensions of flexibility and permeability. Hall and Richter (1988) describe flexibility as the extent to which the physical conditions of time and place, such as the hours and place of work, may be modified (Hall & Richter, 1988). The limits are flexible when the individual has full control over when and where they work (McCloskey, 2016). An example of flexible boundaries is a business owner who can leave work to attend to personal affairs and return to work later. In contrast, the hard limit does not provide this option - for example, where and when a security guard can its role is very limited (Ashforth et al., 2000). For example, a permeable boundary is a person who can make private phone calls or receive lengthy personal visits during their working time. A worker with limited opportunities (no access and no time to change roles) has an impermeable boundary (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Flexible limits are not direct; private time is modified accordingly when we modify work time. Permeability describes the degree to which a person physically located in one domain can be psychologically influenced by another (Hall & Richter, 1988). When the boundaries are permeable, the obligations of a role enter the other role domain (Allen et al., 2014). High-level professional permeability describes situations in which home outages occur while one is in the zone of work. A high degree of domestic permeability exists when work activities take place in the domestic domain. For example, the surgeon may not make phone calls with his partner at work (impenetrable professional limit) but always respond to emails and complete documents from the home office (permeable interior boundaries). The permeable boundaries between home and work can have directions (McCloskey, 2018). Thus, an individual can have (Impermeable) professional boundaries but (im)permeable internal boundaries. Some employees accept the intervention of work-home boundaries and see an opportunity for family life to be integrated into the professional field (Bailyn et al., 2001), while other fears the high degree of work-family integration caused by the rapid growth of mobile technologies (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

4.1.5 *Role theory*

Is a rigorous set of normative expectations that define precise positions or statuses in social structures, outlining corresponding roles and behaviours during interactions (Biddle, 1986). The fundamental principle is that an individual's existence encompasses multiple roles, including tasks both inside and outside the workplace (Anglin et al., 2022) the foundational premise is that an individual's existence encompasses numerous roles and duties, inside and outside the workplace (Anglin et al., 2022). To assess the interference between different roles in existence, Work life balance (WLB) is dissected, allowing researchers to measure whether paintings interfere with personal lives or vice versa. Theoretic theory suggests that pressures may overlap within two sets of functions, mainly if adhering to one set makes it difficult to comply with another. Empirical research has shown a correlation between paintings-existent imbalance and poor results resulting from emotional exhaustion (202). However, an alternative option would be beneficial as both conflicts are present in this model. Conversely, a beneficial paintings-existence stability is connected to tremendous results of more desirable process satisfaction and enhanced intellectual health (Haar et al., 2014).

4.1.6 *Compensation theory*

In compensation theory, if people are not fulfilled in their current situation, they will seek fulfilment in other contexts. According to this theory, family and work coexist in the same environment and affect

each other (Mathew & Natarajan, 2014). The price is said to be the conflict between work and family. Because negative experiences in one domain led to positive thoughts in another domain, they are labelled negative. People can look for inspiration; another domain is responding to someone's displeasure. Compensation is activities that satisfy human needs and can increase the level of enjoyment.

4.2 *Critical analysis of work-life balance theories*

4.2.1 *Spillover theory*

Spillover Theory clarifies the interconnecting between work and life, showing how encounters in one space can influence the other emphatically or contrarily (Goode, 1960). It is invaluable for understanding the interplay between emotions, actions, and personalities from the workplace to home life and vice versa (Sonntag & Binnewies, 2013). The weaknesses are accepting a straight, unidirectional relationship between work and life spaces. It does not account for personal contrasts in adapting instruments. Meanwhile, it is efficient for applicability in situations where work and personal life are closely linked, such as in more remote workplaces. It is less pertinent when people keep up a strict division between work and life.

4.2.2 *Social exchange theory (SET)*

Social Exchange Theory (SET) emphasizes the complementary connections between managers and workers, highlighting the significance of perceived fairness and value (Blau, 1964). This theory also clarifies how positive exchanges (e.g., support at work) can lead to greater work satisfaction and improved work-life balance (Manna et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the weaknesses are that it overemphasizes the benefits and costs, ignoring the emotional and psychological aspects of work-life balance. In addition, it can be limited in its applicability to societies with distinctive social norms and expectations (Hornung & Glaser, 2010). Furthermore, its applicability is that it works well in corporate settings where formal and informal exchanges are common but is less successful in understanding work-life balance in independent or gig economies where employer-employee relationships are less defined.

4.2.3 *Conservation of resources theory (COR)*

Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) emphasizes the significance of resource management, which is vital in both work and individual life. It highlights how the loss of resources (e.g., time, vitality) can lead to stress, affecting work-life balance (Deng et al., 2021). The weakness of this theory is that it downplays circumstances where resources can be liberally accessible or easily replenished. Somehow, this theory may not fully capture the dynamic nature of resource exchange between work and life (Chen et al., 2015). In addition to its applicability, it is valuable in high-stress situations where resources are restricted, such as healthcare or emergency services (Prapanjaroensin et al., 2017). In addition, it may be less pertinent in high-autonomy occupations where resource control is more balanced.

4.2.4 *Boundary theory*

Boundary Theory focuses on how individuals create and maintain work-life boundaries, providing insight into work-life integration strategies. This theory recognizes individual differences in boundary management preferences (e.g., segmentors vs. integrators) (Sayah, 2013). The weakness of this theory is that it may be too simplistic if individuals can fully control or manage boundaries without outside influences, and it possibly does not fully account for the fluidity and permeability of boundaries in some occupations (Wepfer et al., 2018). It is highly applicable in telecommuting or self-employment contexts where boundary management is crucial, but less applicable in rigid work environments where restraints are externally imposed.

Table 2. Theories related to work-life balance

No	Source	Study's Context	Underpinning Theories	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Summary of Findings
1	Aman-Ullah et al. (2022)	Healthcare sector of Pakistan	Social Exchange Theory	Job satisfaction (mediating variable) Employee retention and turnover intentions	Work-life balance	This study extends the existing literature on the link between work-life balance and employee behaviour (employee retention and turnover intention) in Pakistan's healthcare sector, using job satisfaction as the mediator.
2	Lin et al. (2024)	Manufacturing industry in the UK	Social Exchange Theory (SET) Theory	Work-life balance	Human resources practices	GI mediates the relationship between GHRM practices, ER, GWLB, and CSP. OC helps to maintain a GWLB and ER, implement environmentally friendly HR practices, and achieve CSP goals.
3	Ahmadi et al. (2024)	Small firms in Sweden	Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)	Wellbeing	Working conditions	Managers' working conditions and well-being are dynamic and linked to growth-related changes that occur from the start of organisational activities and during periods of growth.
4	Hughes & Donnelly (2024)	Academics from UK universities	Boundary Theory	Macroturbulence	Management and experience of work	The pandemic intensified existing tensions in work-life boundaries, as employees navigated blurred lines between personal and professional spaces. While the shift to remote work presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for organizations to enhance flexibility and access a broader talent pool.
5	Zaitouni et al. (2024)	Bibliometric analysis of the Scopus database	Role Theory	Work-life balance	-	Multidisciplinary work-life balance research grew between 2000-2020. Main research themes included gender, family life, and emerging directions.
7	Heřmanová et al. (2024).	Agriculture sector in the Czech Republic	Compensation Theory	Benefits for work-life balance	Employee benefits and preferences	The results show that benefits from the "Holiday and times off" category have the highest value for Generation Z and that, on the contrary, they value benefits from the "Benefits for work-life balance" category the least.

4.2.5 Role theory

Role Theory clarifies the numerous roles in which people are involved and how these roles can conflict or improve work-life balance. This theory gives a framework for understanding overload and role conflict, which are common issues in work-life balance (Bakar & Salleh, 2015). The weakness of this theory is that it may overemphasize the negative aspects of multiplicity, such as conflict, without satisfactorily exploring role enrichment (Parchomiuk, 2020). It is highly applicable in settings where people juggle different roles, such as working parents or caregivers, but is less successful in single-role settings where other variables, like time management, dominate.

4.2.6 Compensation theory

The strengths of compensation theory are that it recommends that individuals compensate for scarce in one domain (e.g., work) by looking for fulfilment in another (e.g., family), giving a balance next, it offers a positive point of view on how people can accomplish work-life balance in challenging circumstances (Mospan et al., 2016). However, the theory assumes compensation is always possible, which may not be the case in high-stress situations, potentially leading to overcompensation and burnout (Stanley & Sebastine, 2023). The applicability is pertinent when people adapt to overseeing their time and responsibilities. Finally, it is less appropriate in highly demanding roles where compensation strategies are challenging.

Table 3. Comparison of theories related to work-life balance

Theory	Strengths	Weaknesses	Applicability	Gaps/Areas for Future Research
Spillover Theory	Explains interconnectedness between work and life	Linear, unidirectional view	Remote working environments	More research on multidirectional spillover effects
Social Exchange Theory	Focus on reciprocal relationships	Overemphasises rational calculation	Corporate settings	Exploring emotional aspects of exchanges
Conservation of Resources	Emphasises resource management	Assumes scarcity mindset	High-stress environments	Dynamic nature of resource exchange
Boundary Theory	Focus on boundary management	Overly simplistic, ignores fluid boundaries	Remote/freelance work	Fluidity and permeability of boundaries
Role Theory	Explains role conflict/enrichment	Overemphasises negative aspects of roles	Multiple-role contexts	Role agency and customisation
Compensation Theory	Positive view on balance through compensation	Assumes compensation is always effective	Flexible roles	Risks of overcompensation leading to burnout

4.3 Gaps and areas for future research

4.3.1 Integration of theories

Future research could explore how these theories interact and complement each other. For example, combining boundary and role theories can provide richer insights into how individuals manage multiple roles while maintaining boundaries.

4.3.2 *Cultural contexts*

Most of these theories were developed in Western contexts. More research is needed to understand how these theories apply in different cultural contexts, especially in collectivist societies where work and life are not clearly defined.

4.3.3 *Technological advancements*

The advent of digital workplaces has made it difficult to distinguish between work and life. Future research could explore how these theories hold up in the context of digital workspaces and telecommuting.

4.3.4 *Longitudinal studies*

Many work-life balance studies are cross-sectional. The effectiveness of work-life balance strategies can be impacted by longitudinal research, which can provide more comprehensive information. The comparison and comparison of these theories can help researchers better understand the intricacies of work-life balance and identify areas where these models can be expanded or combined for more comprehensive models.

5. **Conclusion**

This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the literature review by employing a thematic analysis of theories pertaining to work-life balance. The findings reveal that work-life balance is an essential factor in determining employee performance, as it directly influences employee loyalty and organisational commitment. The reviewed studies suggest that when employees can successfully balance their work and personal responsibilities, they tend to be more engaged, productive, and less likely to leave the organisation.

The findings revealed three primary hypotheses concerning work-life balance. Most stated theories focused on the fundamental principles and concepts and their practical application to achieving work-life balance. Conversely, the literature also indicates that when individuals are able to strike a healthy balance between their work and personal lives, they tend to report greater job satisfaction (Brough et al., 2014) and reduced turnover intentions and psychological strain. Existing research also suggests that improving work-life balance can reduce absenteeism and increase employee productivity. Fundamentally, work-life balance is about creating and maintaining supportive and healthy environments that enable employees to balance their work and personal responsibilities, thus strengthening employee loyalty and productivity.

The discovery suggests identifying the most widely discussed literature review on theories of work-life balance. This article reviews aspects of contemporary theory and research on work-life balance, starting by exploring why the topic has become important for research and policy in some countries, outlining traditional perspectives, and examining the concept of balance and its implications for understanding the complex interplay between the demands of one's professional obligations and the needs of their personal commitments. The research indicates that work-life balance is a multidimensional construct that not only encompasses the perceived capacity to fulfil both work and non-work responsibilities but also encompasses the feelings of satisfaction and fulfilment that arise from effectively navigating these competing priorities that often characterise modern life (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Melayansari & Bhinekawati, 2020). Existing literature highlights that work-life balance is primarily characterised by two key features – the relationship between the conflicts and facilitations experienced across one's work and non-work roles, as well as the degree of perceived control an individual has in managing the boundaries between these domains (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

While some argue that a strict work-life balance may be unachievable, research suggests that a change of priorities can be a more realistic approach to enabling employees to effectively navigate the demands of their professional and personal lives. After examining the current literature, it is clear that additional investigation is required to determine the suitability of these theories in different organisational settings.

Furthermore, a thorough examination of the factors that impact work-life balance and the efficacy of current measures is necessary. Additionally, future studies should prioritise investigating the dynamic aspects of work-life balance in contemporary work environments, including technological improvements and shifting societal standards, to increase our understanding of work-life balance and offer vital guidance to organisations aiming to adopt successful work-life balance initiatives. The findings of this study reveal that various I/O (industrial/organizational) psychology theories serve as critical frameworks for understanding work-life balance. Each theory offers unique perspectives on the integration of work and life, highlighting the importance of managing boundaries and effectively allocating resources. These theories collectively emphasize that achieving a harmonious balance between productivity and well-being is crucial for maintaining both individual and organizational success.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Cawangan Shah Alam, Institute of Business Excellence and Faculty of Business Management Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia for providing the facilities and financial support on this research.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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Authors' contributions

Hazuana Zulkiflee carried out the research, wrote and revised the article. Wan Edura conceptualised the central research idea and provided the theoretical framework. Both Wan Edura and Norfadzilah designed the research, and supervised research progress. Norfadzilah Abd Razak Rahmah anchored the review, revisions and approved the article submission.



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