

## Work-Life Balance Dynamics among Hybrid Workers within a High-Productivity Culture

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### Abstract:

Hybrid work is often assumed to automatically improve work-life balance, yet high-productivity cultures may weaken its benefits. This study aims to examine how hybrid workers maintain work-life balance through coping strategies, structured flexibility, and productivity pressure. A qualitative design was applied using in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. The participants were 8 hybrid employees in technology and professional services roles, with varied positions and work tenures. Data were analyzed through data condensation, reduction, display, and verification. The findings show that work-life balance improves when workers use coping strategies such as digital boundaries, scheduled breaks, and emotional regulation. Hybrid flexibility reduces stress when implemented through clear and documented systems, including rotation schedules and online attendance records. However, productivity pressure disrupts personal life through always-on behavior, demands for rapid responsiveness, sudden meetings, and excessive multitasking. This study presents a conceptual integration of three mechanisms that explain work-life balance in hybrid settings. Organizations are recommended to formalize flexibility structures and limit after-hours communication norms to prevent boundary erosion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Changes in work patterns due to digital transformation have created the increasingly common phenomenon of hybrid work across various industry sectors. Modern society faces high-performance demands while maintaining personal quality of life. This issue is important because work-life balance directly affects psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational productivity (Yeluru et al., 2022). According to OECD (2021), workers who cannot balance job demands and personal life are at higher risk of stress and burnout (Chen et al., 2021; Serrano-Ripoll et al., 2020;



Vgontzas & Loder, 2022). This phenomenon shows that work-life balance dynamics are not only an individual concern but also a social and economic challenge affecting the broader society. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms of work-life balance in the context of hybrid work is an urgent research priority.

Although hybrid work offers flexibility, many employees report difficulties separating work time from personal time. An “always-on culture” emerges, where employees remain digitally connected to meet high-performance targets. Data from Gallup (2022) show that 62% of hybrid workers feel that productivity pressure interferes with their personal life (Lutsenko et al., 2024; Makar et al., 2023). In practice, this manifests as increased overtime, sleep disturbances, and family conflicts. This issue creates a dilemma: the flexibility of hybrid work, which should enhance quality of life, can instead exacerbate stress and imbalance (van et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). This situation necessitates research that systematically examines the factors influencing work-life balance in high-productivity cultures, enabling the design of effective intervention strategies.

Previous studies have highlighted work-life balance and hybrid work. Rangel et al. (2024) and Jones et al. (2024) found a negative relationship between long working hours and psychological well-being. Waite et al. (2022) and Parmar et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of digital boundaries to reduce stress among hybrid workers. Meanwhile, Verhelst et al. (2023), Bag et al. (2020), and Williams et al. (2021) highlighted the role of organizational support in improving work-life balance, and Ghashghaeizadeh (2020), Chaika (2025) and Hsiung et al. (2022) showed that work flexibility positively affects job satisfaction but does not always reduce burnout. However, these studies are limited to standard work cultures or public organizations, rarely addressing work-life balance dynamics in high-productivity cultural environments. This study fills this gap by examining the interaction between hybrid flexibility and high-performance pressures, providing relevant theoretical and practical contributions.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on hybrid workers within a high-productivity culture, where extreme performance demands influence work-life balance. This approach differs from previous studies that focused solely on flexibility or organizational support without considering the intensity of productivity culture (Gisi, 2023; Graves et al., 2021). The study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to map workers' adaptation strategies, digital boundaries, and effective coping mechanisms (Ramohai et al., 2022; Vgontzas et al., 2022). A deep understanding of these factors is crucial for designing adaptive HR policies, enhancing employee well-being, and minimizing burnout risk. Thus, this research provides both academic insights and practical contributions for organizations implementing hybrid work.

Based on the phenomenon and previous literature, the main research question emerges: how does work-life balance function for hybrid workers in a high-productivity culture? This problem involves identifying factors that disrupt balance, workers' adaptation strategies, and the impact of performance pressure on well-being and job satisfaction. The research gap is evident in the lack of studies simultaneously assessing hybrid flexibility and the intensity of high-performance work culture. Understanding this issue will provide empirical answers regarding the interaction between job demands, flexibility, and well-being, which have so far been discussed separately.

This study argues that work-life balance in hybrid work cannot be understood without considering the context of high-productivity culture. The initial contribution of this research is to show how workers manage time, establish digital boundaries, and use coping strategies to maintain well-being. By integrating individual and organizational perspectives, this study offers a new model of hybrid worker adaptation relevant to modern demands. Its originality lies in a multidimensional approach, combining work flexibility, productivity pressure, and psychological well-being. The findings are expected to provide a foundation for developing HR policies, employee well-being interventions, and theoretical contributions to work-life balance literature in the hybrid work era.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological research design aimed at understanding the subjective experiences of hybrid workers within a high-productivity culture (Kekeya, 2023). Phenomenology was chosen because the study focuses on exploring the meanings, perceptions, and dynamics of work-life balance from the perspective of individuals directly experiencing the phenomenon. This approach allows the researcher to capture in-depth experiences, social interactions, and adaptive strategies that workers use to maintain equilibrium between work and personal life elements that cannot be quantified. The selection of this design is grounded in the works of Mundi et al. (2025), who emphasize phenomenology as an ideal method for investigating human behavior in real-life contexts.

The research was conducted in three technology and professional service companies that implement hybrid work models with high-performance cultures. These sites were purposively selected because they combine flexible work structures with demanding performance expectations, making them representative of the phenomenon under study (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020). The participants comprised 20 hybrid workers, including 12 men and 8 women, aged 25–45 years, with 2–10 years of work experience, occupying various roles such as staff, managers, and supervisors. Purposive sampling ensured that all participants had relevant experiences related to work-life balance in a hybrid work environment.

Data were collected using multiple triangulated methods to ensure richness and validity (Cole, 2024). Semi-structured in-depth interviews explored personal experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies. Participatory observations captured workplace interactions, technology use, and time-management behaviors. Documentation, including HR policies, work schedules, and activity records, provided additional context. This triangulated approach allowed the study to capture diverse perspectives within a high-productivity work culture.

Data analysis followed a systematic procedure including data condensation, display, verification, and reduction. Key information from interview transcripts and field notes was summarized and selected during condensation (Lee et al., 2024). Data were visualized through tables, diagrams, and thematic matrices to facilitate pattern recognition. Verification and conclusion drawing were conducted by cross-checking findings with original data through source, method, and member triangulation. Data reduction involved filtering irrelevant information, emphasizing main themes, and categorizing findings according to work-life balance and coping strategies. This

approach aligns with the methods of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), ensuring a thorough and systematic analysis.

The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through several validity strategies. Source and method triangulation compared information across interviews, observations, and documentation (Fadli, 2021; Soesana et al., 2023). Member checking involved participants verifying transcripts and interpretations. An audit trail documented all steps of data collection and analysis for traceability. Peer debriefing allowed preliminary findings to be discussed with fellow researchers, minimizing subjective bias. Together, these strategies ensure the reliability, credibility, and transferability of the qualitative findings.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

This research findings section presents key findings regarding the dynamics of work-life balance among hybrid workers in a high-productivity culture. The results focus on three key aspects: individual coping strategies, documented hybrid work constraints, and productivity pressures that interfere with personal life. Conclusions are based on interviews, observations, and documentation to provide a comprehensive and understandable empirical picture.

### **Coping strategies improve work-life balance**

In this study, coping strategies are defined as conscious efforts by hybrid workers to manage work pressure and maintain a balance between work and personal life, particularly within a high-productivity culture. In practice, coping strategies are reflected in tangible actions, such as setting boundaries for working hours, prioritizing tasks, refusing work after certain hours, reducing notifications, and creating recovery routines, such as light exercise or dedicated time with family. Coping is also evident in how workers calm themselves when targets increase, regulate emotions when workloads pile up, and seek social support when feeling overwhelmed. This sub-finding emphasizes that work-life balance is not only influenced by the hybrid work system but is also strongly determined by individuals' ability to build consistent survival and coping strategies.

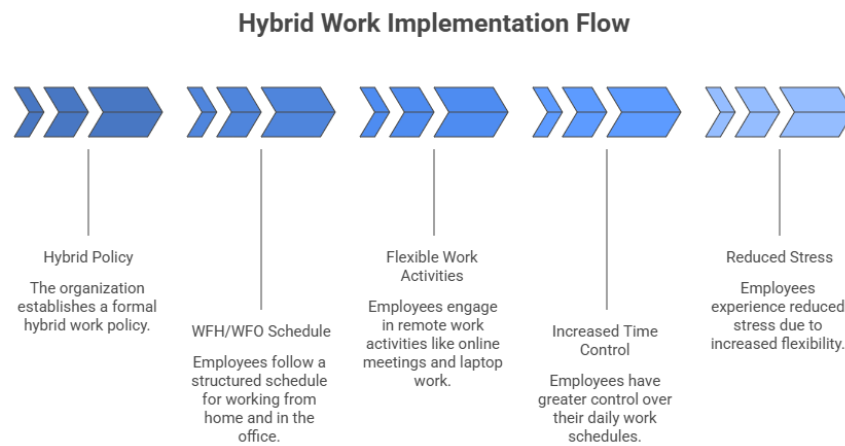
Interview findings show that several informants use digital boundary-setting as a coping strategy to maintain work-life balance. One informant stated, "I turn off office notifications after eight p.m., because otherwise my mind keeps thinking about work." Another informant said, "I started making my own rule once it's after working hours, I don't open email at all." Based on these statements, the researcher interprets that digital boundaries become the most dominant form of coping because a high-productivity culture often pushes workers to remain constantly responsive. Informants do not reject work demands, but instead manage response timing so that work does not disrupt their personal lives. This indicates that effective coping is not simply about avoiding work demands, but about creating personal control over work boundaries.

Beyond digital boundaries, coping strategies also emerge in the form of emotional management and recovery routines. One informant explained, “When it gets too much, I intentionally take a short break, step outside, grab a drink, and then continue again so I don’t explode.” Another informant shared, “I learned to say no, especially when sudden extra tasks come in, because if I accept everything, I become stressed and end up angry at home.” The researcher interprets that coping is not only technical but also psychological, involving the ability to regulate emotions, restrain impulsive reactions, and manage pressure in healthier ways. These statements indicate awareness that work-life balance can be disrupted when work pressure spills into family relationships, so coping is directed toward preventing conflict and emotional exhaustion.

Based on observations, the researcher found a pattern that hybrid workers with active coping strategies tend to demonstrate more structured and stable work behaviors. They appeared to have clear work schedules, limit meeting durations, and avoid excessive multitasking. In several situations, the researcher also observed that informants who applied coping strategies were able to stay focused during working hours, yet stop immediately when work hours ended without guilt. A restatement of these findings shows that coping functions as a regulating mechanism that maintains boundaries between work space and personal space. The data patterns indicate that the most frequently used coping strategies are digital boundaries, scheduled breaks, and the ability to refuse unrealistic workloads. Thus, work-life balance is stronger among workers who maintain self-control and consistent recovery routines.

### **Hybrid work flexibility reduces employee stress**

In this study, hybrid work flexibility is defined as the organizational allowance given to employees to determine their work location (WFH/WFO) and adjust working hours according to task demands, without reducing productivity targets. In practice, this flexibility is clearly reflected through formal and visual documentation, such as WFH-WFO rotation schedules, digital attendance systems, screenshots of hybrid work policies, and photos of employees’ work activities both in the office and at home. This sub-finding focuses on how such flexibility is associated with reduced stress, as indicated by lower commuting pressure, increased control over time, and fewer conflicts between work activities and personal needs. Thus, hybrid flexibility is not understood as complete freedom, but rather as a work system that enables more adaptive adjustments to work situations.



**Figure 1. Hybrid Work Implementation Flow**

Based on observations, hybrid work flexibility was evident through employee attendance patterns that were not uniform yet remained structured, with some employees attending the office on certain days and working from home on others. The researcher also observed that on WFH days, informants tended to start work in a calmer condition, without rushing, and showed fewer signs of fatigue caused by commuting. In addition, documentation of work activities showed that employees could adjust working hours to task needs for example, completing focused work in the morning and conducting meetings at mutually agreed times. The researcher interprets that this flexibility provides a sense of control over work rhythm, thereby reducing emotional pressure. This condition supports workers' psychological stability while performing their tasks.

A restatement of this finding shows that clearly documented hybrid flexibility is not merely a formal policy but is genuinely implemented in everyday work practices. Documentary evidence such as rotation schedules, digital attendance records, and photos of work activities demonstrate that workers have opportunities to choose work locations based on their conditions and task demands. The implementation of this flexibility reduces stress because workers do not always face commuting pressure, are not constantly exposed to socially demanding work environments, and have more space to arrange work time according to personal needs. In other words, hybrid flexibility helps workers balance work energy and personal energy. This makes work-life balance easier to achieve, especially when organizations provide clear and consistent flexibility structures.

The data patterns indicate that hybrid flexibility is most effective in reducing stress when supported by an organized and well-documented system, rather than ambiguous flexibility. Consistent documentation reflects a structured system, such as clear WFH-WFO schedules, integrated online attendance, and evidence that work activities remain productive across two locations. Across the overall data, a pattern emerges showing that workers with access to flexibility tend to demonstrate better emotional stability, particularly in time management, energy recovery, and reduced daily pressure. In addition, the most influential type of flexibility is location flexibility, because it directly reduces commuting burdens and provides a more comfortable work environment. Thus, this sub-finding demonstrates that hybrid flexibility serves as a mechanism that strengthens well-being, especially when its implementation is consistent and supported by documentary evidence.

## High productivity pressure disrupts personal life

High productivity pressure in this study is defined as a work condition that demands rapid, consistent, and continuous performance, causing hybrid workers to experience increased work intensity beyond normal working hours. In the field, this pressure is observed through visible behaviors such as working past official hours, remaining active on work communication platforms at night, responding quickly to work messages even outside working hours, and engaging in excessive multitasking. Productivity pressure is also reflected in signs of physical and mental fatigue, including tired facial expressions, reduced focus, and difficulty resting despite having flexible work arrangements. This sub-finding emphasizes that a high-productivity culture can blur the boundary between work and personal life, resulting in a direct disruption of personal balance.

**Table 1. Observation of High productivity pressure disrupts personal life**

Field Observation	Indicator
Workers remain online after working hours	Always-on behavior
Work messages are answered quickly at night	Responsiveness pressure
Many tasks are handled simultaneously	Excessive multitasking
Sudden meetings occur outside normal hours	Time unpredictability
Workers appear tired and struggle to focus	Mental and physical fatigue
Work activities enter family time	Personal life disruption

Based on the table, the researcher interprets that high productivity pressure pushes hybrid workers to maintain continuous work connectivity. Staying online after working hours and responding quickly to messages indicate that workers feel compelled to preserve a productive image and remain available whenever needed. The restatement of this finding is that hybrid flexibility does not automatically create balance, because productivity pressure informally extends working time. The researcher also observed that sudden meetings and excessive multitasking prevent workers from fully closing work activities, causing work-related thoughts to spill into personal time. Visible fatigue among workers further strengthens the interpretation that productivity pressure is not only about targets, but also about shaping a work pattern that disrupts recovery and personal routines.

The data pattern shows that personal life disruption becomes strongest when productivity pressure takes the form of rapid responsiveness demands and work expansion beyond working hours. Observations indicate that hybrid workers tend to experience blurred boundaries because work communication continues throughout the day without a clear endpoint. In addition, excessive multitasking and sudden meetings form a recurring pattern that accelerates exhaustion and reduces workers' control over time. Another observed pattern is that productivity pressure often appears not as a direct command, but as a normalized work habit within organizational culture. As a result, personal life is affected through reduced rest time, disrupted home routines, and increased emotional strain. Thus, high productivity pressure creates a systematic work pattern that gradually shifts personal space into work space.

## Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that coping strategies play a crucial role in strengthening work-life balance among hybrid workers, especially in environments shaped by a high-productivity culture. This result aligns with existing literature that emphasizes work-life balance as an active process rather than an automatic outcome of flexible work arrangements. Prior studies have noted that boundary-setting and self-regulation are key predictors of work-life balance, particularly when workers face continuous digital connectivity. The present findings support this view by showing that digital boundary-setting (such as turning off notifications and limiting email access) becomes the most dominant coping strategy (Freedenberg et al., 2020; Jamilah et al., 2025). However, this study also extends previous insights by highlighting that coping is not merely a personal preference but a survival mechanism that hybrid workers develop in response to persistent productivity demands.

In addition, the study's findings on emotional management and recovery routines reinforce earlier research linking coping strategies to psychological resilience in modern work settings. Existing studies generally suggest that coping is effective when it includes both behavioral strategies (time management, refusal skills) and emotional strategies (self-calming, emotional control) (Blake et al., 2020; Khrapov et al., 2022). The present study demonstrates this duality clearly: workers not only regulate work boundaries but also actively prevent emotional spillover into family life. Compared to prior research that often focuses mainly on organizational support or policy frameworks, this study emphasizes that internal coping skills remain essential even when organizational systems appear flexible (Clabaugh et al., 2021; Serrano et al., 2020). This suggests that hybrid work policies alone cannot guarantee balance unless workers are equipped with the ability to manage emotional and cognitive pressure.

The findings on hybrid work flexibility reducing employee stress are consistent with literature that identifies flexibility as a key factor in lowering daily work strain, particularly by reducing commuting burdens and allowing better control of work rhythms. Previous studies often highlight that flexibility improves employee well-being through autonomy and reduced time pressure (Cruz-Vargas et al., 2021; Vaseltsova et al., 2023). This study supports that argument but also adds an important nuance: flexibility reduces stress most effectively when it is structured, documented, and consistently implemented. Unlike some prior assumptions that flexibility itself is inherently beneficial, the present results show that ambiguous flexibility can fail to reduce stress because workers may still feel uncertain about expectations (Fleming et al., 2024; Principato et al., 2025). Therefore, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding that flexibility is not simply the presence of choice, but the presence of predictable systems that legitimize that choice.

The findings regarding high productivity pressure disrupting personal life strongly align with the literature on "always-on culture," in which constant responsiveness and blurred boundaries lead to exhaustion, reduced recovery, and increased emotional strain. Many studies have argued that hybrid work can unintentionally intensify work demands due to digital accessibility. This study supports that claim through observational evidence showing continuous connectivity, sudden

meetings, excessive multitasking, and visible fatigue. At the same time, the present findings add depth by demonstrating that productivity pressure often operates indirectly, not as explicit orders, but as normalized habits within organizational culture. This highlights a key difference from studies that frame productivity pressure primarily as managerial control; in this context, pressure becomes embedded in everyday expectations and collective work norms.

Theoretically, this study contributes to work-life balance research by integrating three interconnected mechanisms coping strategies, structured flexibility, and productivity pressure into one explanatory frame. The results suggest that hybrid work outcomes depend on the interaction between individual agency and organizational culture, rather than on work arrangement alone. In practice, the findings imply that organizations should not only offer hybrid policies but also provide clear structures, documented schedules, and explicit norms for after-hours communication. Additionally, employee well-being programs should include training on boundary-setting, refusal skills, emotional regulation, and recovery routines. In high-productivity cultures, these interventions are essential to prevent hybrid work from becoming a hidden extension of working hours and to ensure that flexibility truly supports employee well-being and sustainable productivity.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that work-life balance among hybrid workers in high-productivity environments does not arise automatically from flexible work arrangements, but is shaped by the interaction between individual coping strategies, structured hybrid flexibility, and persistent productivity pressure. The most important finding is that workers who establish digital boundaries, regulate emotions, and maintain recovery routines tend to achieve more stable work-life balance, while formally structured flexibility gives greater control over work rhythm and reduces stress more effectively than informal flexibility alone. The main academic contribution of this paper lies in explaining hybrid work as an interaction between organizational culture and individual adaptive capacity rather than merely a change of workplace location. By integrating coping strategies, structured flexibility, and productivity pressure into one framework, this study offers a more comprehensive explanation of work-life balance in high-productivity settings. However, the study is limited by a small participant pool and a focus on technology and professional service sectors. Future research should involve broader cross-industry samples, compare different productivity cultures, and apply quantitative or mixed-method designs to strengthen empirical evidence.

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