Heini Pensar

Re-Thinking Work-Life Balance in the Context of Remote Work

The Importance of Personal Re-sources in Nurturing Individual Agency

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Author	Heini Pensar https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4439-5502
Supervisor(s)	Professor Liisa Mäkelä University of Vaasa. School of Management, Human Resource Management. Professor Riitta Viitala University of Vaasa. School of Management, Human Resource Management.
Custos	Professor Liisa Mäkelä University of Vaasa. School of Management, Human Resource Management.
Reviewers	Docent Marja-Liisa Manka Tampere University Professor Julia Richardson Curtin University, Faculty of Business and Law, School of Management and Marketing
Opponent	Professor Julia Richardson Curtin University, Faculty of Business and Law, School of Management and Marketing

Tiivistelmä

Etätyön äkillinen kasvu on muuttanut työelämää maailmanlaajuisesti, ja miljoonista kodeista on tullut työpaikkoja. Tämä hämärtää työn ja kodin välistä rajaa, vaikuttaa työntekijöiden työn ja muun elämän tasapainoon sekä luo uusia vaatimuksia rajan hallinnalle. Väitöskirjassa tutkitaan etätyöntekijöiden kokemuksia työn ja muun elämän tasapainosta ja sen hallinnasta koronapandemian aikana, jolloin etätyö oli laajamittaisesti käytössä monissa organisaatioissa. Tutkimuksessa on kerätty pitkittäinen kyselyaineisto (T1, N= 1218, T2, N=776) sekä ja laadullinen haastatteluaineisto (n=89), joita tarkastellaan useiden teoreettisten linssien läpi pyrkimyksenä luoda uutta, aiempaa monipuolisempaa ymmärrystä etätyöntekijöiden työn ja muun elämän välisestä tasapainosta ja sen hallinnasta.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että työn ja muun elämän tasapaino on monimutkainen, moniulotteinen ja yksilöllinen kokemus. Etätyö on tuonut monia etuja, jotka voivat potentiaalisesti auttaa ihmisiä ylläpitämään hyvää tasapainoa eri elämänalueiden välillä. Etätyö sisältää myös riskejä, kuten intensiivistä työtä, pitkiä työaikoja ja sosiaalisen tuen puutetta. Tasapainon ylläpitämiseksi psyykkinen irrottautuminen työstä on tärkeää. Sitä edistääkseen etätyöntekijät käyttävät erilaisia strategioita, kuten kognitiivisia kontrollia, fyysistä irrottautumista, aikataulutettuja rutiineja ja vapaa-ajan aktiviteetteihin uppoutumista. Etätyön haasteet ja tukitarpeet vaihtelevat työntekijän elämäntilanteen mukaan, ja etätyöntekijän perhetilanne on tiiviisti kietoutunut työn ja muun elämän tasapainon ylläpitämiseen.

Teoreettisesta näkökulmasta tutkimus tuottaa uutta tietoa työn ja muun elämän tasapainon taustalla vaikuttavista resursseista ja yhtymäkohdista eri elämäntilanteissa elävien tarpeet huomioiden. Työelämän näkökulmasta keskeinen havainto on, että yksilön omaa toimijuutta tasapainon luomisessa tulisi tukea, jossa erityisen tärkeää on esihenkilön luottamus ja kannustus etätyön hyötyjen käyttöön. Esihenkilö voi tukea etätyöntekijöitä luomalla yhteisiä rajoja, tarjoamalla emotionaalista tukea ja olemalla roolimalli.

Asiasanat: Etätyö, työn ja muun elämän tasapaino, työn ja muun elämän rajan hallinta, yksilön voimavarat, työstä palautuminen, psykologinen irrottautuminen

Abstract

The rapid growth of remote work has transformed the global workplace, turning millions of homes into workspaces. This blurs the boundaries between work and home, challenging the maintenance of this boundary and impacting the work-life balance of employees. This doctoral thesis examines remote workers' subjective work-life experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, where remote work was extensively performed as the primary form of work in many organizations. This study utilizes longitudinal survey data (T1, N= 1218, T2, N=776) and qualitative interview data (n=89), which are analysed through various theoretical lenses, with the aim of creating a novel and holistic understanding of the phenomenon of work-life balance and the factors that influence it.

The research findings indicate that work-life balance is a complex, multidimensional, and individual experience. Remote work offers several advantages that can potentially help individuals maintain a good balance across different life domains. However, it also presents risks, such as excessive work intensity, long working hours, and a lack of social support. To maintain balance, psychological detachment from work is a crucial aspect. Remote workers employ various strategies to facilitate this detachment, including cognitive control, physical disengagement, structured routines, and engaging in leisure activities. The challenges and support needs of remote work vary between individuals, and in the remote work context, are increasingly influenced by the employees' nonwork role responsibilities, such as those of a parenting role.

These research findings contribute to the work-life literature by highlighting the resources and connections underlying work-life balance. The study also emphasizes the importance of considering the specific work-life challenges faced by both parenting and non-parenting employees. A key observation is that supporting individual agency in creating balance is important, with a particular emphasis on fostering trust and encouragement from supervisors regarding the benefits of remote work. Supervisors can support remote workers by establishing boundaries, providing emotional support, and serving as role models.

These research findings contribute to the work-life literature by highlighting the resources and connections underlying work-life balance, and taking into account the needs of individuals in different life circumstances. As a practical implication, this thesis encourages employers to provide more personalized support to promote work-life balance and individual agency through work-life programs.

Keywords: work-life balance, work-nonwork boundary, personal resources, recovery from work, psychological detachment

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Who wouldn't want to know the secret of achieving a good work-life balance?

As a mother of a large family, I am first in line in wanting to discover such a recipe. In the early stages of my career, I used to think that success in one's profession came at the expense of other life goals. Later, when I juggled a career and motherhood for the first time, I was determined to prove that one could manage multiple demanding roles. Nevertheless, with time, I came to realize that life requires constant balancing between competing desires, and expenditures of time, and effort. Ultimately, we are responsible for steering our own ship, and as these variables shift from one life stage to another, or even from one day to the next, the experience of work-life balance is unique to each individual. After reflecting on this topic during my thesis process, I regret to say that there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for achieving balance. However, I can tell you that having the right support is crucial in this matter.

Remote work adds another layer of complexity to the work-life balance equation. Having worked remotely for over 20 years and led remote teams for a decade, I thought I was aware of remote workers' well-being needs. However, it was only during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote work became widespread that I realized how much it can affect employees. One of my colleagues pointed out that their specific needs for support had been neglected for a long time, even though they had been there for years, well before the pandemic. For me as a supervisor, this feedback was an eye-opener and motivated me to take a deep dive into the well-being of remote workers. At first glance, one may be tempted to believe that remote working is a privilege that solely improves people's lives, but work-life balance is a complex experience that is affected by various factors. Importantly, without a thorough understanding of these factors, we run the risk of failing to provide adequate support for remote employees, as I previously had.

I hope that this thesis will contribute to the broader conversation about work-life balance in Finnish working life and generate interest from both leaders and employees. I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to research a topic that directly assists me in achieving a balance between work and other aspects of my life, such as motherhood and various personal interests. My hope is that my work will benefit others, but this would not have been possible without the help of others.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Liisa Mäkelä, for believing and trusting in me, and providing me with the opportunity

to work on this project as a member of the Leadis team. Her competent guidance led to the production of the four studies, which I am very proud of. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my manager, Riitta Viitala, for her advice and support. Our long discussions, especially those where we wore woollen socks, will always be cherished. Warm thanks to the pre-examiners of the dissertation, Julia Richardson and Marja-Liisa Manka for their diligent efforts and encouraging feedback. I hold their contributions in the highest regard. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my co-authors, Rebekah Rousi, Hilpi Kangas and Samu Kemppinen, for professional guidance and contribution, not to mention the moments of fun and laughter.

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A heart-shaped thank you goes to my husband, Johan: Your unwavering support in both work and home domains have been enriching, although sometimes gone un-thanked from my side. But I am hugely grateful for your patience and love. I owe big thanks to my family members Pirjo, Kari, Kirsi and Kimmo, and our caregivers Milla and Marjo for looking after our children and house – not to mention the pets, who we by the way, consider family members (Wilkin et al., 2016).

Above all, I am immensely grateful to our children for their hugs, kisses and patience, while I stubbornly worked on this thesis into many late nights. Indeed, now that this chapter has come to an end, I think it is time for mummy to switch off from work for a while…

Sincerely,
Heini

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Figures

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Abbreviations

WLB	Work-life balance
COR	Conservation of resources theory
JRD	Job demands and resources theory
E-R	Effort and recovery model

Articles

[1] Mäkelä, L., Kemppinen, S., Pensar, H. and Kangas, H. (2023), "Working Remotely During the COVID 19-Pandemic: Work and Non-Work Antecedents of Work–Life Balance Development", Abendroth, A.-K. and Lükemann, L. (Ed.) *Flexible Work and the Family (Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research, Vol. 21)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 69-97. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1530-353520230000021003 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the European Academy of Management Zürich, Switzerland, July 2021.

[2] Pensar, H & Mäkelä, L. (revised & resubmitted), "Roads to recovery in remote working. Exploration of the perceptions of energy-consuming elements of remote work and self-promoted strategies toward psychological detachment". Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Academy of Management virtual conference July 2021, and the Työelämän tutkimuspäivät, December, 2020.

[3] Pensar, H & Rousi, R. (conditionally accepted), "The resources to balance – exploring remote employees' Work-Life Balance through the lens of Conservation of Resources". An earlier version of this paper was presented at 9th International Conference of Work and Family, July 2021.

[4] Kangas, H., Pensar, H. and Rousi, R. (in progress), "I wouldn't be working this way if I had a family - differences in remote workers' needs for supervisor's family-supportiveness depending on the family status". An earlier version of this paper was virtually presented at the Academy of Management conference in Seattle, United States, August 2022.

Author's Contribution

Article 1. Heini Pensar contributed to defining the research framework, authoring specific sections of the article draft (hypothesis construction, literature review), and editing the article at various stages. Liisa Mäkelä, as the overall responsible and corresponding author, defined the research settings, authored, developed, and edited the article throughout different phases. Samu Kemppinen defined the research settings, analyzed data, determined methods, analyzed and visualized results, and took responsibility for finalizing the article. Hilpi Kangas participated in defining the research settings, authored sections of the article, and edited it during various phases.

Article 2. Heini Pensar served as the primary and corresponding author, overseeing the research setup, participating in data collection, and taking responsibility for the methodologies and data analysis. Pensar both authored the initial text and edited the article at various stages. Rebekah Rousi played a supervisory role in this authorship, verifying the findings, contributing to the authoring of the original manuscript, and editing the article during different phases.

Article 3. Heini Pensar was the first and corresponding author, who defined the research setting, and had the responsibility for data analysis. Pensar authored the original text and edited the article in different phases. Liisa Mäkelä, as the leader of the research project (in which this article was produced) was responsible for obtaining financing and research resources, and supervising the research process. Mäkelä verified findings and participtaed in the authoring of the manuscript, while being in charge of making the necessary changes in the first revision of the article.

Article 4. Heini Pensar was secondary author, who took part in the definition of the research framework, participated in the collection and management of the research data. Pensar had the responsibility for the data analysis, and overall methodologies. Pensar authored parts of the original draft and edited the article at various stages. Hilpi Kangas, as the first and corresponding author, was responsible for defining the research setup, collection of and managing the research data. Kangas supervised the data analysis and verified the findings, authored the initial manuscript and edited the article in different phases. Rebekah Rousi supervised the choice of methodologies and verified the findings. Rousi participated in writing the initial draft and edited the article in different phases.

1 INTRODUCTION

In In recent decades, an increasingly intense and demanding work climate has emerged as a result of the rapid technological advancements that enable working from any location and at any time (Golden & Veiga, 2008; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2023). Not long ago, people's work was confined to the traditional workplace, commonly known as "the office." However, in today's society, work processes have transitioned to a virtual realm, where activities flow seamlessly through smart devices that accompany us day and night, fitting into our pockets (Thulin et al., 2019). As a result, work has become more flexible in terms of working time and also the choice of workplace. Such flexibility blurs the concept of working hours and challenges the boundaries between employees' professional and private spheres of life (Adisa et al., 2022). Although these trends have been developing for some time, they have taken on a new dimension with the rapid and widespread adoption of remote working in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, when organizations implemented remote work as a precautionary measure to mitigate the spread of the virus and safeguard the well-being of their employees.

1.1 The leap into remote working and blurring work-home boundaries

The change in work practices came suddenly and unprecedently. From 2020 to 2022, the COVID-19 virus spread rapidly worldwide, posing a major health risk to people in all countries. To slow the spread of the virus, precautions required people to avoid large gatherings including the workplace, requiring many to work from home (Eurofound, 2022). This resulted in a leap into remote work globally and an overnight transition to digital operations. Although remote work was not entirely unfamiliar to many organizations, the conditions imposed by the pandemic led to a widespread and involuntary adoption of full-time remote work on a large scale, even in professions that were previously not considered suitable for remote work (ILO, 2022). As a result of these events, millions of households worldwide were transformed into daytime offices. Consequently, both employees and employers faced a novel situation, with no formerly established models for managing remote work and balancing it with family and personal life.

In Finland, too, a state of emergency was declared during the pandemic, and remote working suddenly expanded. Despite Finland's reputation as a frontrunner in international comparisons of digitalization (ETLA, 2019) remote work had

traditionally been carried out in a modest way. To illustrate the extent of the transformation in Finland, prior to the pandemic situation, remote work was estimated to be carried out by only 23% of Finnish employees in total, but during the initial stages of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, this number surged to 60%, before settling at around 40% in 2021 (Eurofound, 2020; Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020; Statistics Finland, 2021a). The contrast between the early and later stages of the transition lies in the fact that the lockdown was nearly absolute in 2020 (e.g. when schools and services remained closed), while during the later phases, a variety of professions were able to return to their workplaces.

The magnitude of the change in Finnish employees' working situation can be understood when considering that half of the employees who engaged in remote work during the spring of 2021 had no prior experience of remote working (Statistics Finland, 2021b). Less than 10% of employees working remotely during the pandemic (equivalent to 3% of the total workforce) had regularly practiced remote work before the pandemic (Statistics Finland, 2021b). But despite this significant change, Finnish employees have generally embraced remote working. A survey conducted in 2021 found that 90% of remote workers expressed a desire to continue working remotely even after the pandemic (Statistics Finland, 2021b). It is therefore hardly surprising that after the pandemic-induced restrictions were lifted and offices reopened, many organizations have continued to adopt hybrid models that combine remote and in-person work, making remote work a mainstream option for many workplaces (Microsoft, 2022b).

This shift has revolutionized the working landscape by introducing greater flexibility and autonomy for employees, thereby facilitating the maintenance of a healthy work-life balance (Carillo et al., 2021). However, remote working has also presented challenges in effectively managing the interface between work and personal life (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The advent of remote work has physically brought work into our homes, making it a constant presence (Charalampous et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). This shift has created a new hazard of after-hours availability and an active involvement in work-related tasks. The blurring of boundaries between the work and home environments, can both physically and psychologically result in confusion, an overwhelming workload, and ultimately, challenges in effectively detaching from work (Fukumura et al., 2021; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). This kind of development may lead to further negative health consequences and impede people's recovery from work (Sonnentag, Binnewies, et al., 2010). Recovery, however, is an aspect that affects health and should occur daily (Manka & Manka, 2016, p. 181). But the structural characteristics of work, such as long working hours, weaken recovery (p. 184).

Challenges can also arise in the opposite direction, at home. While employees work from home, their physical presence among other household members can create increased expectations regarding attending to household chores and childcare, even during hours that are designated as work hours (Allen et al., 2015). As remote work becomes increasingly prevalent as a primary form of employment, adapting to these new kinds of expectations, while still maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for the overall wellbeing of employees (Borowiec & Drygas, 2022; Lunau et al., 2014; Mensah & Adjei, 2020; Yang et al., 2018).

1.2 The need for re-thinking work-life balance

Understanding the implications of recent developments, and in particular the new flexible way of working, is crucial for individuals' well-being and how people can maintain a healthy balance between their work and personal lives. Work-life balance (WLB) refers to an individual's ability to manage their responsibilities in both their professional and personal roles while maintaining happiness, success, and dedication to their important life domains (Casper et al., 2018). WLB is not only a significant and encompassing indicator of employees' overall well-being, but is also closely linked to other work-related measures such as job satisfaction and employee engagement (Haar & Brougham, 2020; Parkes & Langford, 2008). The potential disruptions to WLB caused by remote work emphasize the importance of focusing on identifying mechanisms that specifically promote WLB in the context of remote work.

In Finnish working life, there is evidence suggesting that the pace of work in organizations has intensified, resulting in a decline in worker well-being (Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2023). According to the Work Trend Index (Erkkila, 2021; Microsoft, 2021) that was released during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, 58% of Finns felt overworked and 45% experienced some degree of exhaustion (globally, these figures are 54% and 39%, respectively). Among the 1300 responses on the recovery calculator produced by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2022), as many as one-third reported working long work weeks, some even exceeding 50 hours per week. At the same time, as many as 30% of Finns felt that their employers did not care about their WLB (compared to 19% globally).

When WLB is effectively managed, it can yield positive outcomes including improved well-being, performance, and commitment (Haar & Brougham, 2020; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Tamang, 2010). However, if employees are left to navigate their WLB without support and this balance becomes compromised, employers face

various risks concerning employee health, such as stress, stress-related symptoms, strain, absenteeism, and ultimately, burnout (Borowiec & Drygas, 2022; Mensah & Adjei, 2020). These potential consequences provide a compelling reason to continue generating information about WLB in the context of changing work environments.

There is no single recipe for achieving WLB, since it is a very personal experience that depends on each person's unique life priorities (Casper et al., 2018) in the various roles in their lives. But as the working population is undergoing demographic changes including an aging population and increasing workforce diversity, it becomes even more important to recognize and address the diverse needs and challenges faced by employees (Husic et al., 2020). This presents organizations with new challenges to effectively align their work-life benefits with the diverse life priorities and support needs of their employees, and in addition to generic instrumental work-life support, the focus should be shifted towards providing personalized support that is tailored to the unique needs of each individual (Thakur & Kumar, 2015; Wahjoedi, 2021). Thus, there is a need for re-thinking work-life balance overall, and for understanding how to effectively support it.

1.3 Positioning of the research in this thesis

This thesis acknowledges a growing need to understand the contributors to WLB in current working circumstances, and especially in professions that include extensive remote working. The studies in this thesis adopt an individual-focused perspective on WLB, which is still a rare angle in the vast body of research on this topic (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). But they address some of the current research gaps in the WLB literature and similarly provide contributions to the remote work literature. In the following section, the gaps in the research and areas that require further investigation are briefly discussed.

The literature on WLB has been steadily produced since the 1990s (S. Lewis et al., 2007), and researchers have employed diverse operational definitions and measurements for this construct over time (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). However, this has resulted in a lack of consensus on the definition of WLB (Casper et al., 2018), and consequently a rather fragmented body of literature with incongruent conclusions, making it challenging to compare findings across studies. A recent meta-analysis by Casper et al. (2018) produced a compiled perspective of the WLB construct, and suggested that individuals' experiences of balance are rather multi-faceted, including both cognitive and affective

experiences (Casper et al., 2018; Wayne et al., 2021). It is also recognized that WLB is likely to be influenced by a complex structure of factors. While the extensive research on this topic has identified various antecedents of WLB, the intricate interplay among these factors is not yet fully understood (Haar et al., 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). This calls for further investigations to unravel the complexities behind individuals' balance. The research presented in this thesis positions itself to address these research needs by employing a triangulation approach, utilizing various methods and theories to build understanding of the discussed complexities. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study to adopt Casper's recent model to qualitatively explore the work-life balance phenomenon.

The roots of research on WLB trace back to women's entry into the workforce, and thus traditionally, the research focus has been on parenthood, and particularly mothers' abilities to reconcile the demands of work and family responsibilities (Adamson et al., 2023; Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017). This has further influenced the entire body of literature on the work-life interface, which has long been concerned with studying the relationship between work and family, often through the lens of their conflict (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). Also, the majority of WLB literature focuses on examining various work-family initiatives and practices aimed at alleviating work-family conflict (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017). As a result, the existing literature predominantly focuses on organizational perspectives and aims to address the question of which organizational policies and practices are effective in a more general sense, and the exploration of the strategies and means that individuals use to construct WLB have largely been overshadowed (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). One recognized issue is the tendency of work-family initiatives remaining to be underused, and this is likely to be because they may not suit everyone or because of a reluctance to use them in fear of career consequences (Chan et al., 2016; Heikkinen et al., 2021; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). In this thesis, a distinctive approach is employed by adopting the less common individual perspective. Thus, the factors that contribute to WLB in the context of remote work are explored though the individual's experience.

In addition, the research on WLB has historically revolved around a traditional family concept centred on the nuclear family, typically comprised of parents and children. Because of this, there has been limited attention given to individuals who fall outside this traditional family dynamic (e.g. on parents or solo-living employees) and who may have their own specific work-life needs (Boiarintseva, Ezzedeen, & Wilkin, 2022; Haar, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2018). Furthermore, the literature has often narrowly viewed the nonwork sphere solely through the lens of the family, overlooking the broader range of roles beyond the family domain that influence work-life balance (Kelliher et al., 2019; Prakash, 2018).

However, newer literature on WLB has begun to embrace a broader perspective that goes beyond the work-family relationship to encompass other nonwork roles in addition to family roles (Keeney et al., 2013; Wickham & Parker, 2007). There still remains a scarcity of research aimed at differentiating the needs of employees beyond their parenting role and the constraints of the traditional family situation (Keeney et al., 2013; Wickham & Parker, 2007). By recognizing this limitedness of literature, this thesis contributes to the existing understanding of the diverse needs of employees in various family situations (Haar, 2013; Mäkelä et al., 2015). This is accomplished by studying a diverse sample of remote workers with varying family dynamics and parental statuses, exploring the factors influencing WLB in these diverse contexts. It is worth noting that Western European countries, including e.g. Germany, France, Luxembourg, and specifically Finland, have a very high proportion of working couples living without children (21% in Finland). Additionally, Finland as well as Austria and Poland have a significant number of one-person households (20% in Finland) (Eurostat, 2009). Considering the diverse range of family statuses, it is important to continue to establish this diversity in the academic discourses around WLB, in particular distinguishing the needs and experiences of individuals with variations in family status.

As previously described, the emergence of remote work adds another layer to WLB research. Despite the earlier prevailing assumption that remote work is adopted to enhance WLB (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012), recent literature has shown that extended remote working challenges employees' work-life interplay and may even hinder their WLB (Palumbo, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). The pandemic situation has expedited research on WLB, and led to accumulated evidence on the impacts of remote work on WLB (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). These studies suggest that remote work is likely to contribute to an intensified and highly productive work environment, accompanied by increased workloads (Carillo et al., 2021). These factors may ultimately compromise individuals' well-being and also hinder their ability to effectively recover from work (Mauno et al., 2023). So far, limited knowledge exists on the recovery experiences of remote workers (Haun et al., 2022), and addressing this need for novel knowledge, this thesis focuses on illuminating the strategies that individuals employ to ensure adequate recovery, even in the face of intensified work challenges.

Prior research has demonstrated that well-managed work-home boundaries play a beneficial role for achieving WLB (Allen et al., 2021), and as well as for facilitating recovery from work. Boundary strategies aid in promoting psychological detachment, enabling individuals to temporarily disengage their thoughts from work (Haun et al., 2022; Luta et al., 2020). But with remote work blurring physical and temporal boundaries, it poses a challenge to maintaining this healthy

detachment from work (Charalampous et al., 2022). While boundaries have been extensively studied as individual strategies, it is important to recognize that other factors such as family dynamics and social support also influence boundary management. So far there have been limited studies on these other factors(Shirmohammadi et al., 2022), for instance on how supervisors can support boundaries in remote work, aiming to enhance employees' WLB. In this thesis, understanding the potential role of supervisors in boundary management also considers supervisor support as fostering employees' ability to maintain a viable WLB.

It is also noted that the research on WLB has predominantly adopted quantitative research approaches (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). However, it has been increasingly recognized that qualitative methods (alongside quantitative methods) are needed to provide deeper insights into individuals' experiences, perceptions and subjective interpretations related to WLB, offering a more holistic understanding of this complex phenomenon (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Haar & Brougham, 2020).

With these research needs in mind, the findings presented in this thesis intersect with several academic discourses: first, they contribute to discussions in the field of work psychology; second, they relate to the discussion of leadership; and third, the main purpose of this research is to contribute to the discussion on human resource management. The theoretical frameworks used in this study include a combination of several theories rooted in work psychology, and which are also typically used in leadership research. By utilizing multiple theories, it is possible to create a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The research needs presented establish the purpose of this thesis, and the following section will introduce the questions formulated based on these needs.

1.4 Research purpose and questions

The aim of this research is to explore employees' subjective work-life experiences and how their WLB can be supported, thus deepening the understanding of the factors that specifically contribute to WLB in the context of remote work.

The overarching research question (RQ) is:

> ***What are the experiences of work-life balance among remote workers, and what factors influence the balance?***

This question is further broken into more specific questions, which are investigated in the individual studies that comprise this thesis:

> *RQ1: Which factors predict remote workers' work-life balance development over time?*
>
> *RQ2: What are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effective utilization of these resources in favour of work-life balance?*
>
> *RQ3: How do remote workers self-promote recovery from work through psychological detachment?*
>
> *RQ4: How does working remotely blur the work/nonwork boundaries of employees?*
>
> *RQ5: What kind of supervisor support do remote workers experience as helpful in reducing the effect of blurred boundaries between work and nonwork?*

This compilation thesis consists of four articles, which each explore one or more of the addressed questions. Table 1 provides a summary of each article, including the research questions addressed, the theoretical frameworks used to examine WLB as a phenomenon, and the research methods employed to answer the research questions.

This thesis was written as part of the LEADIS research project at the University of Vaasa, which was conducted in 2020. The project involved eight researchers in addition to the research director. Two large research datasets were collected, and publicly available material was produced based on the results. This material has been widely used within Finnish working life.

Table 1. Overview of articles

Article	Research questions	Theoretical angel	Method
Article 1: Working remotely during the COVID 19-pandemic: work and nonwork antecedents of work-life balance development	RQ1: What factors predict WLB development in the remote work context over time?	Job Demands and Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001)	Longitudinal survey study (n=1146, T1; n=737, T2) Structural Equation Model (SEM)
Article 2: The resources for balance – exploring remote employees' Work-Life Balance through the lens of the Conservation of Resources	RQ2: What are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effective utilization of these resources in favour of work-life balance?	Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989)	Semi-structured interviews (n=89) Thematic analysis with a deductive approach
Article 3: Roads to recovery in remote working. Exploration of the perceptions of energy-consuming elements of remote work and self-promoted strategies toward psychological detachment	RQ3: How do remote workers self-promote recovery from work through psychological detachment?	Effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998)	Semi-structured interviews (n=89) Thematic analysis with aninductive approach
Article 4: I wouldn't be working this way if I had a family - differences in remote workers' needs for supervisor's family-supportiveness depending on the family status	RQ4: How does working remotely blur the work/non-work boundaries of employees? RQ5: What kind of supervisor support do remote workers experience as helpful in reducing the effect of blurred boundaries between work and nonwork?	Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000)	Semi-structured interviews (n=89) Thematic analysis with a relational approach

1.5 Intended contributions

Along with its four articles, this thesis makes a contribution to academic research by emphasizing the significance of an individual's agency as a key driver of WLB. Therefore, the discussions in this thesis represent a less common perspective focused on the individual (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022), aiming to elucidate the mechanisms that steer an individual's ability to maintain WLB. Theoretically, this research strives to broaden the view of the phenomenon of WLB as a complex experience of individuals. Each of the research questions presented is examined by approaching the phenomenon from various theoretical perspectives, and thus several theoretical contributions are intended.

First, the work in this thesis (Article 1) expands the understanding of factors that impact WLB development in the long run, not only considering work-related factors but also home-related factors. Drawing from the *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001) which assumes that demands affect people's health conditions and ability to work, while sufficient work-related and personal resources buffer these effects, the theory is extended to include nonwork demands and resources, and the need to account for the impact of home-related influences on WLB.

Second, this thesis (Article 2) contributes to the importance of qualitative research in WLB studies (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017), providing in-depth and nuanced knowledge of the phenomenon. Incorporating the *Conservation of Resources (COR) theory* (Hobfoll, 1989) which suggests that individuals have an inherent need to obtain and accumulate resources to enhance their wellbeing and performance, this study delves deeper into the hierarchy of resources behind WLB and sheds light on the critical resources that act as gatekeepers for other resources in the context of remote work.

Third, this thesis (all articles) expands the discourse on the work-life interface beyond the traditional view of family (limited to parents and children) by including employees with different nonwork responsibilities in this research. Thus, the needs of employees who do not live within the traditional immediate family concept can also be transparently and equally included.

Fourth, in order to study the recovery experiences of remote workers, this thesis (Article 3) incorporates the *Effort-Recovery (E-R) model* (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) from recovery research. The E-R model proposes that work demands deplete an individual's resources, which need to be adequately replenished to avoid negative health effects such as exhaustion and sleep problems. This thesis extends the E-R model to the remote work context and identifies the internal and external

drivers that influence the energy consumption of remote workers, as well as identifying categories of strategies for recovery enhancement.

Fifth, this thesis (all articles) contributes to the literature on remote work. In previous studies conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was often examined in a more limited context, with only a subset of employees working remotely on a regular basis (Allen et al., 2015). During the pandemic, entire organizations shifted to remote work, fundamentally altering the way these organizations operated(Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). This generates a new context for remote working where remote working is being extensively delivered, and is a new matter of concern for entire organizations. The studies in this thesis provide additional insights into this context.

Sixth, this thesis (Article 4) offers new insights into how supervisors can support remote workers. It continues the work of Thomas et al., (2022) and investigates this support through the concept of *Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviours (FSSB)* in the virtual context of remote work. FSSB refers to employees' perceptions of their supervisor's support, which can manifest as emotional and instrumental support, role modelling, and creative work-family management (Hammer et al., 2009). This study extends this concept to include non-parent and solo-living employees in addition to those with parenting responsibilities.

At the very heart of this thesis is the practical perspective. The studies conducted in this thesis aim to generate knowledge that can assist employers in developing personalized support for individuals, and strategies for remote workers to enhance their WLB and overall well-being. Thus, the primary objective of this thesis is to create actionable knowledge that can be effectively applied in real-world work settings.

1.6 Key concepts of the study

In the research on Work-Life Balance (WLB), there exists a specific vocabulary relevant to this area of study. This section is dedicated to presenting the essential concepts utilized in this thesis, with the aim of aiding the reader's comprehension. The definitions provided here illustrate how these concepts have been interpreted within the scope of this study. More detailed descriptions will be presented in the literature review, which is covered in Chapter 2.

Work-life balance (WLB) is defined as employees' perceptions of the extent to which they feel satisfied, dedicated and successful in the roles they consider

important. This perception of the concept draws from the definition presented by Casper et al. (2018), Brough et al. (2014), and Greenhaus et al. (2003).

Remote working refers to work that is normally performed at the employer's premises but is agreed to be delivered from outside of the premises with the help of information technology. This understanding of remote working is based on the work of Bailey and Kurland, (2002) and Garrett and Danziger, (2007). One typical form of remote work is working from home, which has been studied for instance by Golden et al. (2006) and Oakman et al. (2020).

Job demands mean the physical or psychological effort expected to be invested in a job. They are usually distinguished into categories of quantitative, emotional, physical, and cognitive job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). Should the demands be too high (e.g., work overload, continuous emotional pressure, difficult work tasks), the employee is likely to experience stress and strain (Kinnunen et al., 2011). In this thesis, it is acknowledged that individuals who work from home not only face job demands, but also home demands which can be equally challenging. Therefore, the concept of job demands is expanded to include the demands faced at home while working.

Resources refer to instruments that fulfil an individual's basic psychological needs that help individuals to deal with demands and enhance an individual's personal growth and wellbeing. This understanding is based on the work of Hobfoll (1989; 2018), who has proposed that resources can take many forms, for instance personal resources and social support (Hobfoll et al., 1990; Wayne et al., 2007). In the work context, the term "***Job resources***" refers to various physical, psychological, social, and organizational instruments that assist individuals in achieving their work-related goals (Demerouti et al., 2001, 2002). These resources stimulate personal growth and well-being among employees, while also contributing to work-life balance (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Psychological detachment is understood as an experience of the state of being emotionally disengaged from work (Etzion et al., 1998), and believed to promote one's psychological recovery from work (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). It allows one to temporarily forget about work, which hinders the effect of job stressors. Psychological detachment can be enhanced with strategies (Luta et al., 2020), and employing them is a particularly useful skill in the home working environment, where detachment may pose a challenge (Charalampous et al., 2022).

1.7 The structure of the thesis

This thesis enhances the understanding of both the phenomenon of WLB and the context of remote work. Thus, this thesis is structured in a way that first familiarizes itself with the concept and definition of WLB and the relevant literature on existing knowledge, followed by a review of the phenomenon within the specific context of remote work. New research findings are presented of remote workers' WLB specifically, which are finally interpreted in relation to the previous body of literature. To assist the reader, the structure of the thesis is presented in the plot flow in figure, and thereafter, a brief explanation of the content in each chapter is provided.

Chapter 1 shed light on how the changing work climate and the rapid growth of remote work have impacted individuals' abilities to maintain WLB. The inclination of remote work for intensifying the way of work and blurring the boundaries between work and personal life was discussed. Based on these trends, needs for new research on WLB was recognized. The chapter further addressed the limitations of existing WLB literature, which are its narrow emphasis on work and family, and the so far limited understanding of the complexity behind WLB and the various factors influencing it. Thereafter, research questions were formulated to address these gaps, and a positioning of this study within the context of established academic discourses was clarified. In this chapter, it was proposed that further research is needed to examine WLB from an individual perspective, in order to understand the complexity of WLB and its underlying mechanisms. It was explained that this study investigates the factors that influence the emergence of WLB in the context of remote work, taking into account individuals' nonwork roles as part of the overall framework. Furthermore, a concise summary of the anticipated contributions was provided.

Chapter 2 seeks to provide a thorough overview of the current state of WLB literature, and thereafter examine the WLB phenomenon in the context of remote work based on existing knowledge. The chapter begins by shedding light on the evolution of the WLB concept, and its various forms and synonyms which contribute to the rather fragmented nature of the current literature. Following this, the chapter presents the major perspectives that WLB research has focused on in recent decades, and areas which demand new research are highlighted. The chapter also introduces the theories commonly associated with WLB, and delves deeper into the theories that are employed to investigate the research problem of this thesis. Since the focus of the thesis is on the factors influencing individuals' WLB experiences, the antecedents of WLB are presented to provide an understanding of what is already known in this area. While the primary focus is

not on investigating the consequences of WLB, a brief overview of these consequences is provided, as they demonstrate the significance of WLB as a part of well-being research. After this, the chapter contextualizes the WLB phenomenon within the realm of remote work. This section commences by providing a definition of remote working, followed by a summary of the literature's evolution in this domain. The literature review provided here illuminates what is currently known about the impact of remote work on WLB.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological choices of the study. It starts by introducing the assumptions of the pragmatic approach, followed by an overview of the principles and forms of triangulation employed in the thesis. This is followed by a reflection on the hermeneutic journey of the research, which elucidates the study's progression, including the emergence of each research question and the factors influencing the researcher's decisions and learning throughout the process. The chapter outlines the stages of data collection and the quantitative and qualitative analysis methods employed, while also reflecting on the quality and reliability of the utilized methods.

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the central findings in the four articles which this thesis builds upon. The chapter presents predictors of WLB over time in the context of remote work. It described the key resources of WLB highlighted through the qualitative exploration, and suggests their intersections, resulting with an identification of the underlying structure of WLB resources. The chapter also highlights the close connection between recovery experiences and WLB, emphasizes the significance of personal resources, and examines how they are supported through supervisor support as part of the overall framework. The chapter also presents differences in individuals' experiences, taking into consideration their nonwork role responsibilities, specifically comparing parents and non-parents.

The **last chapter** consists of the researcher's reflections of the results and their significance, namely the theoretical and practical contributions. The researcher explains how the results of this thesis have addressed the identified research gaps. As the purpose of this thesis is pragmatic and primarily aimed at producing knowledge with practical value, the emphasis of the conclusions is on recommendations for the workplace. Finally, a model that guides individuals and employees in supporting WLB is revealed, and an accompanying form is proposed as a tool for individual discussions in the organization.

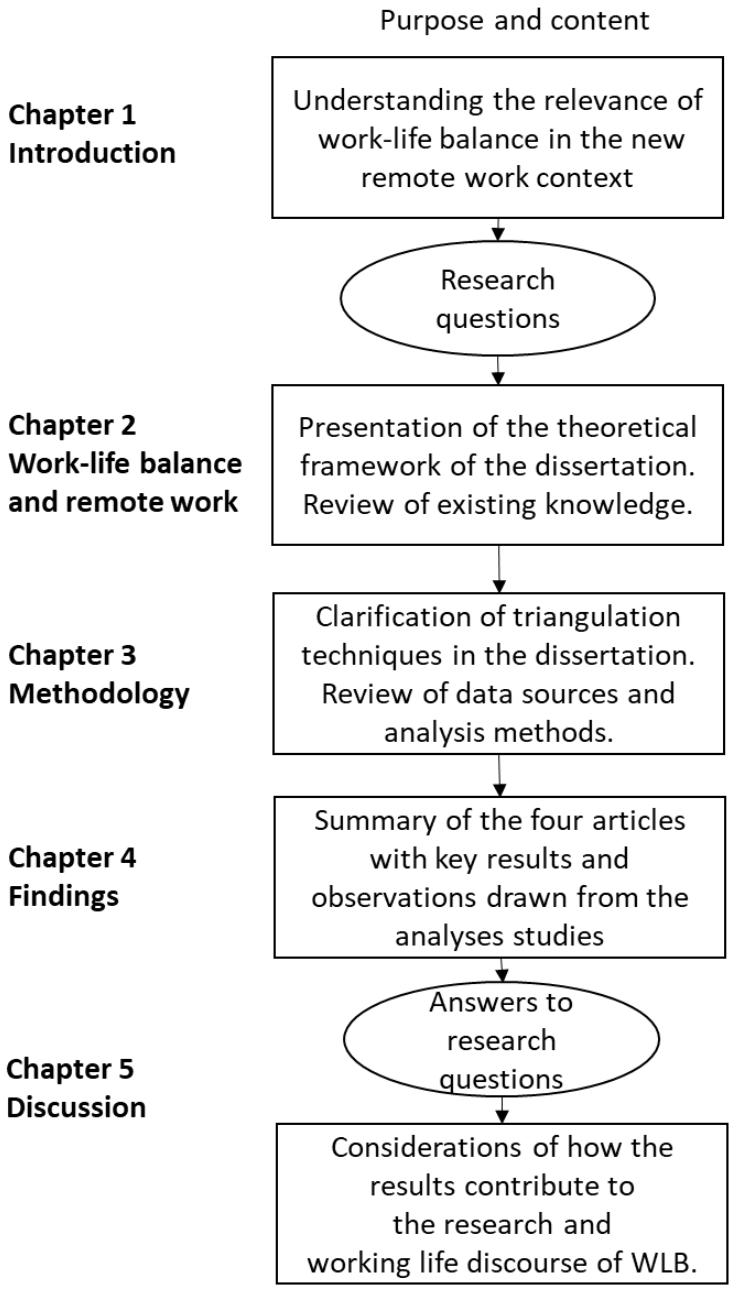

Figure 1. Plot flow of the thesis

2 WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND REMOTE WORK

To fully understand the phenomenon of work-life balance, it is important to explore its conceptual origins and how its definitions have evolved over time. Because the concept of WLB encompasses multiple titles and terminologies, there are different interpretations of it within the literature, which can make research on the topic seem fragmented. When taking part in the discourses on WLB, it is important to grasp these complexities. Therefore, this chapter aims to provide clarity by defining WLB and laying the groundwork for a deeper exploration of its intricacies.

The term "work-life balance" first emerged in the field of occupational language in the 1990s, and has since gained widespread recognition and common usage in everyday language (WordSpy.com, 2000). This evolution is not surprising, as people strive to balance the demands of work and personal life in our increasingly intense work environment. The term work-life balance has become prevalent in different languages around the world, for instance in Spanish "*armonía entre la vida laboral y personal*", in French *"équilibre vie professionnelle-vie personnelle",* in Swedish "*balans mellan jobb och privatliv"*, and in Finnish "*työn ja muun elämän tasapaino*". In short, work-life balance refers to how well individuals feel they can prioritize and succeed in life areas they consider to be important (Casper et al., 2018; Brough et al., 2014). Overall, the use of the term "work-life balance" reflects a growing awareness of the importance of achieving balance between work and personal life, and the impact that this can have on well-being, relationships, and overall quality of life. Next, the terminology of WLB is examined, and the discussion revolves around how these definitions should be interpreted in research, with a focus on distinguishing between them.

2.1 Research on work-life balance

Extensive attention has been given to the interface between one's professional and personal lives across research disciplines such as psychology, sociology, management and gender studies. This interface between work and nonwork has typically been described as the degree of *compatibility* of two life domains, i.e. that one's responsibilities at work and home are either reconcilable or have conflicts between them (Frone, 2004; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The studies of the work-life interface have primarily focused on how resources are drained and stress is generated by participation in multiple life roles (Goode, 1960). In order to protect one's resources, balancing the work-home interface has been a topic of interest from the perspectives of employee and family wellbeing to company performance

and sustainability (Järlström et al., 2018). When these diverse viewpoints are taken into account, it is no wonder that the concept of work-life balance has lacked conceptual clarity (Casper et al., 2018). To present the literature on the work-life interface as a whole, the plethora of constructs comprising it are presented, starting with a short summary of the evolution of the concept.

2.1.1 Early evolution of the concept of work life balance

Employers' interest towards work-life issues initially arose along with the increased participation of women in the labour market, which began to significantly transform working life in the 1970s. This development eroded the prevalent ideal of a man as the "breadwinner" in the family and the woman as primarily responsible for childcare and other home duties (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; S. Lewis & Cooper, 2005). With this revolution, greater tensions between work and family were created pressuring employers to introduce family-friendly initiatives, and these eventually evolved into now common company policies (Liddicoat, 2003). These combined events triggered a wider discourse on the need for support in work-family reconciliation. This discourse has only been accelerated by the continuously intensifying modern work life which continues to increase work and family demands on the employee (Akanji et al., 2020; Le et al., 2020), and has proved to be indispensable in driving profound changes in employees' work conditions and women's position in the labour market (Karkoulian et al., 2016; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Shabir & Gani, 2020).

The development of the WLB concept can be traced back to the work of Marks and MacDermid (1996), the developers' *theory of role balance* which proposed that people with balanced role systems experience less strain, and thus greater well-being. A *role* refers to a pattern of behaviour that is socially recognized and that provides a strategy for coping in a reoccurring situation. Marks and MacDermid describe a positive role balance as being fully engaged in performing every role within one's total role system. A negative role balance means the opposite, which means becoming disengaged in the performance of the roles, and which Marks and MacDermid link to apathy and cynicism. In their theory development, the authors demonstrate that the valuation of importance of each role in the self-system not only involves *affective* experiences (e.g., feelings), but also *cognitive* experiences (e.g., success and devotion in the roles). Their work laid the foundation for the initial version of the WLB concept, which served as a crucial starting point for academic research on the topic.

2.1.2 Work-family conflict (WFC) and enrichment (WFE)

In early 2000s, other perspectives in the discourse on the work-family interface were emerging, which focused on the *relationship* of work and family roles. One concept that emerged in work-family research was *the absence of conflict* between roles, as proposed by Duxbury and Higgins, (2001), which eventually became the dominant idea in the field. From this viewpoint, a successful reconciliation of work and family roles is defined by low levels of *work-family conflict (WFC)*. The concept of WFC was initially conceptualized by Greenhaus and Beutell, (1985) who described that employees face various demands at home and work, and those can be *time-based* (e.g., expectations on time consumed or time limitations), *strain-based* (e.g., expectations for devotion and energy consumption), and *behaviour-based* (e.g., expected behaviours). A work-family conflict is thought to arise from an inter-role conflict in which pressures in one role become incompatible with demands from the other role. In line with the different types of demands, work-family conflict can manifest as *time-based conflict* (various roles compete for time), *strain-based conflict* (one role makes it difficult to fulfil demands in another role), and *behaviour-based conflict* (behaviour required in one role differs from the behaviour needed in another role). All of these types of conflicts are proposed to lead to stress and a poorer quality of life (Md-Sidin et al., 2010).

In work-family literature, there are several different terms similar to WFC, which address the negative relationship between professional and personal roles. The term *work-life interference*, for instance, refers to a situation where expectations at work interfere with the expectations at home or vice versa (Beigi et al., 2019; Greenhaus & Brummelhuis, 2013; Pleck, 1977). Another example is *work-family compensation* which posits that increased involvement in one role must be done at the expense of another role (Lambert, 1990; Staines, 1980). In fact, scholars have identified six types of mechanisms that negatively link work and family; spillover, compensation, segmentation, resource drain, congruence, and conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990), which all indicate how successfully the work-life interface can be managed.

The issue with the previously mentioned WLB related concepts is that they only focus on the negative experiences of the individuals' work-life experiences. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) have argued that the work–family interface is not entirely negative, but that work and family responsibilities can support one another. They introduced a positive relationship, i.e., the *synergy of roles*, which they termed as *work–family enrichment* (WFE). Enrichment means the extent to which the experiences in one role can improve the outcomes in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The idea is that different resources, such as skills,

psychological, physical and social-capital resources, as well as flexibility and material resources, can be generated within one role and yet benefit another role. Again, the literature introduces several terms to describe such a positive relationship. Two terms similar to WFE have been equally used in literature*: work-family enhancement*, *and work-family facilitation*. While it has been suggested that these three terms are synonymous (Frone, 2004), slight differences have been identified (Wayne, p. 106, 2009): Enhancement occurs when individuals gain benefits in one domain that result in benefits in another domain, whereas enrichment happens when the individual actually utilizes the gained benefit. An example of enhancement could be where gaining a skill such as project management at work, may also be utilized in organising family responsibilities. An example of enrichment could be a situation where an individual enjoys family time during leisure, and the positive emotions created in these activities turn into energy and productivity at work. Facilitation, in turn, means that the benefit enhances the functioning of the system as a whole, and thus differs from enrichment that occurs on the individual level. An example of facilitation is a situation where the employee is provided flexible working hours by the employer, which helps them in their overall work-family management.

The common thread is that one's life balance consists of two separate paths, the negative path (conflicts) and the positive path (enrichment), which interact to produce a balance (Frone, 2004; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003). In other words, the balance is a second-order composition of the two paths. The issue with this structure is that it has not been widely tested (Brough et al., 2014). However, while it is suggested that one's balance of low conflict and high enrichments reflects a harmonious interface between different domains of life (Frone, 2004; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003), the concept of work-family conflict has remained more prominent as a stand-alone definition to represent the quality of one's work-life interface. The primary issue here is that the concepts of WFC and WFE are solely focused on the relationship between roles, and do not take a position on the *reconciliation* of the roles – the balance.

2.1.3 Work-family vs. work-life balance

Alongside the concepts of work-family conflict and work-family enrichment, Greenhaus et al. (2003) also introduced the concept of *work-family balance* where the balance part represents *equal* engagement and satisfaction in both work and family roles. According to this definition, the balance is based on three components: *time balance* (equal time allocation between roles), *involvement*

balance (equal dedication between roles), and *satisfaction balance* (equal satisfaction between roles).

This idea was further expanded by Voydanoff (2005) who, in turn, explained the balance as the *fit* between a person and their environment. She proposed that the balance should be determined by the degree to which a person's resources are sufficient to help them perform in both work and home roles. The better the resources fit the demands, the higher the sense of balance. Voydanoff also presented an idea of a *global balance* in which the demand-resource fit is at a level where effective participation in both life domains is possible. Valcour (2007) further developed Voydanoff's work and presented a measure of *satisfaction with work-family balance* that included both affective and cognitive components. Valcour defined the balance as an overall level of contentment regarding one's success in meeting work and family role demands, and as a degree to which individuals can divide time between work and personal life.

Interestingly, the work of Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) provides, again, a very different view of the balance. Grzywacz and Carlson did not consider the balance to be so much of a psychological construct, but instead viewed it as an accomplishment of role-related expectations. They theorized that individuals negotiate and agree expectations with their role-related peers, such as partners and family members at home and supervisors and colleagues at work, and in turn need to live up to these expectations. The fulfilment of expectations fosters a sense of balance. This work was extended by Carlson et al. (2009), and the balance is detailed as an extent to which individuals feel they can meet expectation in their various roles.

Kalliath and Brough (2008) questioned Greenhaus et al., (2003) earlier definition of *equal* components of time, involvement and satisfaction, since it does not consider an individual's will to allocate time and devotion *unequally* between roles. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) continued to draw from the person-environment fit and proposed a version of the work-family balance which includes the individual's values as a basis for the balance assessment. With this, Greenhaus and Allen also emphasized that individuals evaluate their role effectiveness and satisfaction based upon their life priorities, wherein people feel balanced when they experience the positive affective and cognitive experiences in the roles they value. Furthermore, Greenhaus and Allen incorporated the concepts of WFC and WFE, which they concluded to influence role satisfaction and effectiveness. However, this model focuses on the work and family spectrums, without considering individuals' broader lives including community, leisure, and other spare time duties (Hall et al., 2013). Additionally, as noted by Wayne et al. (2017),

balance is used in the literature for different measures that are not interchangeable.

Kalliath and Brough (2008) expanded beyond the family by replacing the term "family" with "life". They defined work-life balance as individual's perception that work and nonwork activities are compatible in accordance with the individual's *life priorities*. Brough et al. (2014) validated this concept by directly surveying the individual's perceptions about the state of their own balance.

Recently, Casper et al. (2018) addressed a further need to unify the jungle of WLB definitions. They defined WLB as more precisely work-nonwork balance, referring to the lack of conceptual clarity as a *jingle-jangle fallacy*, where jingle refers to giving many meanings for one concept and jangle refers to giving many names or concepts to one meaning. Casper et al. (2018) argue that such confusion had led to a lack of WLB construct validity. To examine the implications of these fallacies, they conducted meta-analyses of the distinct definitions of the balance construct. In this piece of work, with a review of the remarkable 290 publications, the authors concluded that a balance can be assessed in two ways: on one hand as a more generic assessment of the integration of work and nonwork roles – the *global balance*, and on the other hand, as a *multi-dimensional construct* that includes one *affective* and two *cognitive* (*effectiveness, involvement*) dimensions. The global balance is a unidimensional construct which addresses the combination of work and nonwork roles. It refers to the level of harmony individuals experience in the integration of the roles in the two life domains. The multi-dimensional construct, instead, is divided into three balance experiences, in which the affective dimension defines the extent to which individuals feel happy and content in the highly valued roles, the effectiveness dimension that defines the extent to which individuals feel successful in these roles, and the involvement dimension that defines the extent to which individuals feel sufficiently devoted in the valued roles.

Wayne, Vaziri and Casper (2021) further identified the items for this multidimensional concept. According to their work, the global balance represents the state of the combination of one's work and nonwork roles. For example, they query whether the individual experiences that there is harmony and a balance in how their roles are blended, and whether the work and nonwork roles are complementary. The multi-dimensional model has three parts; the section for involvement balance includes questions about the individual's perception of their own devotion and time consumption in their highly valued roles, the section for effectiveness balance asks whether individuals feel they perform well in their highly valued roles, and the section for affective balance refers to emotions of happiness and satisfaction in their highly valued roles.

All in all, the literature on WLB to date still reflects the confusion of definitions and measures. Therefore, when interpreting current work-family literature one must not confuse the notions, but rather understand how their differences affect research comparability. As a conclusion of the literature review of the concept of work-life balance, two notions of WLB-construct (mentioned below) form the cornerstones for the research presented in this thesis:

1) *employees' perceptions of the compatibility of work and nonwork roles in accordance with the individual's life priorities* (Brough et al., 2014)

2) *employees' perceptions of how well they can combine their work and nonwork roles, in a way that they can experience satisfaction, involvement and effectiveness in the roles they consider important* (Casper et al., 2018)

2.1.4 Perspectives of WLB research

The variety of WLB concepts has produced an extensive but evenly inconclusive body of research (Casper et al., 2018). Ever since the discourse on work-life issues commenced in the 1990s (S. Lewis et al., 2007), scholars' interests towards WLB have been steadily growing for the past three decades, and markedly accelerated in recent years (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). General insights into the structure of the literature can be drawn from three recent literature reviews (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021). Rashmi & Kataria (2021) reviewed 945 publications from 1998 through to 2020, with WLB as a keyword, and therefore the review represents only a part of the full body of the very wide literature on the work-life interface. The majority (87%) of the reviewed publications were empirical research and the rest (13%) were conceptual papers. Over half of the studies (56%) were quantitative, mostly based on surveys, and a little over a third (36%) were qualitative, while the rest (8%) consisted of mixed methods. The other recent review by Thilagavathy & Geetha (2021) was based on just 99 publications from 1990 through to 2019 concerning WLB. Of these, a little under a third (27%) were conceptual papers, while the rest (72%) were empirical, of which most (79%) were based on quantitative methods, while the rest (21%) used qualitative or mixed methods. Qualitative studies on WLB remain more rare. Given the fact that quantitative research has remained prevalent in WLB research, Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) conducted a review of qualitative research in the field. They examined a comprehensive range of work-family and WLB related concepts, basing their review on a total of 152 studies (1992-2015). They identified some major themes among the reviewed studies, including parenthood, gender differences, cultural differences, family-friendly policies, non-traditional work arrangements, coping strategies, and under-studied

populations. Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) emphasize that qualitative findings challenge the widespread rhetoric surrounding the prevalence and benefits of family-friendly policies and non-traditional work arrangements, particularly at the individual level. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the qualitative side of the WLB research.

Generally, these reviews (among some others: e.g. Brough et al., 2020; Dizaho & Othman, 2013; Fan et al., 2021; Guest, 2002; Jain & K. Nair, 2013; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Tamang, 2010; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022) show that the literature on WLB is influenced by various perspectives, e.g. whether its focus is on traditional gender research which assumes gender differences in the ability to maintain WLB, whether the family concept is behind it, whether the focus is on traditional family roles and configurations and the national context(s) in which the research is conducted, and whether the subject is studied from the organizational or individual perspective. Next, some prominent perspectives of the WLB research will be presented.

Gender perspective. The origins of the WLB concept make it logical that most of the WLB literature takes a gendered perspective, especially regarding the work-family interface of women (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). However, the evidence from work-family literature on the existence of gender differences is rather mixed. While some studies conducted across various countries have failed to identify significant differences in work-life experiences between men and women, others show that women report lower levels of satisfaction with their WLB (e.g. Chung & van der Lippe, 2018; Favero & Heath, 2012). Studies also suggest that women generally experience higher levels of work-family conflict (Jaga & Bagraim, 2017; Kim, 2017; Mäkelä et al., 2017). Research also indicates that women tend to bear a disproportionate burden of parental and domestic responsibilities, regardless of their occupation (e.g. Burnett et al., 2010; Denson et al., 2018; Knudsen, 2009). It has been suggested that men and women prioritize work and family roles differently and utilize resources to integrate work and family in diverse ways (Jennings & Mcdougald, 2007; Wayne et al., 2007). Traditionally, men have been perceived to have a greater responsibility as breadwinners in the family, but in recent times, expectations regarding household chores for men have also become more equal (Banchefsky & Park, 2016). There is also evidence that men equally desire WLB, but they may experience barriers to achieving it due to work responsibilities and expectations (Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019). Regardless of the mixed signals from gender research, the gendered implications on WLB have drawn the attention of policy-makers (Rosa et al., 2020). A notable development has been witnessed in gender equality in many modern societies (J. Lewis, 2006; Lomazzi et al., 2018), but regardless of that, the work-family literature continues

to report gender inequalities and biases, and demonstrates how those are intertwined with women's abilities to reconcile professional demands with their parenting responsibilities (Lomazzi et al., 2018). These issues are caused by increasing demands causing work overload, lack of partner-involvement in childcare and family responsibilities, and the deep-seated gender biases that are still present in organizations. The COVID-19 emergency demonstrated a widening gap in the time that women and men devote to children (UN Women, 2020), and there is evidence that the home-working during the emergency was particularly burdening on women (Kenny & Yang, 2021; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). But while signals from WLB and gender research may be mixed, there is a clear need for the gender perspective to remain one of the most important focus areas for WLB literature.

Family and non-family perspectives. Work-life literature has so far had its main attention on the family in the nonwork sphere of life, addressing challenges of working parents, dual earners and working women (Kelliher et al., 2019). Due to the intense focus on work and family, the other nonwork roles (e.g., friendships, voluntary work, and other spare time duties) were long excluded from these considerations (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). Although the discourse has since expanded beyond family to include other aspects of life, literature regarding work and parenting remains dominant (Beigi et al., 2019; Guest, 2002; Kelliher et al., 2019). In general, the term "life" has been largely considered to centre around childcare responsibilities. The traditional context is, however, challenged in several dimensions: it is limited in the need for caring, in the definition of family, and it lacks the perspective of "life" activities that are not family related.

The carer responsibility is an important notion within the literature of WLB. According to Eurostat (2019), a third of EU residents have caring responsibilities. This translates to around 100 million people with caring responsibilities, but in addition to caring for children under 15 years, it can also include other groups demanding care, such as elderly, sick and disabled people. Also, unmarried couples may be perceived as not having family obligations, when limiting this view only on childcare and disregarding their obligations to other family members or relatives. Wilkin et al. (2016) have however also argued that the care of pets requires a considerable amount of time from a family, and should therefore be considered in organizations' work-family policies.

The concept of family has traditionally been thought to consist of a married or cohabiting couple, along with their dependent children (Gutek et al., 1991). This is not necessarily aligned with the modern concept of family, and Statistics Finland defines a family to consist of "*a married or cohabiting couple or persons in a*

registered partnership and their children living together; or either of the parents and his or her children living together; or a married or cohabiting couple and persons in a registered partnership without children" (Statistics Finland, n.d.). Another definition by Piotrkowski (1979) considers family as a collective of two or more individuals who are in a relationship of interdependence towards shared vision and goals. Modern definitions of family encompass individuals who may not be biologically related but who are considered as family by certain individuals due to the presence of strong emotional bonds and supportive relationships (Rothausen, 1999). As the current understanding of WLB is mainly centred on mothers or parents, it fails to acknowledge the significant contributions of other individuals in the upbringing of children, such as siblings, grandparents, other relatives, or family friends (Kelliher et al., 2019). Furthermore, the work-family literature is also centred around a middle-class and dual-earner nuclear family, and more diversity in living arrangements such as employees living alone, couples without children, single parents, and LGBTQ couples needs to be included in future literature (Kelliher et al., 2019).

In the "*life*" domain (or the nonwork domain), WLB is also challenged by non-family related responsibilities. Although the literature has primarily focused on the work-life challenges faced by employees with family responsibilities, there is also evidence to suggest for example that solo-living employees face similar challenges and have their own unique support needs in their everyday lives (Wilkinson et al., 2018, 2022). In fact, the work–life stress of unmarried professionals is typically derived from long working hours with unpredictable ending times (ten Brummelhuis & Van der Lippe, 2010). Although the work-life challenges of employees based on their different nonwork responsibilities can differ, it is reasonable to assume that most employees have interests (and equally challenges) in maintaining balance, regardless of these differences. For instance, Haar, 2013 has compared the WLB of parent and non-parent employees, and demonstrated that WLB was considered important in both groups and its influences on people's health were nearly identical between the groups. Boiarintseva et al. (2022) have shown that dual-earner couples without children face similar challenges in managing the work-nonwork interface as their counterparts with children. In conclusion, there is a need to widen WLB research in the context of other family structures than only the traditional ones.

Because there has been a narrow family only -perspective in work-life research, there has been a lack of consistency in defining the full scope for the nonwork sphere which comprises everything outside of work, also beyond the family aspect (Prakash, 2018). In one definition, the nonwork domains has been divided into three areas (Kirchmeyer, 1992): parenting, community (e.g., charity, political

involvement), and recreation (hobbies, sports etc.). Wickham and Parker (2007) instead, identified 35 nonwork roles which could be clustered into five categories: family-based, sporting-based, charity-based, education-based, and social-based. These, however, exclude the perspective of taking care of oneself, such as elements of rest and sleep, which are a crucial part of the nonwork sphere of life. Nevertheless, Keeney et al. (2013) have more comprehensively listed eight distinct nonwork life domains that are: health, family, household management, friendships, education, romantic relationships, community involvement, and leisure. This research has implications for designing more inclusive work-life policies and practices, and presents a new lens for understanding individual differences at the work-life interface.

National and cross-national perspectives. The early research on employees' work-life experiences was mainly conducted in the U.S., but there has been an increase of research across various contexts (Casper et al., 2014) from western and eastern perspectives (Chandra, 2012). The main contributors to WLB research, after the U.S. are the United Kingdom, Australia, India, Spain, Germany and Canada (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021). While most studies on employees' work-life experiences are conducted in a national context (J. M. Haar et al., 2019; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Shockley et al., 2017), the globalization of organizations has called for cross-national research.

Cultural factors (values, assumptions, beliefs) play a role as a context for the work-life experiences of employees. Individuals' work-life experiences, including WLB, are dependent on their natural and cultural context (Greenhaus & Powell, 2016; Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2013; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Poelmans, 2005). Even within Europe, the WLB support from governments and workplaces varies (den Dulk & van Doorne-Huiskes, 2007). Overall, European countries have increased their public work-life support. The most advanced national policies can be found in Nordic countries (Eurostat, 2009). This is evident specifically in the public sector where employers provide work-life support to their employees. In other European countries, WLB is considered more a private matter and people rely on support from friends and relatives (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). There are also national differences in terms of gender equalities, and employees in countries representing high gender egalitarianism also experience higher WLB (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014).

Looking at the Finnish national context, it can be observed that in terms of the gender division of housework and childcare, Finland is one of the most equal countries in Europe. According to a Eurostat comparison of countries, Finland placed fourth when reviewing the equity between women and men in daily

childcare, and fifth in housework. In 2016, the European Union as a whole saw 93% of women and 69% of men aged 25 to 49 who had children under 18, take care of their children on a daily basis. However, the equivalent numbers in Finland were 91% for women and 79% for men (Eurostat, 2021). In addition, family structures vary across countries, and Finland has the highest proportion of one and two-person households without children compared to other European countries (~20%: Eurostat, 2009) . This can be considered to have an impact on WLB needs (Wilkinson et al., 2018, 2022). Finnish organizations rank as world-class in the matters of gender equality, with principles and practices in place as instruments for managing the work-life interface (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.; Eurostat, 2009). Yet, studies on work habits reveal that Finnish workers still experience work overload and exhaustion above the multinational average (Eurofound, 2023; Microsoft, 2022a).

Organizational and individual perspectives. Another major focus in the literature is the assessment of organizational level initiatives as catalysts for employees' WLB (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). Most studies have primarily examined various means of instrumental support (policies, benefits) and their impact on WLB, while much less attention has been paid to "softer" aspects as WLB support, such as the employees' personal resources and their perceived emotional support. However, both Rashmi and Kataria (2021) and Thilagavathy and Geetha (2021) concluded their reviews of WLB literature by suggesting that there is a risk that organizational initiatives, policies and work-life practices designed to support WLB may be underutilized by employees due to various reasons, such them not fitting everyone or because of a fear of negative career consequences. The authors suggested an agenda for future research to explore how individual abilities, along with WLB policies, can enhance WLB. Thus, individual strategies are important aspects that need investigation rather than workplace practices. Rashmi and Kataria (2021) further suggest that individuals' resources (for instance psychological capital and self-regulation) are needed, because those resources may help individuals to accomplish WLB.

2.2 Theoretical lenses for studying work-life balance

Alongside the vast terminology and literature, WLB has been extensively studied from various theoretical perspectives. When studying the field of WLB, it is essential to develop an understanding of the breadth of these perspectives. In this chapter, a brief overview is provided of the theories commonly associated with the concept, followed by an explanation of the theoretical framework employed to address the research problem in this thesis.

The theoretical foundation of the WLB concept in this thesis is based on adaptations of the Person–Environment Fit theory (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Voydanoff, 2005) and role theories (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The person-environment fit theory suggests that the match or compatibility between a person and their environment affects their well-being and satisfaction. The person-environment fit theory is linked with WLB in the sense that it highlights the importance of finding a fit or balance between an individual's needs and values and the demands and resources of their work and personal life environments. Role theories suggest that people play different roles in their lives (e.g. employee, parent, spouse, friend), and that these roles may have different relations and intersections (e.g. conflicts). Particularly, people manage the combination and interface of roles in various ways.

Other prominent theories that are closely associated with WLB research include border and boundary theories (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000), Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Job Demands and Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), Social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), Spill-over theory (Zedeck, 1992), and Self-Determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), to mention but a few. This thesis has adopted four different theoretical perspectives to study WLB. As the focus of the research is on *resources* that facilitate an individual's WLB, the backbone of the theories is founded on the COR-theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which argues that employees strive to obtain, utilize and conserve resources that support them in achieving things they value, such as WLB (Haar et al., 2019). Research on the work-family interface generally leans on the COR-theory, as the theory can explain the relationship between work resources and employees' well-being (e.g. Adisa et al., 2021; Fukumura et al., 2021; Haar & Brougham, 2020).

A closely related theory to the COR-theory is the JR-D-theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), which proposes that employees face various demands at work and have certain resources to respond to those demands, and is specifically centred around the work context. The JD-R theory has been used to examine WLB from the perspective that work demands and available resources affect WLB (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Thakur & Kumar, 2015; Visser et al., 2016; Wepfer et al., 2018). The study presented in **Article 1** extends the investigation to home demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008). The study in **Article 2** continues the exploration of various resources that seem to influence the work-life experiences of remote workers, and with the basis on COR-theory, seeks to unravel some of their connections. Work-life balance conceptualizations include the notion that stress is caused by experiences of imbalance. Another stress theory based on the balance of resources is the effort-

recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), which proposes that employees consume energy when they deal with work stressors, and that energy reserves are replenished when these stressors stop. Although the effort-recovery model is not commonly linked to the concept of WLB, employees' recovery experiences are linked to their WLB. More concretely, the "life" (nonwork) part in WLB includes time for rest and recovery, and an employee's psychological recovery from work has been seen to predict their WLB (Althammer et al., 2021). This theory allows for the examination of both energy-consuming elements of remote working and individual strategies through which individuals can construct WLB through recovery. This theoretical lens is adopted in the study that is presented in **Article 3**. Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) posits that individuals tend to establish and maintain boundaries in order to protect their roles, and is commonly associated with WLB research as boundaries are thought to improve WLB (Adisa et al., 2019; Allen et al., 2021). Therefore, the study presented **Article 4** adopts the boundary theory for a further exploration of work-nonwork boundaries that are challenged in the remote work context, and how these challenges can be mitigated by supervisor's support.

2.2.1 Conservation of Resources (COR) -theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998, 2002) is based on the tenet that individuals are motivated to obtain and protect resources, and the loss of resources causes stress. At the heart of the theory lies the concept of "*resources*", which can be defined as a means of supply, support or capability that enables action, knowledge acquisition, and improves the overall quality of human life. Hobfoll (1988; Hobfoll et al., 2018) categorizes resources by their nature and usage. Specifically, resources can take the form of *objects* (things, goods), *conditions* (agreements, principles), *energies* (time, lucre), *personal characteristics* (skills, strengths) and *support* (help, advice) (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Wayne et al., 2007). Hobfoll, (2002) also makes a difference between resources that are controlled by the individual (personal resources) and resources that could be available in certain external circumstances or provided by others (contextual resources). Individuals seek to balance their resources to perform in both work and home roles (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

The COR theory includes seven main principles (Hobfoll, 1989), which explain the role of resources in human wellbeing. The fundamental *first* principle of the theory states that people naturally strive to obtain and protect resources, while a loss of resources, or threat of losing resources, causes the individual to experience stress. The *second* principle emphasizes the interdependence of resources and proposes

that resources can generate new resources. The *third* COR- principal claims that people with sufficient resources can prevent the loss of resources, while the *fourth* principle adds that they can also better survive the loss of resources, and the *fifth* principle states that employees with sufficient resources can replace lost resources with new ones. Thus, it can be assumed that individuals who have access to resources are better equipped to cope with various situations. The *sixth* COR - principle proposes that resources tend to remain stable across time and circumstances. Finally, the *seventh* principle states that people who possess resources tend to be valued by their peers.

Based on these core principles, COR theory suggests that people have a pool of resources at their disposal that they want to protect and grow. This means that people may lose resources from this resource pool or even gain new ones, depending on the life conditions they are in. As per principle two, resources are often linked to each other, and linked resources build *resource caravans*. The name caravan illustrates that, just like camel caravans are attached to each other with a rope, resources are also linked to one another. New resources help to obtain additional resources, which form a *gain spiral* of resources. However, the linkages between resources can also unfortunately be a risk. Losing one part of the linkage risks cutting linkages to other parts of the caravan, and losing one resource may lead to the loss of many resources. In the COR theory, such an occurrence is called a *loss spiral*.

The COR-theory further theorizes that an individual's resources are dependent on the environment or circumstances the individual is in. The theory describes them as *caravan passageways*, and resource caravans "move along" these passages, which can ideally protect and enhance the caravan. A favourable passageway protects or enhances the content of the caravan, whereas an unfavourable passageway consumes the resources in the caravan or hinders new ones to be generated. A passageway usually means circumstances that are constructed and maintained by people. In an organization context, the passageway could mean the company culture.

The gain and loss spirals are also influenced by an individual's own *coping*, i.e., how they utilize resources to acquire new resources or cope with the loss of resources. The theory distinguishes between functional and dysfunctional coping. If an individual loses resources and is unable to find ways to cope or acquire new resources (in other words, they become paralyzed or give up), the cycle of resource loss may worsen. On the contrary, constructive methods can help to utilize existing resources and even break the cycle of loss.

The COR-theory is helpful in identifying gains and losses of resources caused in remote working, and how they may influence the work-life experiences of employees. But more importantly, the COR-theory assembles resources in a hierarchy and allows one to identify how various resources correspond with each other – which resources steer other resources (i.e. form linkages), and what are the hindrances for a sufficient management of resources.

2.2.2 Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) theory

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory is an occupational stress theory and proposes that employees deal with various demands in their daily work, and usually have resources at their disposal which support the employee's well-being. When work demands increase and resources become less sufficient, the person becomes burdened (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). Every job has its own characteristics, and thus the job demands vary from job to job, and resource availability varies from situation to situation. In order to understand the JD-R theory, one needs to take a closer look at its components, namely the demands and the resources.

Job demands mean the physical or psychological effort expected to be invested in a job. Different requirements affect individuals in different ways. Some are burdened by unfavourable working hours, while others are worn out by difficult customers on a daily basis. Therefore, job requirements are usually distinguished into categories of quantitative, emotional, physical, and cognitive job demands. *Quantitative job demands* refer to the amount and pace of work, such as workload, task quantity, hours worked, and expected speed and intensity. When these demands exceed acceptable levels, they can lead to work pressure and overload, causing stress and negatively impacting the employee's well-being. *Emotional job demands* refer to the characteristics of work that require employees to engage emotionally in their work. Some occupations (e.g., crisis work) are thought to be highly emotional demanding by their nature (de Jonge et al., 2008). However, anyone can face emotional demands at work depending on the work environment (e.g., discrimination, bullying). *Physical job demands* refer to activities that require musculoskeletal effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Nygård, 1999), and usually relate to jobs that expose employees to physically challenging and repetitive work (Hildebrandt et al., 2001). *Cognitive job demands* comprise activities that demand knowledge usage (e.g., decision making and problem solving). For example, professionals like programmers, lawyers and accountants need to handle information on a daily basis, and the cognitive demand in these jobs is high. However, demands are experienced individually, and usually

measured as perceptions (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). When evaluating the quantitative demands of a job, it is important to take into account the individual worker characteristics that play a role in the way we experience the demands (Veldhoven, 2013). Should the demands be too high (e.g., work overload, continuous emotional pressure, or too difficult work tasks), the employee is likely to experience stress and strain (Kinnunen et al., 2011).

This is where ***job resources*** come into play. Job resources refer to various instruments that help individuals accomplish work goals (Demerouti et al., 2001, 2002). They can be physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects that help to reduce job demands and their associated consequences. Resources can be, for instance, social support at work, supervisory coaching, performance feedback, time control, learning possibilities, autonomy, etc. Resources also stimulate an employee's personal growth, learning and wellbeing (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; W. Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Thus, resources are not only helpful for managing job demands, but they – alone – are important instruments for work enjoyment, personal development, motivation, and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

The JD-R model comprises of two main paths. First, the energy-driven path begins with job demands and leads to exhaustion as the demands freely continue or increase. This harmful development can be prevented with sufficient job resources which buffer the impact of job demands on the strain experienced by the employee. Consequently, employees with sufficient resources can cope better with demanding jobs. Second, the motivation-driven path begins with resources that contribute to employee wellbeing, in terms of work engagement (an enthusiasm towards one's own work). Surprisingly, this path is amplified by job demands. When employees are resourceful, they like to utilize their resources in sufficiently challenging work. They are motivated with right types of demands, which they have resources to deal with (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Hakanen, 2005). Thus, it is relevant to adjust job demands to acceptable level, but even more important to ensure sufficient resources, which are a powerful tool in enhancing wellbeing at work.

Researchers (Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al., 2001) extended the original JD-R theory with the inclusion of personal resources – i.e., positive self-evaluations that are linked to individuals' abilities to control and impact their environment, such as self-efficacy (perceived ability). Job resources foster personal resources, whereas sufficient personal resources enhance the usage of available job resources. For instance, support from a supervisor to employee (job resource) could foster the employee's self-efficacy (personal resource), which in turn would help the

employee to utilize job autonomy (job resource) at work to improve their own efficiency and motivation at work. Several empirical studies have demonstrated that individuals who possess sufficient personal resources also achieve higher work performance and life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2004, 2005).

Traditionally, the JD-R theory was limited to the characteristics of work, excluding the resources and demands in the nonwork domain, but there are studies (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008) that have incorporated them into the JD-R theory. Such studies have demonstrated that home demands and resources have played a less important role than work demands and resources in determining an individual's outcomes (work engagement and burnout). However, these studies did not address WLB as an outcome.

Working from home inevitably leaves the employee relying on certain home resources while performing work, for instance the physical environment and the ergonomics of available work furniture and equipment. Working from home may add additional demands (expectations from other family members), and thus very different factors may affect the employees' ability to accomplish results in work and home roles. In order to build a better understanding of the factors influencing remote workers' WLB, the research presented in this thesis extends the JD-R theory to also consider home related demands and resources. This is essential as working from home may impose specific demands such as childcare and home chores, but also add resources associated with an individual's ability to control and impact their environment.

2.2.3 The effort-recovery model and psychological detachment from work

The effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) explains how employees psychologically recover from work-related strain. The model assumes that employees face various job demands in their daily work which require them to try to get the work done. This consumes energy and loads their psycho-biological and cognitive-affective system. In other words, job demands generate a cost in terms of load effects. Load effects can be emotional, cognitive, and behavioural symptoms which cease when work demands discontinue. These symptoms cause short-term fatigue at work (Meijman & Schaufeli, 1996). Like batteries that must be recharged after use, the energy employees expend must be replenished, which requires recovering from work. Recovery can take place when work-related demands cease and reduce the need for effort; and at that point, the individual's psycho-biological systems can reload to the original baseline. If work demands continue to load on the individual beyond working hours, the recovery might not

be sufficient and instead, energy deficits start to accumulate. Continued exposure to load effects and stress can result in long term fatigue and other negative physical and psychological health effects, like problems with sleeping and exhaustion (Binnewies et al., 2010; Sanz-Vergel et al., 2010; Sianoja et al., 2018; Siltaloppi et al., 2009).

How job demands turn into load effects is determined by various job characteristics, especially job control (for instance, the opportunities to have breaks and also to stop thinking about work). Meijman (2000) has drawn a connection between the experience of fatigue and biological survival, stating that human beings need to experience tiredness in order to know they need to take a break and rest. Just as with rest and sleep, recovery is also considered as a basic human need. The need for recovery has been further advanced by Sonnentag and Zijlstra (2006) who have described it as a sense which demands us to take a break from work demands. The Need for Recovery (NFR) scale measures the different sensations and emotions that signal the load effects. These can include, for instance, feeling tiredness, exhaustion, an inability to concentrate, and an inability to relax after work.

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) have suggested that recovery from work takes place through four recovery experiences of *psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences* and *control during leisure time*, of which psychological detachment is considered most important. The concept of psychological detachment was originally established by Etzion et al. (1998), on the basis of studies of military personnel who were working under conditions which created high needs of recovery. Etzion and colleagues examined their ability to detach from energy-consuming load factors at work, and defined psychological detachment as the experience of being away from work. Psychological detachment is known to occur both automatically and deliberately, and it is evidenced that it can be enhanced by individuals themselves. Hence, individuals can also promote their own recovery from work. The other three recovery experiences are relaxation which means the unwinding of body and mind after effort-expenditure (e.g. resting, meditation), mastery which means a development of skills outside of work that gives one pleasure (e.g. advancing in a hobby or learning), and control over leisure which means the ability to decide how to spend breaks from work (e.g. by going for a walk during a lunch break or being able to travel regardless of one's work demands).

Psychological detachment is crucial in the context of remote working. Firstly, working from home challenges the segmentation of home and work roles since the two may need to be acted upon simultaneously. This may prevent the detachment

from happening at all, if the home environment (technology kept on) keeps being a reminder of work matters even during leisure (Charalampous et al., 2022). Secondly, working from home can also influence employees' recovery from work in other ways and even cause additional loading. The research presented in this thesis specifically addresses psychological detachment as a promoter of recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), and thus forms a crucial instrument for WLB (Santuzzi & Barber, 2018; Wepfer et al., 2018).

2.2.4 Boundary theory

Boundary theory explores the boundaries between different aspects of an individual's life and how those boundaries impact their well-being and identity (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Nippert-Eng's (1996) seminal work in how individuals mentally delineate between their personal and professional lives identifies four distinct types of work-family boundaries: cognitive, physical, temporal, and behavioural. These boundaries can be combined in various ways to form "personal realm configurations" that can vary from fully segmented to fully integrated along a continuum as described by Nippert-Eng.

Boundary theory was further developed by Ashforth et al. (2000). According to them, people have multiple roles and identities, such as parent, spouse, friend, employee, etc. These roles can overlap, conflict, or compete. People generate and maintain "mental fences" (i.e., boundaries) between these roles, and in daily life, people transition between roles, exiting one role and entering another. This refers to both physical and psychological movement between roles. In the theory, these transitions are referred to as boundary-crossing activities.

Boundary theory is built on two main concepts, *role boundary* and *role identity*. *A role boundary* is the limit of a role in terms of space and time, and in role transitions affected by the boundary's flexibility and permeability. Flexibility refers to the ability to adjust spatial and temporal boundaries, while permeability refers to being mentally or behaviourally engaged in a different role within the boundaries of a particular role. *Role identity* refers to how a person sees themselves in a specific role, with core and peripheral features shaping this view. During role transitions, the degree of contrast between these features can impact the difficulty of the transition. Core features are more important than peripheral ones, and greater differences in core features can make the transition more challenging.

Mixing these concepts, the boundary theory categorizes roles on a spectrum from high segmentation to high integration, based on role contrast, flexibility, and

permeability. Highly segmented roles have inflexible and impermeable boundaries, while highly integrated roles have more flexible and permeable boundaries. While high segmentation reduces blurring between roles, it can make it harder to cross psychological boundaries. Highly integrated roles can lead to role confusion and interruptions, but violations between them tend to have a smaller emotional impact. Violations of the boundaries may manifest as intrusions (e.g., an undesired work-related call during leisure) and as spill-over (e.g., where emotional strain at home extends to work). Such violations are linked to, for example, work-home conflicts. Different boundary tactics help to manage the boundary and can prevent the adverse effects of violations (G. Kreiner et al., 2009). Behavioural tactics include the use of other people to help to maintain the boundary, taking advantage of technology to build the boundary as well as invoking a triage where only urgent matters are prioritized, and defining which aspects are non-negotiable and never permeable. Temporal tactics involve setting controls for work time and finding temporal respites (going away). Physical tactics mean building physical reinforcers or barriers between work and home, manipulating physical space, and managing physical artefacts. Communicative tactics comprise the management of other people's expectations (of e.g., availability) and confronting violators of these boundaries. There are individual differences in the creation, maintenance and crossing of boundaries, but situations and contexts influence people's abilities to maintain the boundary (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner, 2006).

Studying the work-nonwork boundaries of individuals is essential in remote work research because this context (and specifically the home-working setting) poses specific challenges for maintaining these boundaries. Individuals who previously had well-defined boundaries may find themselves in a new situation where these boundaries become blurred or more difficult to manage. Another factor is that the employees' home environment and nonwork responsibilities (e.g. whether they have parenting responsibilities) have a greater impact on WLB in the remote work context (Adisa, Aiyenitaju, et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to investigate the boundary perspective in research and build an understanding of the different challenges in maintaining boundaries based on the employees' nonwork circumstances.

2.3 Overview of the Antecedents and Consequences of WLB

Work-life balance is widely recognized as important for both individuals and organizations (Guest, 2002). Thus, research has engaged in examining WLB from

both its antecedent and consequence perspectives. This has resulted in a significant amount of available literature on the topic (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). However, WLB is still often confused with concepts similar to it (e.g. work-family conflict), and studies conducted with different concepts should not be fully equated with each other. Therefore, this thesis next provides an overview specifically focused on the antecedents and consequences related to the WLB concept. This briefing has been compiled from collected articles where the identified links to WLB have been presented. The aim here is to outline possible factors that may help to build WLB (antecedents), and as well as to emphasize the significance of WLB as a topic of concern (consequences). The following summary is assembled from recent reviews of WLB research (Brough et al., 2020; Dizaho & Othman, 2013; Fan et al., 2021; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Tamang, 2010; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021, 2022). Figure 2 presents the main research findings to date, briefly summarizing them by the areas listed in the figure.

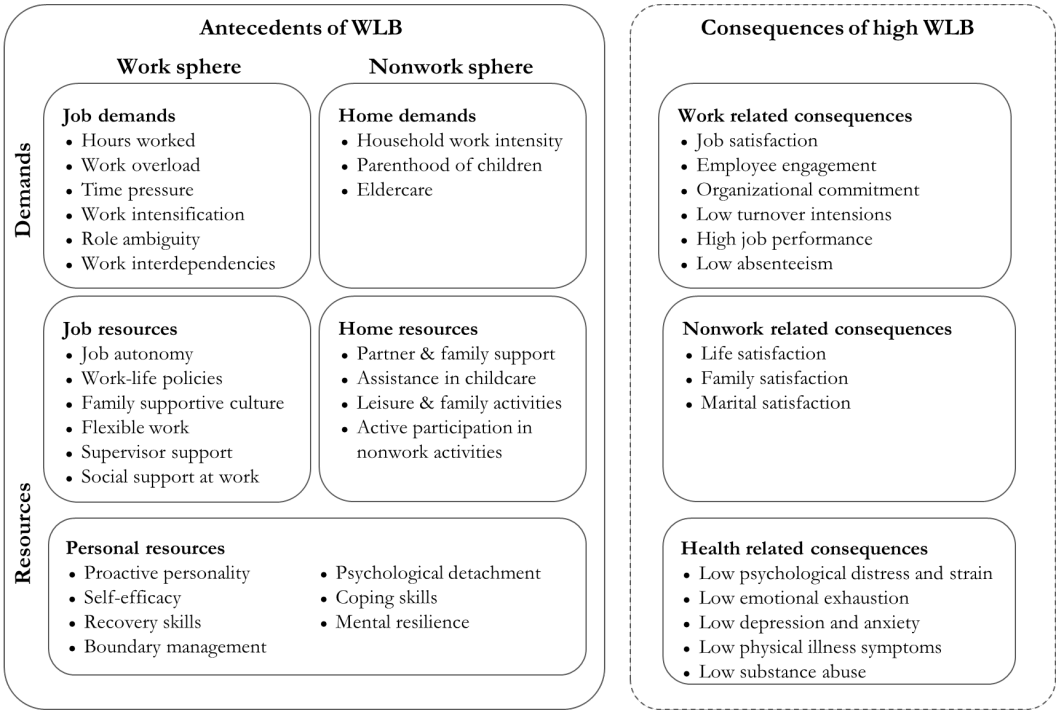

Figure 2. Antecedents and Consequences of WLB

2.3.1 Antecedents of WLB

The specific focus of this research is to understand the components of WLB within the context of remote work. In the following section, the antecedents that previous research has generally associated with WLB, regardless of the specific context, are summarized. These factors are categorized into two groups: work-related factors and nonwork-related factors. Additionally, personal factors are identified which encompass individual characteristics that can influence WLB in both domains of life. The objective is to provide an overview of the existing empirical knowledge on this topic.

2.3.1.1 Work related antecedents

Employees face different expectations in their work, for example related to work results, workload, and schedules. These demands also affect employees' abilities to maintain WLB.

Perhaps the most frequently examined demand in respect to WLB is the *number of hours people allocate to their jobs*. It can be assumed that if people use extensive hours on working, it reduces their nonwork time, and likely causes a sense of imbalance in the use of time. Research has drawn negative associations between hours worked and WLB (Granter et al., 2019; Haar et al., 2019; Pirzadeh & Lingard, 2021). Nevertheless, working hours do not always tell the entire truth. Some people may enjoy spending time working and are willing to invest a portion of their spare time achieving desired results at work. Workload (which refers to employees' perceptions of the amount of work they are expected to do) is essentially a stronger predictor for WLB than the number of hours worked (Syrek et al., 2013). Although there is yet no study to show the association of quantitative workload with WLB as such, especially in the remote work context, quantitative work has been found to influence work-life interference (McCrea et al., 2011; Skinner & Pocock, 2008). However, excessive workload leads to work overload and causes individuals to experience a sense of too much work to do compared to the time available, and is, in turn, associated with WLB (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Pirzadeh & Lingard, 2021). Alongside intensive working and work intensification (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022) which refer to the busy working culture of meetings and work correspondence, WLB has also been negatively associated with time pressures (Syrek et al., 2013).

In addition to the aforementioned quantitative factors, *role-related factors* also have an effect on WLB. Multiple work roles, role ambiguity, and work

interdependencies also cause worsened conditions for WLB (Karani et al., 2022; Tamang, 2010).

It is not surprising that *job autonomy* (i.e., the degree to which people can decide the way they assemble and deliver their own work: Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Spector, 1986) has been shown to have a positive impact on WLB (Haar & Brougham, 2020; Ronda et al., 2016; Walia, 2014). Autonomy increases employees' abilities to control the temporal and spatial elements of work, and thus enhances the possibility to effectively reconcile home and work duties (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

The level of support which individuals can receive at their workplace plays a crucial role in determining their perceived balance (Russo et al., 2016; W. B. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This gives the employer several means of providing support, with a positive effect on WLB – e.g., work-life policies, reinforcing a family supportive culture, flexible work arrangements, as well as supervisor support to the employee.

Various *work-life policies* and a *family supportive culture* help employees to build a life in such a way that the balance can be maintained regardless of their family status (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). The early discourse on WLB issues at women's entry to the labour market encouraged companies to try family-friendly initiatives, and thanks to those initiatives they later evolved into commonly accepted WLB policies (White et al., 2003). These initiatives have also contributed to acknowledging the business case for adopting WLB policies (Dex & Scheibl, 1999; S. Lewis & Cooper, 1995). Although many organizations have established work-life policies and practices to their employees' benefit, the issue is that they still remain underutilized by employees (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). One cause for this is a lack of sufficient organizational support for employees to be aware of and have the courage to utilize them without fear of career consequences. The other cause is the remaining gendered or family-focused nature of these policies (childcare, parental leave etc.).

Employers can effectively influence the employee's balance construct with various work arrangements, where *flexible work arrangements* (FWA) are the most commonly researched theme (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). Work flexibility, for example in terms of place and time, increases the conditions for WLB (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). FWA usually consist of a flexible hours system, remote working, compressed working time, part-time work, and alternating work schedules to enhance employees' sense of WLB (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). However, these arrangements may suit different employees' differently, and not all types of support have positive impacts on WLB (Warhurst et al., 2008).

Research has shown that the impact of FWA depends on the employee's ability to control working time and place (Peters et al., 2009).

Social support plays an important role in achieving WLB. *Supervisor support* has been found to be pivotal in helping employees manage the work-family interface to lower experienced work-nonwork conflict, and to increase the overall wellbeing (Kossek et al., 2011). Family-supportive supervisor behaviour (FSSB) has been positively linked to WLB (De et al., 2021; French & Shockley, 2020; Hammer et al., 2009; Kossek et al., 2011), work-family positive spill over, and job satisfaction (Hammer et al., 2009). Supervisor support is defined through four dimensions; emotional support (feelings, care, comfort to discuss family matters), instrumental support (e.g., FWA and daily adjustments), role model behaviours (such as setting an example on the leader's work/life integration), and creative work-family management (proactive and innovative actions to integrate work and family) (Hammer et al., 2009).

A leader's support can help employees to manage and balance family-related responsibilities by proposing alternative work arrangements that help the employee to better combine work and nonwork domains (Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Moreover, the role model a leader displays has an influence on the work-nonwork balance of the employee. This influences not only the communication of formal practices, but also informal and implied family supportive practises (Fiksenbaum, 2014). Additionally, negative work-nonwork experiences perceived by supervisors have been seen to flow down to their subordinates (Pan et al., 2021). Supervisors and leaders may also be the gatekeepers of other support (Dimitra et al., 2021; Vaziri et al., 2020), and in the best-case scenario they could emphasize employees' concern and facilitate employees' WLB through family supportive behaviours (Vaziri et al., 2020). But there is a further need to build the understanding of the underlying factors of WLB and how the various factors influencing the individual experience of WLB may interplay with each other (Haar et al., 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Social support is, however, not limited to supervisors. *Social support from colleagues* has also been found to influence the sense of WLB, as it can help people share workload or receive needed help to complete their job (Ferguson et al., 2012).

2.3.1.2 Nonwork related antecedents

There are several components in the employees' nonwork sphere of life that are known to contribute to one's WLB. Similarly, as work imposes job demands, the

employee's private life and family situation create expectations of their own on the employee. Although this area is far less researched than the effect of typical work demands on WLB, the literature mentions some antecedents like household intensity, parenthood, children at home, eldercare, partner support, leisure and family activities, family support, as well as an active role participating in nonwork activities.

Household intensity, similar to work intensity, is known to have a negative impact on one's WLB, (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Parenthood and children at home may put pressure on the balance (Tamang, 2010). Taking care of young or school aged children puts demands on the parents (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022) as they may restrict focus on the work domain (Carillo et al., 2021). Employees with parenting responsibilities and children at home are more exposed to a negative WLB (Lonska et al., 2021; Maruyama et al., 2009).

Eldercare, just as parenting, requires resources and may affect the WLB, and is similarly linked to increasing home demands in the nonwork domain (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

Partner and family support have been shown to play a crucial role for WLB (Russo et al., 2016), such as assistance in childcare (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Leisure and family activities can create demands on employees and worsen their sense of balance, but can also help employees to relieve stress and restore energy (Cheng et al., 2020).

Active role participation in nonwork activities is seen as a factor that improves WLB (Voydanoff, 2005), and pleasant leisure activities have been connected to health and well-being (Pressman et al., 2009).

2.3.1.3 Antecedents related to personal resources

People differ in how effectively they are aware of and can create and maintain a work-life balance. Individuals with adequate personal resources are more likely to sustain WLB over time (Chan et al., 2016; Siu, 2013). A proactive personality, strong self-efficacy, good recovery skills, boundary management skills, and psychological detachment strategies have been listed in the literature as important personal resources.

Proactive personality (Aryee et al., 2005) is known as a contributor of WLB. A proactive personality can act upon changes in the environment, while not being restrained by the change. This allows an employee to recognize opportunities and to take steps to promote their own WLB.

Self-efficacy, in which one's belief in their ability to achieve specific goals or outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1997), is suggested influence WLB (Haar & Brougham, 2022; Ronda et al., 2016). It has also been found to moderate the positive effect of autonomy on WLB (Badri & Panatik, 2020), as well as the relationship between organizational support and WLB (Thakur & Kumar, 2015). Cho et al. (2022) further introduce as a concept of work-family balance self-efficacy (i.e. the belief in our skills to balance work and nonwork roles), and demonstrated volunteer work performed by caregivers of elderly parents to have a positive connection with WLB. It emphasizes the individual's own ability to allocate time in their own chosen way, and its contribution to achieving desired balance.

Recovery skills refer to the capability to actively influence one's own recovery. Recovery skills have been linked to recovery from work and WLB. Wepfer et al. (2018) showed that employees who choose to highly integrate their work and nonwork spheres report less recovery activities, and thus were more exhausted and experienced less WLB.

Boundary management strategies have been proposed to promote employees' WLB (Mellner, 2016; Mellner et al., 2014). These strategies can be developed and deployed to protect one's role boundaries. There is some evidence that a sufficient segmentation of work and nonwork roles also promotes one's WLB (Allen et al., 2021; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012).

Psychological detachment strategies have been found to affect psychological detachment in a study by Luta et al. (2020). Psychological detachment strategies can be deliberately created in order to promote psychological detachment. Santuzzi and Barber (2018) demonstrated that people who can psychologically detach from work are likely to have higher WLB even if they experience workplace tele-pressure and an urge to quickly respond to work related correspondence through technology.

Coping skills and strategies (Zheng et al., 2016) have been shown to have a greater effect on WLB than organizational WLB programs. The workers' coping strategies (i.e., active behaviour) were shown to be linked with other resources like positive attitude.

Mental resilience (Hobfoll, 2012), defined as the capability to resist major stress without becoming dysfunctional, has been found to influence WLB (Köse et al., 2021). Mental resilience has been proposed to be fostered by a secure environment and social support (Hobfoll, 2012; Köse et al., 2021).

It is assumed that that the relationship between WLB and its antecedents is not straight forward, but complex. Interrelations exist between the variables, but so far there has been limited research to unravel this complexity (Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020). For instance, it is still unclear how people shape their decisions to utilize available support (Fan et al., 2021). Thus, there has been a further need to explore more of the underlying mechanisms behind WLB (Fan et al., 2021; Haar & Brougham, 2020; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Wan et al., 2022)

2.3.2 Consequences of WLB

While the focus of this thesis is not, in particular, to examine the effects of WLB, it is essential to understand why WLB has garnered so much attention and become a focal point for many organizations. This is because there are numerous suggested consequences for both individual well-being and organizational outcomes associated with WLB. In this section, a brief overview of the consequences of poor WLB is provided, categorizing them into organizational and individual outcomes. Additionally, health outcomes are identified, as they are an integral part of both areas of life. The findings from recent research have been summarized in Figure 2 in relation to the antecedents and consequences of WLB. The consequences are here categorized into work-related outcomes and nonwork-related outcomes, as well as health outcomes, which could affect both the individual's work and home roles.

2.3.2.1 Work related consequences

Work life balance can have either a positive or negative effect on an individual's capacity to function in a work society. While most research findings elucidate the relationship between WLB and job satisfaction, effects on job engagement, absenteeism, organizational commitment, employee turnover and performance have also been explored.

Job satisfaction has been connected to WLB in several studies (Brough et al., 2014; Haar & Brougham, 2020). Employees who feel that they can sufficiently reconcile the responsibilities of work and home are more likely to be satisfied with their work (Brough et al., 2014; Haar & Brougham, 2022). For instance, in a longitudinal

study of workers in Australia and New Zeeland, Brough et al. (2014) found a significant positive relationship between WLB and job satisfaction.

Employee engagement is a broad construct describing the employee's relationship to work, that reflects in their behaviour at the workplace (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Employees with a high WLB are more likely to feel high employee engagement (Parkes & Langford, 2008; Wood et al., 2020). High employee engagement in turn also enhances business outcomes (Harter et al., 2002).

Absenteeism has been found to be affected by WLB, and for example, Sirgy & Lee (2018) described that a high WLB was associated with a decrease in absenteeism.

Organizational commitment has consistently been associated with a high WLB (Casper et al., 2011; Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2019; Tamang, 2010). It is only natural that studies have also shown that WLB predicts low turnover intention (Haar & Brougham, 2020) A longitudinal study by Brough et al. (2014) found reduced turnover intentions as one key consequence of a high WLB.

Performance at work is an outcome of high WLB that goes beyond the employee's experience, with a direct impact on work results (Johari et al., 2018; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). A person who feels that they can use the time needed for their work and can dedicate themselves to their work at the desired level is more likely to also perform their work duties well. It must be remembered that WLB is in part predicted by the amount of work, in which case this linking is logical. Although there is significantly less research showing connections of WLB to overall organizational level performance, a few studies indicate that good WLB can also enhance a company's results (Blazovich et al., 2014).

2.3.2.2 Nonwork related consequences

While nonwork outcomes have not been as actively researched as work outcomes, there is some evidence of an association of these outcomes with various concepts explaining the work-family interface (such as work-family enrichment, facilitation and conflict). Such outcomes include satisfaction with life, family and relationship, and family functioning and performance.

Satisfaction with life, family and close relationships have been associated with a good WLB. A literature study by Sirgy and Lee (2018) describes the influence of a good WLB on aspects like life satisfaction, as does a study by Haar et al. (2014) which examined this relationship across seven different cultures.

A two-wave study by Chan et al. (2016) found that WLB predicted *family satisfaction* over time through work-family enrichment. The link between work-family balance and family satisfaction was also reported by Carlson et al. (2009). In the study by Sirgy and Lee (2018), a similar link to *marital satisfaction* was indicated.

Carlson and colleagues additionally demonstrated cross-sectionally that work-family balance contributed to certain family outcomes such as *family functioning and performance,* after accounting for work-family conflict and enrichment. The study of Sirgy and Lee (2018), further supported the link to family performance.

2.3.2.3 Health related consequences

While there are some studies that note a connection from WLB to both mental as well as physical health (Borowiec & Drygas, 2022; Lunau et al., 2014; Mensah & Adjei, 2020; Yang et al., 2018), health related consequences of WLB have received relatively little focus. However, considering the linkage between WFC and WLB, rich coverage can also be found in the WFC literature on possible health related consequences.

Mental health, psychological wellbeing and depression are often mentioned because of WLB and WFC. Kotera et al. (2020) found that WLB among construction workers was negatively associated with mental health problems and attitudes. A literature review by Whiston and Cinamon (2015) identified a substantial connection between WFC and mental (and physical) health. A cross sectional study on Swiss households also found that WFC is connected to a higher relative risk of mental health problems (Hämmig et al., 2009), and in a study of South-Korean workers, Yang et al. (2018) connected WLB to psychosocial wellbeing. Similar results were reported by Borowiec and Drygas (2022) who found strong links between WLB and mental health.

Physical health, while less studied, has been found to be linked to WFC in two independent cross-sectional studies by Hämmig et al. (2009), as well as Frone et al. (1997). Moreover, Borowiec and Drygas (2022) connected physical health and WLB in a study of workers in Poland.

Self-reported health was strongly associated with WLB among working adults in Europe in a study by Mensah Adjei (2020). In a cross-sectional study by Frone et al. (1997), self-reported health was also found to be connected to WFC.

Substance abuse has further been found to be related to WFC, as seen in the cross-sectional study by Frone et al. (1997) as well as in a literature review by Frone (1999). A study of South-Korean workers also found *Emotional exhaustion* to be linked to WFC (Lee et al., 2013).

The evolving work context, featuring the rise of remote work and advances in technology (Rousi, 2020), poses challenges to achieving WLB, and thus, there is a continuous need for new research on the factors influencing WLB (Haar et al., 2019; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). As previously mentioned, flexible work and remote work have been traditionally perceived as facilitators of WLB, and one might assume they they provide even better conditions for achieving a balance. However, research shows that the experiences of remote workers regarding WLB are much more diverse (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Remote work has the potential to impact an employee's WLB, both positively and negatively. While remote work is traditionally considered to have a positive impact on an employee's ability to balance work and other life responsibilities (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012), specifically the form of remote working which is performed at one's home risks blurring the boundaries between work and personal life (Adisa et al., 2022), which, in turn, can challenge maintaining a desired balance. In the following sub-chapter, the focus shifts from the general phenomenon of WLB to a specific examination of WLB in the context of remote work, where work is conducted from home.

2.4 Remote worker's work-life balance

When looking at the research related to the work-life balance of remote workers, it is important to first note that there are some variations in the terminology and definitions of remote work (e.g. telework, telecommuting, e-work), while they are sometimes used as synonyms and other times understood differently (Allen et al., 2015; Grant et al., 2019; Henry et al., 2021; Vartiainen, 2021). Here, the term remote work is adopted because it is a widely known and established term in working life, and the differences between the different terms are very narrow (Multiplier, n.d.; Remote.co, n.d.; Tagliaferri, 2022). Remote work has several forms, contingent upon factors such as the specific location and extent of remote work (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Additionally, the nature of the agreement between the employee and employer plays a crucial role, including whether remote work is voluntary or involuntary. Before delving into the literature on remote workers' WLB, this section will briefly discuss the factors that define the various types of remote work. A brief journey is taken into the history of remote working and the trends in its research over the past decades, with the intention to foster an

understanding that the literature on remote work is not unequivocal and encompasses diverse contexts.

2.4.1 Definition of remote work and its forms

Going all the way back to the 1970s the concept of remote work was first introduced by Nilles et al. (1976) as "telework", and is often still referred to as such and also called telecommuting. Telework, by its name, meant working at a distance (outside of the employer's premises) with the help of a telephone. Later, telework would be described as work that normally would be performed at the employer's premises but that has been agreed to be performed at a remote location utilizing information and communication technology (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Garrett & Danziger, 2007; Grant et al., 2013; Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2007). This form of work has also been referred to as distributed work or virtual work. Di Martino and Wirth (1990) defined remote work as a flexible work arrangement where work is delivered away from the central offices without personal contact with co-workers through communication technology. It is fair to say; the terms telework, and remote work are used equally in literature.

The story of the concept's father is interesting. Nilles sat in the car during rush hour and started to make use of that wasted time by performing work tasks via the car phone. In fact, initially in the 70s remote working gained popularity as a response for people to avoid urban traffic (Nilles et al., 1976). Combined with the oil crisis at the time, remote working was also seen as easing environmental concerns through energy saving and pollution prevention (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). But despite these benefits, until recently, remote work has been much less utilized than technology would allow. The reason for its limited use seemed to be more of a question of distrust by management (Kaplan et al., 2018) rather than technology. Consequently, remote work was long considered more of a privilege for certain positions and roles (Felstead et al., 2002). However, remote working has been gaining popularity across industries, and particularly in the tech industry. While one of the primary reasons for remote working has been to improve WLB (Tremblay, 2006), there have been several other reasons for deploying it. For instance, remote working has been seen as beneficial for talent management, as a company can acquire skilled resources from a wider geographical area. Remote working is also associated with savings gained in the reduction of office space.

The most recent cause for remote working, instigated by the Covid-19 emergency, has been the need to protect employees and to restrict the rapid spread of infection among employees and within societies. The global pandemic not only affected various health and security guidelines, but also forced companies to change their

entire remote working policies. Allowing remote work resulted in a general change of attitudes and expectations of employees for its continuation. Thus, this event had a fundamental and permanent impact on the way work is being and will be delivered – now and in the future (ILO, 2022; Teevan et al., 2022). Returning to workplaces began after an almost two-year long period of enforced remote working (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022). In response to employees' desires to continue working remotely, new hybrid models combining onsite and remote work have been established (Vyas, 2022). Therefore, remote working is expected to remain as a key form of work where possible (Adekoya et al., 2022; Gajendran et al., 2015; Golden & Gajendran, 2019).

Until recently, research on remote working has been fragmented into various contexts, and the remote work concept has been only vaguely defined. Depending on whether remote work has been performed full- or part-time, by the whole organization or part of it, and whether it has been done voluntarily or not, affect the outcomes of it. These contexts have not been clearly distinguished in the early literature on remote working.

While there exists some variation in the definition of remote work or telework (Garrett & Danziger, 2007; Vartiainen, 2021), some differentiators are typically recognized and have also reached legislative acceptance (e.g. ETUC Framework Agreement on Telework, 2002). One nominator is the *location of work*. Recently, the most common form of remote work has been home based, where during daytime, part of the home becomes the workplace (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), which poses specific challenges as the workplace is constantly present during nonwork time (Nam, 2014). However, remote work is also often performed in satellite offices, where one or several employees perform their work separated from the main office (Hensher et al., 2023). Remote work can also refer to mobile work, where the work location is mobile and changes constantly due to the nature of the work (Garrett & Danziger, 2007). Another nominator of remote working is its *dependency on information technology*. While remote working often relies on virtual processes and communication tools, the extent in their utilization varies (Stoian et al., 2022). Even if digital technologies have been implemented, their use may remain low due to poor user skills (Bălăcescu et al., 2021). The third nominator is the *intensity of remote working*, which refers to the extent remote working is being performed. Full-time remote workers seldom attend an office, while there are different forms of part-time remote workers, from occasionally remote working to regular remote working (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). There are also differences in the *contractual relationships* regarding remote working, as remote workers can represent employees, self-employed, and contract workers. Remote workers can be employed as regular workers, or they can be self-employed

as well as contract workers. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed new contextual differences in remote working. While much of the earlier literature has considered remote working as a *voluntary arrangement* reserved for a selected few, the Covid-19 pandemic changed this to a *mandatory arrangement*, where remote work became an enforced form of work overnight. This introduced new groups of employees into sudden remote working, employees that may not otherwise have voluntarily opted to work remotely for various reasons, for example due to the nature of their profession (Tanskanen et al., 2021) or organizational culture (Lott & Abendroth, 2020), or from their own choice (Laumer & Maier, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed new contextual differences in remote working. While much of the earlier literature has considered remote working as a *voluntary arrangement* reserved for a selected few (Felstead et al., 2002), the Covid-19 pandemic changed this to a *mandatory arrangement*, where remote work became a recommended form of work. Although employer-induced remote working was not a new practice as such (e.g., Hilbrecht et al., 2013; Lapierre et al., 2016), the COVID-19 context introduced complete organizations and new groups of employees into remote working. But not all of those employees may have otherwise voluntarily opted to work remotely for various reasons.

2.4.2 Trends of research on remote work

As remote working is dependent on information and communication technology, a major factor driving the change in remote working is related to the technology development (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). But at the same time, the focus areas in remote work research have adapted to include research on work-life balance (Allen et al., 2015; Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021).

With the advent of personal computers in the 1980's and the popularization of email, the technology for remote work became widespread. This can also be seen in that the first studies on remote working appeared toward the mid-80's conflict (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). It was, however, not until the start of the next millennia that remote working became more common as a research topic. During the early years of the new millennia, technology evolved towards an increasing mobility through smartphones and laptops. These solutions allowed evermore extensive working and it was at this time that WLB began to appear as an element of remote working research (Allen et al., 2015). Following the same pattern as the work-family literature in general, the research initially focused on work-life conflict, and ways that remote working could reduce the conflict.

The literature from early 21st century also focuses on wellbeing, job control and motivation. Three influential papers from that period are presented here. An

extensively cited paper by Kossek et al. (2006), based on data from two service organizations, concluded that the perceived control over decisions about where, how and when one works is a key moderator for the negative effects of remote working on wellbeing. The aspect of work-life conflict is discussed for example by Golden et al. (2006), who studied the effects of remote working in a high-tech company. They found that an increase in remote working reduced people's work-life conflict, but increased their life-work conflicts, which refers to nonwork interferences on work. Increased job performance, as well as an improved job motivation were indicated in a study by Hill et al. (2003) on IBM employees. However, there were also research perspectives highlighting some of the weaknesses in the research at the time, and a meta-analysis by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) noted contradictions which they attributed to weak methodology and an unconvincing theory.

From 2010, with increasing mobility and technological possibilities, remote working became more common, and so did the number of publications on the topic (Herrera et al., 2022). Research began to take a broader focus on employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. There has been a growing recognition of the benefits of remote working, such as increased productivity, improved WLB, and reduced costs for employers. However, some critical voices were also raised. For example, Allen et al. (2015) published a review of contemporary literature on remote work and concluded that research had so far had overlooked the extent of remote working and that it can take various forms (part-time, full time). They therefore suggested that such contextual information should be included in future research.

In recent years, the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 caused a rapid adoption of remote working. This has given the research community insight into new remote work scenarios, especially its mandatory and extensive arrangements. The expansion of remote working is a positive development in that it enabled a new kind of flexibility to work for those who did not have it before. At the same time, the large-scale and prolonged remote working also exposed the disadvantages of remote work (Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). When the remote work recommendations related to Covid-19 were alleviated, returning to the office became possible, but organizations did not go back to their old practices. Instead, they introduced a hybrid work model that combines remote and office work. It seems that research currently focuses on the consequences of hybrid work on employees' effectiveness (Gifford, 2022), performance, effective communication, but also WLB. Hybrid work is based on the idea that work can be carried out flexibly at home and continues to challenge the boundary between people's work and nonwork. The increasing utilization of remote and hybrid work predicts a continued research interest in the work-life interface in remote working. Consequently, it is evident

that the prerequisites of this interface, both at home and at work, must be considered in a novel manner to promote well-being.

2.4.3 The consequences of remote working on WLB

The effects of remote working on an individual's WLB experience can vary a lot, depending on which form of remote work is being applied (Allen et al., 2015), and particularly when work is conducted from home, the effects on WLB can be significant (Adisa et al., 2022; Oakman et al., 2020). Remote working has conventionally been considered a job resource which improves people's ability to reconcile work and home duties, and thus benefits their WLB (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). Past research has shown that remote workers can experience lower work-family conflict and less interference between their work and personal life (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden et al., 2006). Most pre-pandemic papers (with a few exceptions: e.g. Hilbrecht et al., 2013; Lapierre et al., 2016) have viewed remote working as a voluntary or a part-time arrangement, which may have generated an overly positive view of remote working in relation to WLB. It is likely that employees who find remote working suitable also utilize the opportunity to work remotely. However, there is early evidence that remote working can expose employees to experiences that lower their WLB even in situations where employees have volunteered to work remotely (Allen et al., 2015; Maruyama et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2009). Lapierre et al. (2016) compared voluntary and involuntary remote workers, and found that involuntary remote workers experienced more strain-based conflicts in their work-family interface. In contrast, a small qualitative study by Hillbrecht et al. (2013) concluded that the differences between the two contexts (voluntary vs. involuntary) seemed less influential than, for example, gender and the employee's family stage. Differences in the impact on people's work-life interface may not necessarily be determined by the voluntary and involuntary context, but rather the intensity of remote working, i.e., what portion of their work time people spend working remotely. The meta-analysis by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) showed that high-intensity remote working (more than 2.5 days per week) was associated with lower work-life conflict. Elucidating the effects more specifically, Golden et al. (2006) showed that remote working lowers the interference of work on family, but increases the interferences of family on work. Remote work during COVID-19 was not only done at the request of employers, but was a compulsory and full-time arrangement. Research during the COVID pandemic has shown that the extended remote work challenged employees' work-life interplay (Palumbo, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Even though most organizations have now moved away from involuntary remote work, remote work is still being done intensively on a voluntary basis (Microsoft, 2022b). This

underlines the continuing need for understanding the experiences of WLB among remote workers.

In a recent review of the literature, Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) systematically studied 48 research papers (73% quantitative, 23% qualitative methods, 4% mixed-methods studies) published during the COVID-19 pandemic to examine the WLB of homeworking employees. They concluded that remote working caused both losses and gains of resources that impact WLB. These findings, coupled with other recent research evidence are next assembled in regard to the positive and negative factors that are related to remote working.

The positive influences of remote working

Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) suggested that positive consequences on WLB were more likely if employees were supported by resources such as work supervisors and family members, had job autonomy, and were personally adaptable. Carillo et al. (2020a) found that remote working increased workers' autonomy, resulting in an improved WLB. Remote work also often includes elements of an increased flexibility in scheduling work and home activities which can be utilized in a way that positively affects WLB (Kossek et al., 2015; Richardson & Kelliher, 2015). One evident advantage of working from home is the time saving it creates from reduced commuting to work (Cornell et al., 2022). Dedicating this saved time on nonwork activities can make positive contributions to employees' WLB (Fukumura et al., 2021). A study of European remote workers by Ipsen et al. (2021) observed significant improvements in WLB and control over work. Shimura et al. (2021) found that remote working can reduce both psychological and physical stress responses.

The negative influences of remote working

In Shirmohammadi et al.' study (2022), the stressors remote workers faced were perceived work intensity, workspace limitations, technostress, professional isolation, work interdependence, housework intensity, care work intensity, and emotional demands. In general, remote working seems to be inducing an intensive working culture with back-to-back meetings and multitasking (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). There is evidence that remote working and its flexible nature intensifies tendencies for increasing working hours and excessive workload (Carillo et al., 2021; Del Boca et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020; Richardson & Mckenna, 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Some remote workers report a perception of a higher demand for constant availability and being monitored (Wang et al., 2021). The tendency towards overwork could also be caused by the constant availability of work-related technology, triggering an urge to work

(Barber et al., 2019; Suh & Lee, 2017) or even guilt (Hilbrecht et al., 2013; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). Home-working remote workers may find the intersections of work and nonwork difficult to manage. Allowing work to intrude into the home tends to blur the boundaries between the life domains, leading to interferences between them (Allen et al., 2015; Lapierre et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2009). Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė et al. (2022) demonstrated that an overwork climate produced by remote working led to exhaustion over time due to an impaired ability to detach from work, specifically for employees working from home full-time. Kubicek et al. (2022) found that daily demands for coordinating work with others while working from home, were linked to increased cognitive load and reduced psychological detachment. Paradoxically, home-working employees are the ones who need psychological detachment the most since they miss out on the opportunity to physically detach from work (Charalampous et al., 2022). Gillet et al. (2022) found that boundary creation around information technology by remote workers enhanced psychological detachment, while Haun et al. (2022) demonstrated that that temporal boundary tactics were positively connected to the detachment of remote workers, and that segmentation preferences (how firm the work-home segmentation is) moderated these tactics. The firmer the segmentation the stronger the positive effect, and an earlier study by Sonnentag et al. (2010) showed that home-working pastors achieved better detachment if they had a separate office space at home and used a separate phone line for working.

In addition, remote working has been associated with professional social isolation (Charalampous et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021), and consequently, a lack of social support (Kniffin et al., 2021; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2021). Such loss of resources may also impact one's balance, for instance by creating workload on the work front at the cost of resources on the home front, or vice versa. It is likely that as social isolation extends over time, one's social network and related support risk being reduced with the continued remote working (Collins et al., 2016).

Remote working from home can be particularly challenging for parents, who may face greater expectations to engage in home chores and parenting responsibilities at times when they are expected to work (Allen et al., 2015; Lonska et al., 2021). However, employees with parenting responsibilities for young and adolescent children do not always feel that working from home increases their work-life conflict (Schieman et al., 2021), but may instead experience it as enhancing the bond experienced with their children (Chu et al., 2021).

It is apparent that the implications of remote working on WLB apply differently from one individual to another, even if the individuals have access to similar

resources (Fukumura et al., 2021). This stresses the importance of personal skills to manage the work-nonwork interface (Allen et al., 2021; Cho et al., 2022). The evident risks associated with remote working contribute to a future research agenda to develop strategies for managing the challenges of remote working (Charalampous et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Kubicek et al., 2022).

Based on the identified research gaps presented in this discussion, WLB was studied through the collection of extensive data in the context of remote work. The following chapter will outline the research methods applied in this study.

3 METHODOLOGY

The explicit goal of this thesis is to provide practical advice to organisations and workplaces, and therefore the research problem addressed which pertains to the factors influencing remote workers' WLB is inherently practical in nature. As a logical consequence, a pragmatic approach is embraced, employing various research methods as deemed appropriate. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the WLB phenomenon among remote workers, the study uses a triangulation approach that combines theories, data, researchers, and research methods. Data was collected through a survey study and semi-structured interviews with remote workers who were almost solely working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Various methods for data analysis were applied. The subsequent sections outline the study's trajectory and rationale for the chosen methodologies.

3.1 Underlying philosophical assumptions

Philosophical approaches lay out the foundation for a research strategy and methodology, and are therefore an essential part of every research. Hence, it is essential to examine the philosophical positioning of this study and the underlying assumptions that guide the research approach and methodology employed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The conceptions of knowledge and reality differ from each other depending on the philosophical approach, and these differences are related to epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions. *Ontology* refers to considerations of what reality is, and it explains what the aspects of reality are like. For instance, some parts of reality, such as physical items, can be approached objectively and measured, whereas other things, such as feelings, are relative because they are people's subjective experiences. Ontological considerations reflect whether reality is objective and exists without the individual's awareness, or whether reality is subjective and an individual's interpretation (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). *Epistemology* refers to theory of knowledge, which considers the kind of knowledge and how it can be obtained about a given phenomenon. Through epistemological positioning, researchers show their own relationship to the collected knowledge (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Saunders et al., 2009). These assumptions influence the choices of how data is collected and analysed, and whether data is collected in such a way as to eliminate the researcher's influence on the data (e.g. measurement) or whether the researcher tries to place themselves inside the reality of the researched phenomenon.

This research leans on the ideas of *pragmatism* (Feilzer, 2010; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020; Rabetino et al., 2021). Pragmatism refers to a philosophical approach that emphasizes the practical usefulness of knowledge. In pragmatism, the researcher generally focuses on practical understandings of concrete issues and the practical consequences of research, rather than making abstract assumptions of reality (Patton, 2014). Although pragmatism is not committed to any certain philosophy, it does also involve ontological and knowledge-theoretic assumptions (Saunders et al., 2009). Its ontological assumption is that reality is intersubjective, which means that reality is objective and subjective at the same time. The objective reality exists and can be observed, but at the same time people experience the reality in unique ways. The epistemological foundation in pragmatism builds on an idea that knowledge is always based on experience, and that individuals' perceptions of reality are influenced by their social experiences (Morgan, 2014).

In alignment with the pragmatist approach, the work in this thesis was originated from a practical real-life problem. Working life was revolutionized almost overnight when the COVID-19 restrictions came into force worldwide, which has left substantial and permanent changes in the ways that work is being delivered. Millions of organizations and their employees are currently trying to solve the problem of balancing employees' lives in the new work climate. The Leadis research project was set up to provide aid to organizations in addressing these practical problems. Thus, the research strategy and methodologies were shaped accordingly, and a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were an appropriate choice for the empirical research.

The epistemological standpoint for the quantitative part of the research resembles *positivism*, which means that observable and measurable facts are collected generalized and quantified (Saunders, 2009). However, instead of believing that some absolute truth of the phenomenon is objectively measured here, the object of the statistical measurement focuses on informants' choices among pre-defined suggestions concerning the phenomenon. The quantitative study provides an overview of people's interpretations of the surveyed questions. The qualitative part of the research purposes to build an in-depth understanding of remote workers' WLB, and therefore builds on *subjectivism*. This means that the studied phenomenon is interpreted and understood through individuals' subjective perceptions. The term phenomenological research is often used for this kind of research. Phenomenology involves exploring how people experience the world around them rather than relying solely on objective observations or scientific methods (Mascolo & Kallio, 2020). Therefore, the aim here is to describe the essential structures of lived experiences, including the ways in which individuals perceive, interpret, and interact with their surroundings.

A hermeneutic approach to this research brought flexibility to the precision of the research problems and the choice of research methods. The specific research questions first took shape as the research progressed. This progress meant a continuous learning process, through which knowledge and its interpretation are renewed, when the researcher learns more about the studied subject. This progress is described in more detail in Chapter 3.3. Next, the various forms of triangulation used in this study are clarified.

3.2 Triangulation as a research design

Given that this thesis purposes to develop an understanding of WLB among remote workers as a complex phenomenon, it was also logical to approach the subject through multiple lenses (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006; Jick, 1979). In order to enrich the existing knowledge on WLB, the phenomenon was investigated through the utilization of various triangulation techniques (Denzin, 1970, 2006).

Data triangulation as defined by Denzin (1978 p. 295), involves utilizing multiple data sources to address the same research question and strengthen the research findings. Rather than aiming for a generalization of the results, the focus is on obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon (Olsen, 2004). In this study, a combination of longitudinal survey data and interview data has been employed, allowing for a sufficiently comprehensive yet in-depth knowledge to be generated. *Theory triangulation* concerns the adoption of different theoretical perspectives that are used to approach a research question and look at the same empirical material, which aims to enhance the understanding of a research problem from different perspectives (Patton, 1999). This study is based on four predominant of theories in work-family research to describe the different aspects and complexity of the WLB experience. *Investigator triangulation* involves the participation of multiple researchers collecting, analysing and interpreting the same data (Denzin, 1978). It is generally applied for reducing the observer bias (Scribbr.com, n.d.), which means that a researcher's personal opinions and expectations steer the research results. In this study, triangulation has been beneficial in various ways. The involvement of multiple researchers in developing the survey framework, crafting interview questions, conducting interviews, and interpreting the data has resulted in a diverse range of insights. Researchers had the opportunity to influence the research process by providing input on the interview questions and survey content, and conducting interviews independently. This collaborative approach reduced the reliance on the perspective of a single researcher and allowed for the comparison of

interpretations. By incorporating multiple researchers' perspectives, the study benefited from increased validity and enhanced the robustness of the conclusions. *Methodological triangulation* means that multiple methods are used to approach the same research question, contributing to a more reliable knowledge on the phenomenon (Jick, 1979). A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has been used for the data analysis, providing richness and detail around the phenomenon of WLB (McGrath et al., 1982). The idea has been to first map a broader picture of the subject, after which the details of the phenomenon have been analysed in more detail. Each individual study has produced additional information, but also additional questions that have been addressed with methods best suited for the purpose. These methods were not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, as they provided different perspectives and insights.

Given the thought complexity behind the phenomenon of WLB (Casper et al., 2018; Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020) triangulation provided flexibility and depth to the research (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006). Particularly, it provided the opportunity to combine methods and theoretical perspectives to appropriately address the research needs, while also taking into account how the researcher's own understanding of the subject developed in the process. The next sub chapter explains how the progress of the research and the hermeneutic development affected the formulation of the research problem and the choice of methods.

3.3 Research progress

Early on, this thesis work began with one broader question, which aimed to create an understanding of remote worker's work-life experiences and the factors that influence these experiences. The study instruments, including the survey and interview questions, were initially developed based on the researcher's pre-existing knowledge and understanding of the subject. Later, the work evolved into a hermeneutic process, counterplayed by the researcher’s own familiarity towards the studied phenomenon (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). As the research progressed, more detailed sub-questions were spawned.

At the very beginning, the researcher (the author of this thesis) familiarized herself with the topic, and some pre-assumptions were formed. Based on previous literature, it was to be expected that the remote work context would possibly require a renewal of employers’ work-life principles, initiatives and benefits (Vyas, 2022). However, during the research journey, the research focus shifted toward a

much more individual-bound mechanisms of WLB than broad and company-generic initiatives (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022).

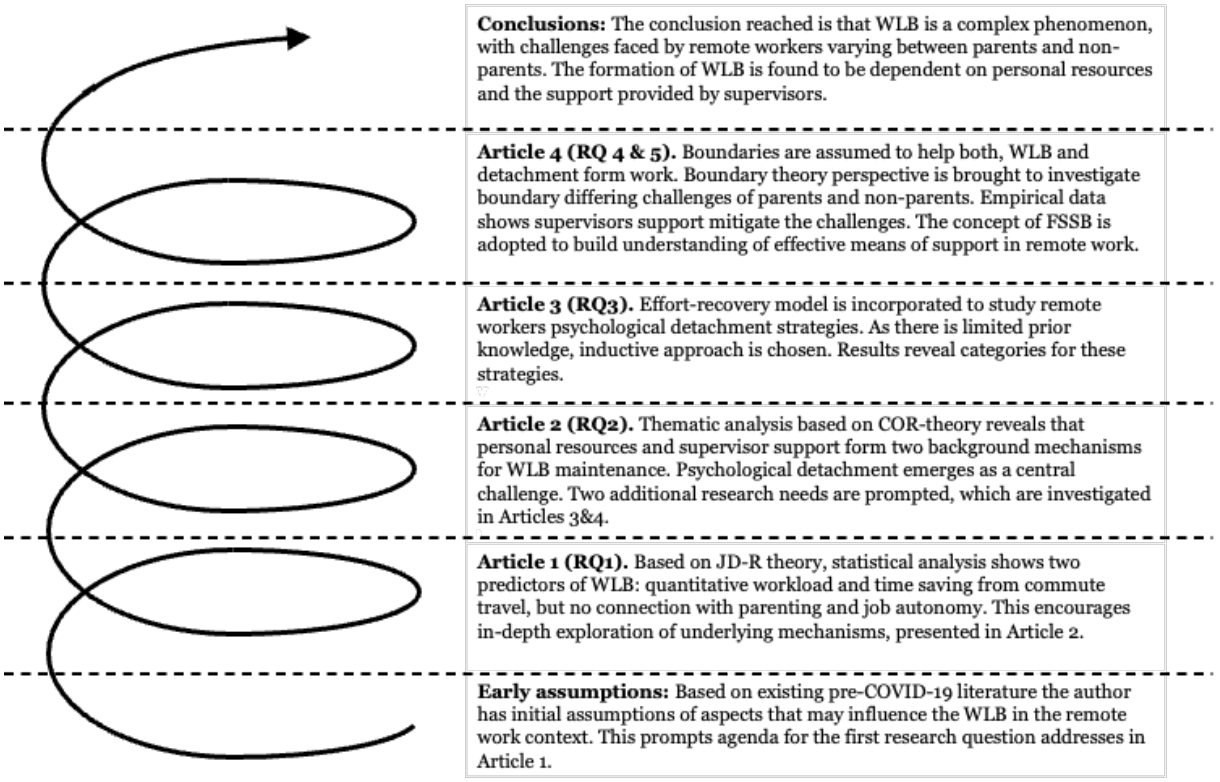

Figure 3. The hermeneutic spiral in this study

The starting point for the research was to draw an overview of the factors influencing remote workers' WLB (Article 1). For this purpose, longitudinal data was collected, and used to build knowledge of the specific variables that predicted WLB, entirely in the remote work context. The variables that were included in the study were assumed based upon prior knowledge of WLB in remote work (Lonska et al., 2021; Maruyama et al., 2009; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; McCrea et al., 2011; Ronda et al., 2016; Skinner & Pocock, 2008), as presented in chapters 2.3.1 and 2.4.3. This research stage took place in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus the studied literature was based on a slightly different kind of remote work context (Allen et al., 2015), as there was no COVID-19 literature yet published. There was an assumption that remote work influences WLB, as it possibly increases the quantitative workload (Richardson & Mckenna, 2014), but at the same time, remote working is known to increase autonomy (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Since it was known that both job demands and resources affect the work-life interface, J-DR was considered as a suitable theoretical lens. However,

while people work from home, the circumstances at home are also likely to pose preconditions for WLB. Therefore, the J-DR theory was extended to also consider home demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008) This may be facilitated with increased autonomy in remote work (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012).

The familiarisation with the longitudinal data material and the findings taken from it raised a new research question and motivated a further investigation of the factors that had influenced the subjective WLB experiences of remote workers (Article 2). It then made sense to further explore the resources that are needed in remote work in order to create a sense of balance (Haar et al., 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). As the extensive remote work during COVID-19 (at the time unexpectedly) continued for several more months, a large volume of interview data was collected alongside the longitudinal data. Quantitative research is always limited to measured variables, while the qualitative research provided additional information about other factors supporting WLB (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017). Since resources became the focus of the research, COR-theory (Hobfoll, 1989) was the logical choice of theory to examine them. The COR-theory could be used to categorize resources and examine linkages or hierarchies between resources, for instance, which resources form resource caravans (which refer to resource conserves, in which resources are linked with one another) and which resource loss cycles (that are situations where the loss of one resource leads to a loss of other resources) occur. Basing the work on the framework of Casper et al. (2018) and the COR framework, a thematic analysis with a deductive approach was selected as the research approach. By studying individuals' subjective WLB experiences in these categories and comparisons between the categories, it was possible to obtain knowledge of the underlying complexities behind the WLB of remote workers. It was clear that some resources contributed to WLB, and that some specific resources (personal resources and supervisor support) steered other resources. At this point in the research, the need arose to investigate these gatekeeper resources in more detail.

While crunching the qualitative data, one topic emerged as a significant aspect for people's work-life experience, namely psychological detachment. Detachment seemed to be particularly challenging in the remote work context, but it was also something that remote workers strived for because it gave them the opportunity to recover and enjoy nonwork without work interruptions. This finding gave rise to a specific research question, through which it was examined how remote workers can help their own detachment while working at home (Article 3). At this stage, it became apparent that the research had to be extended towards recovery literature. It was remarkable that almost no literature was found on this subject, albeit with some exceptions (Dolce et al., 2020; Sonnentag et al., 2022; Sonnentag, Kuttler, et

al., 2010), but yet the qualitative data had revealed that the experience of recovery was intertwined with WLB experiences. In the bigger picture, recovery skills can be seen as one resource influencing WLB (Wepfer et al., 2018). Given that the concept of psychological detachment is connected to E-R theory (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), and that this theory had yet been rarely studied in the remote context, it made sense to use it as the theoretical perspective. Through a thematic analysis, both the effort (energy-consuming elements of remote work) and strategies for recovery (psychological detachment) were taken into account. This made it possible to find out how an individual can support their own WLB experience.

As the various resources that contribute WLB were studied (Article 2), it became evident that employees particularly perceived support from their supervisor as an important resource for their WLB. At the same time, it was noticeable that there were some differences in their support needs. These findings motivated further studying the needs of support from a supervisor (Article 4), also adding a perspective of employees with varying nonwork responsibilities, of both parents and non-parents. At this point, it was necessary to go back to the literature and create more understanding to clarify this question (e.g. J. M. Haar, 2013; Kelliher et al., 2019). Existing research was found to be based on the Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviours (FSSB) concept (Hammer et al., 2009). However, in the current research, there was a need to extend the concept beyond the family, for employees with no parenting responsibility and those who live in single households. It seemed that employees needed support in drawing the boundary between home and work, so it was logical to use boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) as the theoretical foundation for this part of the study. A thematic analysis revealed challenges in boundary maintenance experienced by remote workers, and made it possible to answer the question of how supervisors can support this WLB experience in the context of remote work.

At the culmination of this iterative process of understanding, it is worth noting that the initial assumptions made at the beginning of the study were changed to a great extent. The methodological flexibility brought by the hermeneutics and the triangulation of theory and material made it possible to drill down into the background mechanisms that, especially in remote work, affect people's ability to maintain a good balance.

Figure 4 provides a summary of the main focus of each article. Article 1 examines the predictors of WLB, specifically investigating resources and demands in a general context. Article 2 delves deeper into various resources, specifically identifying personal resources of employees and the support of supervisors as

crucial factors. Article 3 explores the concept of psychological detachment, which emerged as a significant finding from the qualitative data. Similarly, Article 4 provides a detailed exploration of supervisor support.

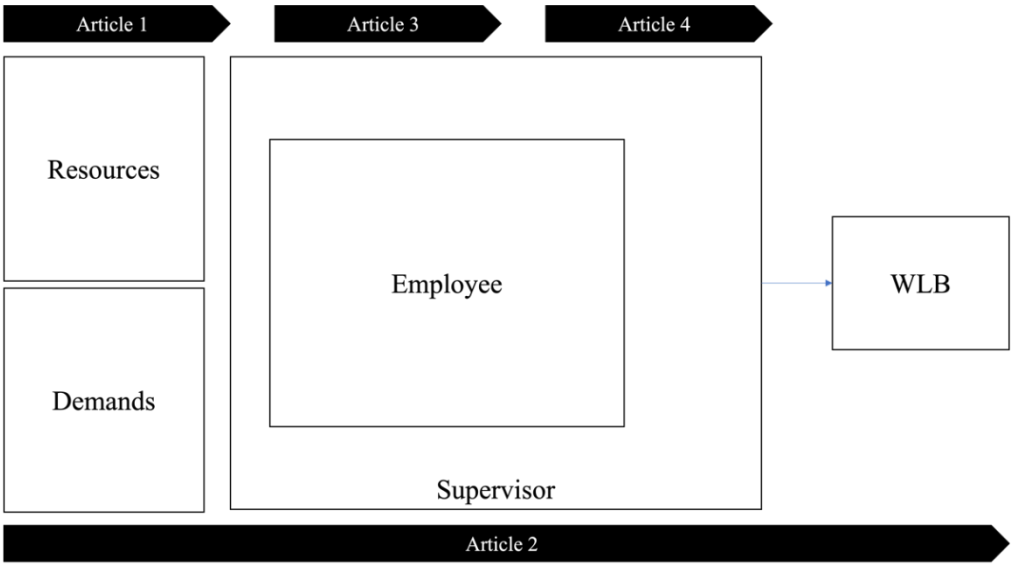

Figure 4. Research subjects

3.4 Data collection

Two sets of data were collected during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic through a longitudinal survey study and an interview study. A two-wave survey (Article 1) took place within year 2020, when the government's strong remote work recommendation was in effect (Finnish Government recommendations). The purpose of the survey was to get a general overview of the factors that predict WLB in the context of remote work. The first wave of the survey was carried out in May-June 2020 (T1) and the second wave approximately six months later, in December 2020 (T2), thereby creating a longitudinal data set for analysis. The survey was conducted through the Webropol tool, hosted locally at the University of Vaasa. All data was securely and anonymously stored, with access limited to project members.

The purpose of the interview study (articles 2,3,4) was to gain an in-depth understanding of remote workers' support needs in maintaining WLB, and how they themselves influenced their own well-being and how their organizations supported WLB maintenance. Through interviews, it was possible to gain knowledge of individual experiences and identify common themes. The interview

study took place from October through to December, 2020. The interviews were carried out via online communication platforms (Zoom, Teams) by six individual interviewers. The interviews formed a part of the LEADIS-project, and thus several researchers and graduating students participated in conducting the interviews. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 90 minutes. The interviews were personal, and only one interviewee and one interviewer participated at a time. Each participant was interviewed once. All of the interviews were recorded by agreement with the interviewee. The interviewees were notified that the data would be handled accordingly to the GDPR-rules (Your Europe, n.d.), i.e., an interviewee can, at any time, withdraw from the research. All recordings were stored in an encrypted local storage facility owned by the university, and only limited members of the project team had access to the recordings. The data was transcribed verbatim and pseudonymized. The pseudonym documents were stored in an MS Teams location to which only the project members had access to. The citations used in the articles to exemplify the results, were translated by the authors of the studies.

The details of the survey and interview content and informants are described in more detail in subsections 3.4.1. and 3.4.2.

3.5 Instruments

Instruments for quantitative measurement. The electronic questionnaire included background questions (birth year, sex, civil status, role, office, number of minor children living in the household, duration of commute during normal conditions), and two questions concerning foci of this study (WLB measure, measure for job autonomy). Four variables were hypothesized as predictors for WLB: time saving, responsibility for children, WBL, and autonomy. A more precise description of the hypotheses and the choice of variables are presented and discussed in Chapter 3.5.1. Below, the scales for the variables used are demonstrated.

Work-life balance (WLB) was measured in a 4-item scale that has been developed and longitudinally validated by Brough et al. (2014). The reliability was high at both time points (T1 α = .89; T2 α = .92). The responses were queried in a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) from 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). An example item is: “Overall, I believe that my work and nonwork life is balanced”. All items were translated into Finnish. The translation from English to Finnish was done by one of the members in the research team, and as a test, the Finnish

translation was thereafter back-translated to English. The original version of English and the reversely translated versions were then compared.

Quantitative workload was measured using a 4-item scale that is based on the QPS-Nordic questionnaire (Wännström et al., 2009). An example item is: "Do you have too much to do?" A high reliability was demonstrated at both time points (T1 α = .89; T2 α = .92). The responses were queried in a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) from 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree).

Job Autonomy was measured with a 6-item scale based on the Nova-Weba questionnaire (Houtman et al., 1994), also used by Runhaar et al. (2013). An example item is: "I am free to decide how I do my work". A high reliability was achieved at both times (T1 α = .82; T2 α = .83). The responses were queried in a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) from 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree).

Time saved from commuting was measured with a single question: "How long does your one-way commute take in minutes?" The mean for time saved from commuting was approximately 28 minutes and had a standard deviation of 16.

The number of children living at home was measured with a scale ranging between 0 and 10 children living at home.

The age of the youngest child was measured with a scale ranging between 0 and 18 years of age.

Age and *gender* of the participants were used as controls in the model.

The latent variables of quantitative workload, job autonomy and WLB were used as sum scores in a descriptive and attrition analysis.

Interview questions. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, with a relatively detailed interview guide prepared in advance (Kallio et al., 2016). This type of interview is commonly used to gather subjective responses on a particular phenomenon (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The semi-structured approach allowed the interviewers to ask the same questions in a consistent manner, while also allowing for spontaneous dialogue based on the situation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The research team reviewed and validated each question in the guide, selecting them based on their purpose and contribution (Galletta et al., 2019). The questions were designed to be open-ended, prompting respondents to describe or list things, and encouraging interaction. The semi-structured approach allowed the interviewer the opportunity to ask probing questions or allow participants to add any important issues they deemed relevant. The interview guide included some pre-suggested probing questions, but their actual

utilization depended on the interviewer and the specific interview situation. The interview guide was pre-tested through three pilot interviews (Kallio et al., 2016), resulting in some adjustments to the questions and their order.

Next, the interview sections relevant to this study are briefly described.

The interview guide was divided into five sections. The first section gathered participants' background information (age, role, living situation, and remote work experience both before and during the pandemic). The second section focused on building an idea of the employees' remote working environment, and whether the participants worked alone or with others. Here, the participants were also asked to describe their experience with their employer's remote work culture, and how the transition to remote work had been supported. The third section explored the relationship between the employee and their supervisor, including communication and support, and how this had changed due to remote work. The fourth section aimed to build an understanding of the participants' experiences around WLB, based on Casper et al.'s (2018) definition of affective and cognitive balance. The participants were asked to provide a detailed description of their typical workday while working remotely, from beginning to end. This included information about breaks taken throughout the day and their ability to disconnect from work at the end of the day. They were also prompted to discuss their life priorities and evaluate their capacity to prioritize different areas of their lives, and whether remote work had impacted this ability. Additionally, participants were asked to assess their own WLB and express any desires they had for additional support. Finally, the fifth section addressed self-leadership, asking about daily work management, individual strengths, and stress relief.

3.6 Informants and data

Survey participants. The survey study (Article 1) was carried out in eleven large-sized companies within one multi-national corporation with large operations in Finland. The survey was initially sent out as an online questionnaire to all employees within these companies (N=2483) granting all employees the possibility to respond to the study. The response rate was in T1 was 49% (N=1218), and in T2 it was 64% (N=776) of the respondents who had returned the first questionnaire. Those who were not remote working in T1 (n = 72) or T2 (n = 39) were excluded. The final sample size used for the analysis was 1146 at T1 and 737 at T2. Remote work was a very rare form of work in the corporation in question, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most employees (80%) only spent a very small amount of time (<10%) working remotely. Therefore, the participants did

not originally have much previous experience in remote working. Most participants were very office-based knowledge workers. Well over half (64%) of the respondents were men. At T1, the average age of respondents was 43.9 years (SD = 10.3; range = 20–68), and most reported to live in a relationship (70%). Most employees were highly skilled and senior salaried employees. Over half of the respondents (53%) had children living at home, and 17% of respondents had one child, 20% had two children, and 10% had three or more children living in the same household. The mean value of the number of the children was 0.83 with a standard deviation of 1.08. The age of the youngest child was coded with 0 if no children, and 1–18, where children <1 years were coded as 1. The mean age for the youngest child in the household was 3.63 with a standard deviation of 5.27.

Interview participants. The interview sample (articles 2,3,4) represented 89 employees from six large-sized corporations from multiple industries, including the technology industry, information technology, business services, telecommunications, and insurance. The companies were selected based on their directives for remote working, which ensured that participants with experience of home-based working could be recruited. Random purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) was employed to recruit participants. Each company assigned a point of contact who identified and invited remote teams to join the study. Team managers who accepted the request were invited to participate, and an invitation to take part in the study was sent to between three and five members of their teams at random. If the employees were willing to participate in the interview, they would book a time for the interview through an on online booking system. An invitation to an online interview was sent thereafter. The sample was based on remote workers aged between 23 and 60 with a mean age of 41.64. More than half (62.9%) of the respondents were women, and a third (34.8%) were supervisors. Around half (48.3%) of the participants had children under 18 living at home, and most (78%) participants lived with their spouse and fifth (20%) lived in a single-person household. The restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic meant that all but four of the participants were working fully from home at the time of the study, and had done so for at least six months (the four exceptions spent some of their working hours in the office). The majority (70,7%) had some previous experience of remote working, but only a small portion (5,6%) had worked remotely as their primary form of work before the pandemic, whereas over a third (38.7%) had worked remotely part-time. Nearly a fifth (17.9%) of the participants had no experience of remote working prior to the pandemic.

3.7 Analyses

3.7.1 Statistical analysis techniques

As the aim of the quantitative study (Article 1) that was adopted to address research question 1 (RQ1) was to examine the overall development of WLB and its predictors over time (between Survey 1 and Survey 2), various statistical analyses were conducted. Structural equation model (SEM) was adopted for studying the connections and temporal associations between WLB and work and nonwork demands and resources. The SEM-method is generally considered to be useful in situations where the aim of the research is to investigate whether an existing theory is supported. SEM is thought to be well-suited for examinations of latent variables, and also when connections between variables are examined longitudinally (Metsämuuronen, 2011). Therefore, it was also thought to serve the purpose for the two-way survey study.

In the SEM model, quantitative workload, job autonomy and WLB were used as latent variables (i.e. measuring underlying reasons), whereas commuting time, number of children and age of the youngest children were logically counted as observed variables (i.e. value measured as it is). In contrast to the observed variables, latent variates cannot be measured directly, but are derived from multiple observable quantities that describe the latent phenomenon. For instance, WLB cannot be measured as a specific number or "amount" of a balance, but it is measured by querying several items that lead to the experience of WLB. The latent moderated structural (LMS) equations are used to translate latent variables so that their interactions can be analyzed (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000). LMS was also used in this study to examine the intersections between latent and observed variables.

In work-family research, and research on WLB, gender, age and family status are typically controlled (Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020; Park et al., 2022; Thrasher et al., 2022). In this study, they could influence the effects of job autonomy, quantitative workload, age of the youngest child and the number of children at timepoint 2. Therefore, controls for gender (0=male, 1=female), age (years), and relationship status (0=single, 1=in relationship) were included in the model.

The variables were assembled in a cross-lagged panel model, which means a study that examines the reciprocal relationships of several variables in two points of time (Kearney, 2017). In this model the WLB was adjusted to eliminate any previous differences in WLB outside the period for study, for example differences between

men and women or various ages. A comparison between the timepoints of the latent variables was made. This meant that the mean values in T1 were restricted to 0, whereas the mean values in T2 could be estimated freely.

3.7.2 Thematic analysis

The qualitative studies (Article 2,3,4) were based on thematic analysis. Thematic analysis provides a flexible way of data handling as it can be applied in both an inductive and a deductive (also called theoretical) way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both techniques were utilized as part of the studies in this thesis.

In this study, ***deductive thematic analysis*** was carried out on the transcribed text where key themes could be identified based on the research questions (RQ2 & RQ5), but within pre-determined categories that were drawn from theories. Deductive thematic analysis is used to determine the presence of certain content in the qualitative data, but requires some a priori knowledge of the research topic to formulate categories and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Organizing the data in this way aids in identifying patterns of behaviour and underlying mechanisms. NVivo 11 software was used to assist in the analysis of the text. The analysis followed in this study included characteristics of both conceptual and relational analysis (Robinson, 2011).

In the research process, ***inductive thematic analysis*** was carried out as an appropriate approach to part of the research questions (RQ3 & RQ4). The inductive approach was used to identify the main features and themes within the data, where less of an a priori knowledge existed. Inductive thematic analysis generally focuses on searching for and recognizing patterns in the data, and initial codes are created based on the reviewed data as a tool to recognize patterns and themes. The coding is collated and reviewed in a process of finding overarching themes that group together a set of codes (Thompson, 2022) . The inductive analyses were carried out in stages, using NVivo 11 software to assist with the coding, and to carefully review and discuss the themes. Initially, several authors reviewed the full data set to gain an understanding of the interviewees' responses, and based on their shared observations, initial themes were identified. In the next stage, the data set was revisited, and an initial open coding for whole data was applied by the author, where the transcripts were analysed to the point where it was impossible to identify new codes. The initial coding was guided by the research questions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding was reviewed and collated into overarching themes, grouping one or more codes together. The content of each theme was carefully reviewed and interpreted jointly by the

authors, where a logic for inclusion and exclusion was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Regarding **RQ2** (Article 2) the purpose is to understand pre-determined concepts and their underlying mechanisms of WLB according to the WLB dimensions of Casper et al. (2018) and the resource categories per COR-theory (Hobfoll, 1998). Those were identified by analysing keywords appearing in the narratives. The experiences related to *effectiveness* were identified through narratives that described performance, success, and accomplishment in role domains, including the ability to complete work on time and reconcile work and nonwork tasks effectively. *Involvement* experiences were identified by analysing narratives that described time allocation in roles and the presence of individuals in different roles, including being present for family members and having enough time to perform roles. *Affective* experiences were identified by analysing narratives that described emotions or attitudes related to roles and mood when transitioning between roles, such as feeling energized after work and enjoying autonomous work. These descriptions provided insights into how these experiences were manifested during remote work. Afterwards, the data was coded with resource categories based on the COR theory (*energy, condition, objects, personal resources, support*). These categories were not inquired about separately, but were identified through a question where participants reflected on things that helped or hindered them in maintaining balance. In addition to the COR categories, the codes were filtered to identify resources related to remote work, for example when an employee described how remote work had changed some resources. Connections between the dimensions and COR categories were already noticeable during the coding process. These connections were marked more systematically by comparing codes, so it was possible to observe which different resources were perceived to affect the WLB dimensions and how. Comparisons were also made between narratives when nuances were observed, and analysed to see what differences were discernible in the factors that had contributed to WLB. Through these comparisons, resource connections began to emerge, and it was observed that some resources directed others.

Regarding **RQ3** (Article 3), the first step in identifying energy-consuming elements was to code various elements that seemed to increase employees' stress in the remote context. These were identified from narratives in which individuals described the challenging aspects of remote work. The theme of *extended workdays* was first described as an increase in work hours, but the root cause was identified as the absence of set work hours, which led to work extending beyond traditional hours. Initially, workload was identified as a theme, but it was found to be related to work practices rather than an increase in workload. Emotional job

demands were first identified as a theme, but the root cause was found to be a *lack of social support*. These themes contained sub-themes, such as when workdays would extend (beginning, end, or weekends) and the nuances that went along with them. Then, a closer examination was made to identify the reasons behind the codes. This led to the identification of strategies that individuals used to achieve psychological detachment or forget about work during their free time.

Similarly, data was coded for identified strategies that individuals described to be used for switching off from work. Initial themes were addressed in the early familiarization with the data. Four themes were identified (initially called cognitive, physical, time-bound, and replacement strategies). The themes remained somewhat consistent throughout the analysis, although their names were refined. For the "strategies used by individuals in physical spaces" theme, the researchers identified keywords such as space, room, leaving the room, and transitioning that were used by participants to describe how they created a physical boundary between work and nonwork activities. This theme emerged through the identification of codes related to the physical environment and the measures individuals took to create boundaries. These were labelled as physical disconnection, because they mimicked the disconnection between work and nonwork domains that usually happens at the office, and also included a technological disconnection. For the "strategies used by individuals within specific timeframes" theme, the researchers identified routines and scheduled activities that directed attention away from work as codes. This theme emerged through the identification of codes related to time management and the ways individuals structured their days to create boundaries between work and nonwork activities. These were labelled as time-bound routines, because they seemed to be repetitive activities people used to enforce or induce detachment. For the "strategies used to control thoughts and focus" theme, the researchers identified codes related to self-talk, conscious decision-making, and rejecting work-related thoughts. This theme emerged through the identification of codes related to mental control and the strategies individuals used to shift their focus away from work. These strategies were labelled as cognitive controlling because they involved the management of cognitions / thoughts, and deliberately pressing away work-related thoughts. For the "strategies used to forget about work by filling one's mind with other activities" theme, the researchers identified codes related to engaging in other activities as a way to detach from work. This theme emerged through the identification of codes related to leisure activities and the ways individuals found ways to fill their time outside of work. There strategies were labelled as engagement in nonwork activities because they were used deliberately in hindering or preventing work-related thoughts by filling one’s mind with other activities.

Regarding **RQ4** (Article 4), initial codes for various boundary challenges were identified such as the blurring of work hours, work-related rumination during free time, and interruptions during work hours due to household matters. The researchers then categorized these codes under three overarching themes. Firstly, challenges related to role spillover were identified. There were two types of spillover: temporal and emotional spillover from work to home roles and vice versa. In this breakdown, codes were also specified so that if there was a connection between the codes, they were merged. For example, workload expansion in the remote work context was originally identified as a separate theme, but later identified as a connection to temporal slippage, and rather a consequence of temporal slippage which caused people to feel that they had much work to do. Within the content of each code, notable nuances between parents and non-parents were observed. Therefore, these distinct experiences were coded separately.

Regarding **RQ5** (Article 4), firstly the data was coded based on pre-determined dimensions of FSSB (Hammer et al., 2009); instrumental and emotional support, role modelling, and creative work-family management. As the aim was to identify connections between employees' boundary challenges that are identified inductively, the examination of data was continued with a further relational analysis (Robinson, 2011), and the narratives within the themes and dimensions were compared. The narratives of the same participants in many cases revealed experiences in both the theme content, and the dimension content. Similarly, challenges faced by participants were also analysed in relation to the narratives of their supervisors, which allowed for the identification of support measures that were specifically applicable to addressing certain challenges. The analysis yielded three pathways that described how employees with different nonwork responsibilities (parents vs. non-parents) could respond to their respective challenges.

3.8 Evaluating the research quality

It is important to critically scrutinize the quality of these studies. For quantitative research, standard tests and techniques can be applied to ensure and assess the quality of the research, while in qualitative research, quality is determined by factors such as systematicity and transparency (Metsämuuronen, 2011). In qualitative research, which is the primary method used here, it must be acknowledged that biases inevitably exist, and the produced information cannot be entirely objective or replicated in the same way as quantitative research. In this section, the various techniques of ensuring quality are presented which were applied in these studies.

3.8.1 Validity and reliability of statistical analyses

Validity in quantitative research means the extent to which the study concept is measured accurately and whether the results actually indicate what is being claimed, i.e. whether the evidence and theory support the interpretation of test scores (Whiston, 2005). Reliability, instead, refers to the accuracy of the instrument used. A reliable instrument gives the same result if the same study (in the same situation) is repeated (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The following sections describe the choice of instruments for the quantitative study and standardized tests that were carried out in order to assure that the results of the study can be interpreted as answers to the research questions.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to confirm the validity of the measures used. Although well-established and validated measures were chosen for the survey questionnaire, some of them were translated into Finnish by researchers in the research project. With the help of factor analyses, it was possible to ensure that the dimensions assumed for the investigated phenomena persisted in the Finnish questionnaire. The content structure of the phenomena was also confirmed temporally, and thus it was possible to make sure that the interpretation of the phenomenon is correct.

Validated instruments. As presented previously, previously validated instruments were used to measure the latent variables in this study. They all have adequate values of Cronbach alpha, i.e. between 0.7 and 0.99.

Attrition. In order to estimate the impact of participant drop out on the demographic grounds of the study, attrition analysis was conducted. While high attrition tends to weaken the results, the number of re-respondents was still high in this study. For the attrition analysis a logistic regression model was used, and no significant predictors of drop-out in the demographic or other variables were detected.

Stability of the variables. To confirm the structural stability of the study variables, tests for the longitudinal measurements were conducted. Standardized factor loadings indicate the correlation coefficients between observed variables and latent factors. If the loadings are close to 1 there are strong influences between the factors, and the closer the figure is to 0, the weaker the influence. The CFA model produced acceptable standardized factor loadings which indicated that the latent measures are valid. For WLB at T1 the loadings had a range of .70 to .90, and WLB at T2 had a range of .75 to .92. For autonomy T1 had a range of .56 to .73, and T2 had a range of .75 to .92. For quantitative workload T1 had a range of .68 to .84, and T2 had a range of .65 to .82.

Data adjustments. The challenge with the CFA-model is that it assumes that all of its variables and their linear combinations are normally distributed. However, those can be adjusted. A maximum likelihood estimator (MLR) is used to make statistical inferences and indicates how likely a population is to generate the observed sample. Here it was utilized for the slightly non-normal distributions. Missing data was patched with a full information maximum likelihood (FIML) method.

Measurement invariance. In a longitudinal study, measurement of invariants are important because they exclude misguidance of interpretations in comparisons between two time points of measurement. It assesses whether the same variable is measured consistently at the different timepoints and in the same group, so that observed results over time can be counted as a development of the time and not because of changes in the construct (Dimitrov, 2004). In this study, for the longitudinal measurement invariance, the cutoff points suggested by (Chen, 2007) were used (ΔCFI ≥ -.01; ΔRMSEA ≥ .015; ΔSRMR ≥ .03), and was confirmed by tests of configural, metric, scalar and strict measurement invariance to have no significant reduction in model fit.

Chi-square test. The model was tested with chi-square deviation, which is a statistical test to evaluate the goodness-of-fit of the model to the observed data. The Chi-square test is commonly used in statistical analyses to determine whether the observed data is consistent with the expected data, based on a specific model (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). Unfortunately, this indication in SEM-models is very sensitive to sample size, and with large sample sizes the test indicates a misfit. Hence, as expected, the Chi-square test showed a model misfit. However, there are other key figures that can be used to test whether the Chi-square test signal is incorrect because of the large sample size, e.g. the root mean square error of approximation which compares the general adequacy of the theoretical model to a perfect model, the comparative fit index which tests the adequacy by relating the theoretical model to the null model, and the standardized root mean square residual which compares the sample variances/covariances to the estimated variances/covariances. The model fit was deemed to be adequate with help of these key figures (non-significant χ^2; RMSEA < 0.06; CFI/ TLI ≥ 0.95/0.90; SRMR < 0.08), and all of them justified the fit (RMSEA (0.039), CFI (0.953), TLI (0.945) and SRMR (0.048)). After adding the structural paths and covariates to the model, the model Chi-square test (χ^2 = 1174.167; df = 489; p < 0.001) again indicated a model misfit, but similarly the other key figures indicated adequacy (RMSEA (0.035), CFI (0.945), TLI (0.939) and SRMR (0.046) values).

Data tools. Descriptive and attrition analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS version 26, and the cross-lagged panel model was tested with Mplus version 8.6.

Given the described aspects and the careful tests of the quantitative model, it is fair to claim that the findings provided on the quantitative study can be considered as sufficiently supportive.

3.8.2 Quality of thematic analyses

There is no comparable structure for assessing reliability and validity in qualitative research designs as there is in quantitative research. Instead, the quality of qualitative research is more appropriately evaluated based on its transparency and systematicity (Meyrick, 2006). As a researcher conducting qualitative research, it is important to be aware of one's own assumptions, values and biases that may impact the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Such reflexivity means the ability to reflect on one's own and others' practices and beliefs to acquire a deeper understanding of the subject, with an openness to challenge assumptions and biases. A qualitative researcher faces a hazard of a double-hermeneutic, which means that firstly the informant interprets a question they answer or situation they describe, and thereafter the research interprets this description (Giddens, 1993). In the research presented in this thesis, it is very likely that the background of the author and the other researchers involved in the progress has influenced the interpretations drawn from the interview data. However, there has been an attempt to decrease this influence through reflexivity and considering the results in discussions among the researchers.

In qualitative research, validity and reliability can yet effectively be pertained with triangulation of investigators and assuring data representativeness, with providing a robust description of the process and disclosing the evolution of assumptions and conclusions (Brink, 1993). Therefore, the studies in this thesis have been transparently reported, the research results can be traced back to the research data because the coding has been done systematically. The reports of the results have been enriched with quotations from the original data to demonstrate the connection between the narratives and researchers' intepretations. As explained in Chapter 3.2, the qualitative studies in this thesis were drawn upon several triangulation techniques, and most importantly involved several researchers who participated in the data collection and analysis, and who were very familiar with the interview data. Thus, the findings and themes evolved through several visitations to the data, and were cross-checked among the researchers, specifically with one researcher searching for any contradictory evidence which would present a different view to the findings. The interview data itself was broad, and findings

could be motivated with a related frequency in the narratives, although the aim of the qualitative analysis was not to generalize findings, but rather to understand notions from the shared experiences of remote workers.

Reliability in qualitative research also lies with the consistency of the research, and there are some concerns with thematic analysis as a research approach, related to its consistency and coherence (Holloway & Todres, 2003). While exact replicability cannot be achieved in qualitative research reliability may be enhanced, as suggested by Silverman (2013), a continuous data comparison, the inclusion of deviant cases, and the use of tables. These aspects have been carefully and deliberately considered in this research with systematic reviewing and presenting of the results. Similarly, the validity in qualitative research can be understood as the appropriateness of the tools, processes and data (Meyrick, 2006), in other words, how the sample has been chosen and how the questions have been formulated. There are certain practices that strengthen the validity even in interpretivist approaches (Metsämuuronen, 2011), and the qualitative research presented in this thesis is briefly discussed through the tools used, stability, reproducibility, and accuracy.

Coding tool. There is always a place for human error in the coding, which cannot be eliminated. However, technology is helpful in not only carrying out the coding, but also reviewing and correcting the codes. Therefore, use of coding technology as a support for the coding is generally recommended. The N-vivo tool was utilized in the qualitative study of this thesis. The cases (transcribed interviews) were uploaded to the N-vivo tool, and codes were either pre-created (RQ 2,3) or created as a result of the analysis (RQ4). The actual coding was done manually in the tool, because nuances in the Finnish language (and different dialects) are difficult to code automatically.

Stability. The stability in the coding can be tested by a re-coding of the data after a period of time. The coding of the data has been carried out in several waves. It has also been a natural consequence of the publishing process, which has demanded changes to the content of the articles. Consequently, the data has been revisited several times.

Reproducibility. Reproducibility can be demonstrated with more than one researcher demonstrating the same results. The data of the qualitative study has been visited by the co-authors of the articles, and also within the data analysis process. Also, the independent conclusions of the interviewers in the initial phase of the data familiarization showed that similar patterns had been identified by different interpreters.

Accuracy. The accuracy of the coding can be promoted with the frequency of the coded concepts. One of the key criteria in the coding was identification of common patterns. The large sample of the data allowed the conditions for accuracy analysis.

Closeness of the categories. There is always a risk that two categories exist for one or similar concepts. The themes and their sub-themes were carefully reviewed and cross-checked by several researchers (the co-authors) for this purpose. Initially there were more themes identified than presented in the final results, but the researchers combined them in joint themes.

It must be noted that, while a systematic way of handling data can be technology-assisted, there is still a risk that that it consists of a simplistic word count and remains superficial. Especially, the focus on the text and wording can mislead the researcher into disregarding the context and make naive conclusions. These challenges became evident in the process for the qualitative analysis in this study. Therefore, the coding was produced in several rounds, revisited, and re-processed multiple times during the process, and in this process, the themes (and identified connections between them) evolved and matured.

An example of such maturing can be found in the analysis of RQ3 (Article 3), which focused on extended working hours as the primary theme. Initially, the secondary themes were labelled as starting work earlier than usual, having difficulty ending work at the end of the day, and working on weekends. However, upon revisiting the analysis, a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons for these phenomena was developed. It became evident that these behaviours were influenced by various internal and external forces, which were more crucial to comprehend than the manner in which they were demonstrated. All the thematic analyses presented in this thesis are the result of a lengthy process spanning several years, during which the data was revisited and re-examined multiple times. This process has included discussions between researchers and comparisons with their perceptions, and existing knowledge. The papers (2,3,4) have been presentated in various seminars and conferences which were a meaningful exercise for the maturation of the interpretations. Thus, the findings from the quality study are a product of multi-phase considerations.

3.9 Ethical considerations

All research involves ethical challenges that researchers need to consider and address appropriately. This thesis has been conducted with careful attention to ethical considerations to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. The research is independent of any specific company, and no participating party has

influenced the results. All of participants have been informed of the purpose and use of the research, and have given their informed consent to participate. They have also been provided with the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and have been informed of their right to access their personal data and request its destruction in accordance with GDPR regulations (Your Europe, n.d.).

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, all personal data has been stored on encrypted local drives owned by the University of Vaasa, with access limited to designated researchers. Other data has been handled anonymously to prevent any identification of individual participants or companies.

The researcher has followed good research principles and has committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of participants, conducting the research in an ethical and responsible manner, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and adhering to all relevant legal and ethical guidelines.

In addition, approval was obtained from relevant institutions, including the University of Vaasa and the participant companies before conducting the study. This ethical oversight helped to ensure that all ethical considerations were properly addressed and that the research was conducted in accordance with best practices.

Overall, all necessary steps have been taken to ensure that the research has been conducted ethically, and that the privacy, confidentiality and dignity of all participants have been protected. By upholding these ethical considerations, the research has been conducted in a responsible and respectful manner, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field while promoting the well-being of all involved parties.

In the next chapter, the key results of the analyses previously described are presented.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF REMOTE WORKERS

In this thesis, the objective was to examine the work-life balance experiences of remote workers, and to investigate the specific factors that influence these experiences. This research need arose from the increasing transformation of the workplace and the prevalence of remote work, which lacked a comprehensive understanding of the individual perspective and the complex nature of work-life balance as a construct with underlying intricate factors.

The answers to each research question were obtained throughout the various stages of the research process, and are documented in four articles included in this thesis. In this paragraph, the key findings of the research are presented, organized by article.

4.1 Article 1: Factors affecting the work-life balance of remote workers: Workload and time-saving

Article 1, titled "Working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic: work and nonwork antecedents of work-life balance development" investigates the development of WLB and its predictors in the remote context over time, and is based on the definition of WLB by Brough et al. (2014). This study sought to identify antecedents for WLB in the remote context, and thus answer the research question 1: *Which factors predict remote workers' work-life balance development over time?*

The study investigated how various work and home factors influenced the WLB development of employees working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the Job Demands & Resources (JD-R) theory as a theoretical framework. In short, the JD-R theory posits that employees confront diverse demands at work that have an adverse effect on their well-being, and emphasizes that they possess specific resources to mitigate the negative effects of the demands on employees' wellbeing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001, 2002).

Because the employees principally performed remote working at their homes, their WLB was also expected to be influenced by demands and resources in the home domain. Thus, the JD-R theory (which is typically limited to the work domain) was extended to also encompass the nonwork context (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008). This study was based on the two-wave online survey presented in Chapter 3.

Building on the idea of the JD-R theory and related existing literature, several hypotheses were suggested. The first hypothesis was premised on the notion that remote work might alter employees' workload (Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021) and posits that *high quantitative workload decreases the WLB of remote employees over time during the pandemic* (H1). The second hypothesis pertained to work resources, where the underlying assumption is that autonomy in remote working improves WLB over time (Haar & Brougham, 2020; Ronda et al., 2016; Walia, 2014), and it therefore posits that *high job autonomy increases remote employees' WLB of remote employees over time during the pandemic* (H2). The third hypothesis examined whether autonomy could mitigate the impact of quantitative workload on an individual's WLB, and proposes that *job autonomy buffers the negative effect of quantitative workload on WLB over time during the pandemic* (H3). The next hypotheses concerned the home demands and suggested that a *higher number of children living at home decreases remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic* (H4a), and that *the younger the age of the youngest child living at home, the stronger the decrease in remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic* (H4b). The fifth hypothesis examined the impact of home resources on WLB and proposed that *time saved from commuting increases remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.* The last hypotheses tested the impact of the gained home resource of time saving on the negative relationship between parenting responsibilities in the remote work context and WLB, and thus hypothesized that *time saved from commuting buffers the negative effects of the number of children living at home on remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic (*H6a), and *time saved from commuting, buffers the negative effects of the age of the youngest child living at home on remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic* (H6b).

The data analysis showed that the sample had a relatively high level of WLB, rated on a scale of 1-5, with a score of 4.04 at T1 and 3.77 at T2. The quantitative workload was moderate, while autonomy was high. The analysis further demonstrated that workload, autonomy, and time-saving were related to WLB development. The level of WLB and autonomy decreased over time, while workload increased between the measurement points. The results from the study supported H1, which suggested that workload negatively impacted WLB over time. This effect was statistically significant ($\beta = -.12$; $p = .01$), even after controlling for demographic variables such as age, gender, and relationship status. The study found that job autonomy did not have a significant impact ($\beta = -.01$; $p = .92$) on WLB over time, and therefore H2 was not supported. The buffering effect of job autonomy on the negative impact of workload on WLB was also insignificant, which did not support H3. Therefore, this study could not show a prediction of

autonomy on WLB over time. Furthermore, the number of children (β = .03; p = .36) and the age of the youngest child (β = .01; p = .83) did not predict WLB over time, which did not support H4a and H4b. In contrast, time saved from commuting was positively related (β = .06; p = .04) to WLB, which supported H5 and indicated that time saved signified a better WLB. As H4a and 4b were non-significant, the interaction effects between time saved from commuting and the number of children (H6a; β = .02; p =.49), and between time saved from commuting and the age of the youngest child (H6b; β = .03; p =.28) were also insignificant.

In summary, the study suggests that remote workers were able to maintain a relatively good WLB during the pandemic, despite a slight decrease in the WLB of employees over time. While working from home may not necessarily improve WLB, the study showed that quantitative workload (job demand) and time saved from commuting (home resource) were significant predictors of remote employees' WLB as the remote working continued. These findings highlight the importance of managing job demands and protecting home resources for remote workers. However, it is important to note that these results do not distinguish between the impact of the unique COVID-19 situation and remote working in general.

Due to the existing research focus on gender and its relation to WLB in the literature (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021), it is also interesting to review the results from a gender perspective. Although the study did not focus on gender, the participants' gender was used as a control variable. However, no significant association was found between gender and WLB at the two timepoints of measurement. The was no difference in the WLB of women or men at either of the measure points. Moreover, the associations between the age of the youngest child and the number of children and WLB at the first point of measurement differed based on gender. WLB at the first timepoint controlled their effect on WLB at the latter timepoint, and therefore there are no significant direct impacts on WLB at the latter timepoint based on gender. Nevertheless, WLB at the first point of measurement was found to be more challenging for women with more children or younger children. For men, neither the number of children nor the age of the youngest child made a difference for their WLB at the first timepoint. These findings suggest that WLB has been more challenging for mothers from the beginning, but the ongoing pandemic and remote work did not change this condition in any direction, and WLB and its antecedents were equally developed for both genders.

4.2 Article 2: The underlying mechanisms for utilizing resources in WLB maintenance: Personal resources and Supervisor's trust

The findings of Article 1 were somewhat surprising, as they did not demonstrate associations between the presence of family and parenthood and WLB over time, or more long-term effects on autonomy on WLB. The next study then engaged in a qualitative investigation of more possible causes for WLB. Thus, the aim of Article 2, titled "The Resources to Balance: Exploring Remote Employees' Work-Life Balance through the Lens of Conservation of Resources," was to gain insight into how remote workers utilize resources to manage their WLB. More precisely, this study addressed the research question 2: W*hat are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effective utilization of these resources in favour of work-life balance?*

This study utilized Casper et al. (2018) multi-dimensional balance construct to interpret participants' cognitive and affective balance experiences and how remote working influenced them. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (which proposes that employees strive to obtain, utilize, and conserve resources that support them in achieving things they value, such as work-life balance: J. M. Haar et al., 2019; Hobfoll, 1989), was applied to identify resources that enhance WLB. The findings from this study were based on the interview study and thematic analysis with the deductive approach, presented in Chapter 3. The results highlighted several key resources thought to help employees maintain WLB, while also proposing some interplays between these resources.

The study's initial observation was that most participants had a positive view of remote work, but experiences with WLB varied based on their affective, effective, and involvement experiences (Casper et al., 2018; Wayne et al., 2021). While some participants enjoyed the ability to regulate their *involvement* in work, others felt that a constant access to technology at home caused them to lose control over their working hours. An emerging work culture with excessive meetings and reduced informal social interactions between co-workers also contributed to a sense of imbalance in work involvement. Despite these challenges, many participants experienced positive involvement in their nonwork domain, with remote work providing them with more opportunities to spend quality time with their families. They appreciated being able to closely follow their children's lives and have more control over their time at home. The participants rather consistently shared positive experiences of *effectiveness* in their work and nonwork roles. They reported feeling more effective in their work due to the ability to multitask and attend to household chores during breaks or while attending an audio meeting.

This allowed them to avoid chores piling up and provided a sense of ease in their daily routines. However, there were variations in the participants' *affective* experiences, with some experiencing feelings of guilt and pressure to always be available for work. The intensive nature of remote working also created a sense of urgency during working hours, which could lead to negative emotions and spill-over into the home domain. Interestingly, remote workers viewed WLB as having enough energy for both work and personal life, while imbalance was described as feeling worn out at the end of the working day, and this causing negative moods during afterwork hours. Thus, there seemed to be a linkage between employees' recovery experiences and their work-life experiences, especially in regard to the affective aspect.

The analysis based upon the COR-theory highlighted some resources that seemed to be important for remote workers' WLB, and these included flexible working, job autonomy, and time saving from commute travel. Nevertheless, despite these opportunities, some employees struggled to utilize them. These participants felt overwhelmed and lacked the skills to control their involvement in work, leading to confusion and the feeling that work was taking over their home lives. However, those who developed routines and self-control to balance their work and home roles were able to utilize the flexibility offered by remote working. This increased their *self-efficacy* and their ability to navigate the new context of remote work, resulting in greater productivity, an efficient reconciliation of daily duties, and more time for leisure activities. Participants who lacked this self-efficacy tended to feel guilty about taking breaks from work and often had a heavy workload, leading to depleted personal resources.

In addition, it was observed that perceived trust from the supervisor encouraged employees to act upon their own values and prioritize (without feelings of guilt) valued areas of life, and thus manage their own WLB. The area of supervisor support emphasized the emotional aspect which manifested in the care shown by the supervisor and the informal dialogue held between an employee and supervisor, and which seemed to matter for the participants. People whose WLB was not under control claimed that they did not receive the necessary support from their supervisor. Hence, the supervisor’s support appeared to gatekeep employees’ access to resources.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that remote working has the potential to benefit employees in terms of their experiences of involvement, effectiveness, and affective aspects. However, the ability of employees to effectively utilize these opportunities seems to depend on their personal resources, and particularly self-

efficacy. But there is an opportunity for supervisors to support the development of self-efficacy by communicating trust to their employees.

4.3 Article 3: Remote workers' recovery from work: Hindered by added energy-consuming elements and aided by detachment strategies

Article 2 highlighted the importance of personal resources for WLB, while also suggesting a link between individuals' experiences of WLB and recovery. Remote workers struggled with psychological detachment, as the lack of separation between work and home made it difficult to switch off. Despite this, they found ways to facilitate their own detachment and recovery. This led to a research question 3 that focused on remote workers' recovery: *How do remote workers self-promote recovery from work through psychological detachment?* Thus, Article 3 titled "Roads to recovery in remote working. Exploration of the perceptions of energy-consuming elements of remote work and self-promoted strategies toward psychological detachment" attempts to provide insights into the rarely studied remote worker's recovery context, and psychological detachment as one important form of it.

For this study, the Effort-Recovery (E-R) Model was utilized as a framework. This model assumes that employees consume energy when dealing with work stressors, and that energy reserves are replenished when these stressors end (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), but also when individuals actively engage in recovering activities (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Zijlstra et al., 2014). The two sides of individual recovery are seen as the specific features of remote working that call for a need of recovery, and strategies that help employees to promote their own recovery.

The study findings suggest that remote workers face a tendency for extended working hours, intensive working styles, and reduced social support. Remote workers tended to *extend their working hours* due to the ease of maintaining technology-mediated connections and work-related correspondence outside of normal office hours. This tendency is driven both by internal elements such as the workers' own susceptibility for such slippage and a lack of self-control, and external elements such as the organization's expectations for availability and a culture of continuing work correspondence into after-work hours. The *intensive working* style was partly self-inflicted by over-immersion in work and skipping restorative breaks, and also because of an intensive meeting culture with back-to-back meeting and a sense of rush. *Reduced social support* was experienced partly because of remote workers' own reluctancies in seeking sufficient support through

virtual channels (e.g., due to not wishing to interrupt others), but also because of the nature of virtual correspondence, which was explained to increase tendencies for misunderstandings while providing little opportunity in solving emotionally burdening issues among colleagues.

The study identified strategies that remote workers used to support their detachment from work (and thus aid own recovery). Based on these experiences, four categories of strategies were distinguished. The first category of strategies, labelled *cognitive controlling*, was characterized by a conscious ability to plan and regulate one's own thinking and behaviour. This group included activities such as making a deliberate decision to stop thinking about work, giving oneself permission to forget about work, exercising self-control to resist the urge to engage in work after hours, and managing intrusive thoughts about work during leisure time. These strategies helped to promote detachment at the cognitive level. The second group of strategies, labelled as *physical disconnection*, aimed to simulate a physical detachment from work, similar to when people leave the office. They involved actions such as physically moving away from the workstation, hiding cues that reminded them of work, and switching off work-related technology like phones and computers. These strategies were used not only to create physical boundaries, but also to help train the mind to switch off from work. Some participants even reported that shutting down their computer served as a mental signal to end their workday. The strategies in the third category, labelled as *time-bound routines*, included different scheduling and work closing routines. In addition to functioning as temporal boundaries to separate work time and home time, they were also described to be used as signals, reminders and rituals for the individual to temporarily forget about work. The fourth category of strategies involved *engagement in nonwork activities* as a deliberate way to achieve psychological detachment. Remote workers reported that immersion in activities unrelated to work could happen naturally without requiring cognitive effort. However, they also began to use these activities to purposefully detach from work. The activities varied among individuals (e.h. physical exercise, reading social engagement) However, the activities needed to be challenging to facilitate immersion, as simply relaxing on the couch could still allow work-related thoughts to intrude.

In an attempt to summarize the findings of this study, it can be proposed that promoting recovery is particularly important in the context of remote work, as it can impede remote workers' abilities to detach themselves sufficiently from work. Although remote work has its benefits, it also has energy-consuming elements and can be stressful to perform. Some of these elements are caused by individuals themselves, as they lack the necessary personal resources to control working hours

and ways of working, or to effectively socially interact in the virtual environment. On the other hand, organizational elements also contribute to these issues, which are beyond the control of an individual. In such cases, it is crucial that individuals have the necessary skills to achieve their own recovery. This study shows that recovery is possible in remote work despite its stressors, but it requires employees to adopt new strategies.

4.4 Article 4: FSSB supports and alleviates the effects of boundary blurring: Enabling flexibility, but safeguarding boundaries

The study in Article 2 underscored the importance of supervisors as nurturers of personal resources for WLB. Hence, the next study specifically focused on investigating how supervisors can provide support in the context of remote work. While it is known that sufficient boundaries can help employees to maintain WLB (Allen et al., 2021), study 3 revealed that remote workers were facing challenges in this area. Therefore, this study further examines how support can alleviate these challenges. Article 4 "I wouldn't be working this way if I had a family - differences in remote workers' needs for supervisor's family-supportiveness depending on the family status" focused on investigating remote workers' challenges in maintaining boundaries, and the role of supervisor support in addressing these challenges. The study addresses the last two research questions – RQ4: *How does working remotely blur the work-nonwork boundaries of employees?* and RQ5: *What kind of supervisor support do remote workers experience as helpful in reducing the effect of blurred boundaries between work and nonwork?*

This study draws on the boundary theory proposed by Ashforth et al. (2000), according to which people maintain boundaries to protect themselves from role overlaps, and also the concept of concept of family-supportive supervisor behaviours (FSSB: Hammer et al., 2009) which refers various types of support (instrumental and emotional support, role modelling, and creative work-family management) that can assist individuals in managing their work-family interface. The interview data was utilized in order to qualitatively explore answers to the research questions.

The study suggests that remote workers face both an interference of work in the nonwork domain, and an interference of home-related demands in the work domain. These are further divided into three themes that represent the various challenges in boundary maintenance experienced by remote workers. One challenge that remote workers face is *emotional spillover*, where remote workers

describe work-related issues as intruding on one's nonwork domain. They explain that remote working has reduced spontaneous dialogue among colleagues, which would normally provide them the opportunity to receive emotional support. But instead, some of this conservation has been replaced with rumination about work during nonwork hours, for instance with spouses. Particularly, employees who lived alone with no immediate support in the home working environment felt an elevated need for informal dialogue (and thus emotional support) from their supervisors. Digital correspondence seemed to increase the likelihood of emotionally burdening events and conflicts, leaving employees with stress and unresolved conflicts. The other significant challenge of *temporal spillover* entailed the continuation of work engagement into nonwork hours, reducing the time or effort allocated to activities in the nonwork domain. This type of challenge was specifically difficult for employees who did not have nonwork obligations that would naturally limit their working hours and enforce a role transition. Importantly, there seemed to be a lack of instruments such as structures in work routines and ways to protect the home boundary that would have helped employees to stop work and prioritize their nonworking time sufficiently. The third challenge was the demand to juggle simultaneous role expectations (often parenting and work responsibilities) while working remotely. This resulted in feelings of constantly negotiating both domains at once, and increased responsibilities at home reduced the level of effort that could be devoted to work. However, these trade-offs were not always experienced as negative, as they helped employees feel connected to their family during times that would have traditionally been spent away from the home. Yet, an elevated need for flexibility in terms of frequent and ad-hoc role transitions during working hours was observed, and mainly among employees who had parenting responsibilities.

The study revealed that remote workers experienced distinct challenges and expressed varied needs for support depending on their nonwork situation, and more precisely whether they had a parental role, were a spouse, or they lived alone. The need to safeguard the nonwork boundary was particularly emphasized among the non-parents, who also claimed that remote working had increased the permeability of the boundary and allowed harmful temporal spillover. Here, the *instrumental support* from supervisors was specifically needed, for instance in agreeing rules for late-hour correspondence and helping with managing and prioritizing employees' workload. Some cases were observed where a supervisor's own boundary management was different to that needed to meet the needs of the employees. In these cases, the supervisors discussed the importance of becoming aware of their own behaviour as a *role model,* and adjusting it to the needs of the employees when maintaining temporal boundaries. The need to maintain boundary flexibility within working hours was typically noted in the need of

parents who needed instrumental help in defining and articulating this flexibility. In the remote working context where teamwork was scattered, many participants explained that they were increasingly reliant on their supervisor's help, and particularly their supervisor's ability to create a safe atmosphere in the team. This meant that sudden absences or changes in work shifts and responsibilities would be solved together. These can be seen as *creative work-family management solutions*. Also, both parents and non-parents reported a need for *emotional support* to manage the emotional burden involved in the isolated nature of remote work, but in particular, solo-living employees also expressed a need for this support.

It can be concluded that remote work poses a specific challenge *of boundary blurring*, which impedes some employees' abilities to maintain their desired work-nonwork boundary. However, the nature and magnitude of these challenges differ depending on individuals' role obligations within their home domain. Furthermore, addressing these challenges effectively necessitates supervisors providing different types of support. Parents may require creative solutions for balancing family responsibilities during work hours, while non-parents may need help maintaining boundaries to prevent excessive work demands. Consequently, family-supportive supervisor behaviours (FSSB) seem crucial for remote workers in both of these groups, as social support may be limited, and inadequate support can lead to emotional spillover.

5 DISCUSSION

This doctoral thesis aimed to explore the employees' subjective work-life experiences and how their work-life balance (WLB) can be supported. The investigation involved collecting subjective experiences from individuals who extensively worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided insight into how people are able to maintain a healthy WLB when their personal and professional roles are intertwined due to the home-working setting. However, the relevance of this study extends beyond the pandemic context, as remote work has become a prevalent form of work and an essential component of new hybrid models and multi-location work (Microsoft, 2022b). Therefore, supporting individuals' WLB in these novel circumstances remains crucial. To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of these work models, knowledge about supporting WLB is also essential.

5.1 Answers to the research questions

The work in this thesis sought to answer an overarching question of: *What are the experiences of work-life balance among remote workers, and what factors influence this balance?* This question is two-fold because it provides generic knowledge of work-life experiences in the specific context of remote working, but at the same time it seeks to identify the influencing factors in more generic terms which is likely to reach beyond a specific research context.

To answer the overarching research question, several additional research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Which factors predict remote workers' work-life balance development over time?

RQ2: What are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effective utilization of these resources in favour of work-life balance?

RQ3: How do remote workers self-promote recovery from work through psychological detachment?

RQ4: How does working remotely blur the work/nonwork boundaries of employees?

RQ5: What kind of supervisor support do remote workers experience as helpful in reducing the effect of blurred boundaries between work and nonwork?

This chapter provides an overview of the conclusions drawn from the research results concerning these research questions, mirroring them with previous literature. The chapter also explores the theoretical and practical implications of these findings. Firstly, a brief response to each research question is presented.

RQ1: Which factors predict remote workers' work-life balance development over time?

This question was addressed in Article 1. This study addressed the research need for gaining more understanding of the factors influencing WLB, specifically in the context of remote work. It was anticipated that remote work could have an impact on a wide range of factors (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; McCrea et al., 2011; Ronda et al., 2016; Skinner & Pocock, 2008), particularly the demands and resources related to nonwork roles (Lonska et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study investigated the development of WLB longitudinally, with the first measurement point taken when widespread remote work had just begun, and the second measurement point taken eight months later. Following the Job Demands-Resources theory, this study examined the impact of work and home demands and resources on WLB over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). As a result, two factors were found to predict WLB, with the first being *quantitative workload (job demand)*. With this finding, this study provides novel evidence of the relationship between quantitative workload and WLB. While earlier research has established negative associations between work demands, particularly in terms of hours worked and WLB (Granter et al., 2019; Haar et al., 2019; Pirzadeh & Lingard, 2021), this study has identified an additional quantitative factor related to WLB, namely perceived workload.

The other factor that was found to predict WLB was *time saved from reduced commute travel (home resource)*. The longer the time saved from commuting was, the better the WLB over time. This finding is not surprising, as long commutes have been associated with reduced employee energy, well-being, and overall quality of life (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2019; Richardson & Kelliher, 2015), although it is not always the case since sometimes this time goes to extended working (Richardson & Mckenna, 2014).

RQ2: What are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effective utilization of these resources in favour of work-life balance?

Article 2 continued the examination of the background factors influencing WLB, addressing the research need to explore additional factors and the underlying complexity of WLB (Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2022; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

This research problem was approached qualitatively using the multidimensional model proposed by Casper et al. (2018). Additionally, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) was utilized to identify resources that supported WLB in remote work. The findings of a thematic analysis of the interview data endorsed some existing research results, demonstrating that remote work fosters work-life balance by offering greater flexibility, autonomy, and time saving (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Fukumura et al., 2021). But more interestingly, the results revealed two mechanisms that appeared to influence the WLB construct in the background.

The first mechanism identified was that a person's *self-efficacy (personal resource)* appeared to steer the utilization of resources supporting WLB. Individuals who report experiencing a high sense of balance also describe having the ability to utilize the flexibility and autonomy offered by remote work to devote time to areas of life that are important to them, such as spending more time with family or gaining more free time. However, some individuals tend to feel guilt, lack the know-how, or are simply reluctant to use these possibilities. Previous literature has made some references to the influence of self-efficacy, such as affecting the relationship between autonomy and WLB (Badri & Panatik, 2020), but this study suggests that self-efficacy may steer the use of other resources as well.

The second mechanism identified was the *role of the supervisor's trust* as a promoter or hindrance of an individual's self-efficacy. Although supervisor support has been acknowledged as an important antecedent of WLB, this study suggests that the support of the supervisor, specifically in the form of trust in the remote work context, can ease individuals' guilt and promote function. This in turn can encourage the utilization of possibilities such as family time made viable by remote work. The pivotality of the supervisor in influencing employees' WLB has been recognized as previous literature, both in positive and negative terms (Fiksenbaum, 2014; K. Y. Pan et al., 2021). However, in the context of remote work, this study emphasizes the importance of trust, and explicitly communicating it.

(RQ3) How do remote workers self-promote recovery from work through psychological detachment?

In the qualitative study (Article 2), the importance of recovery as part of the WLB experience was emphasized. More specifically, psychological detachment appears to be challenging for home-working employees (Charalampous et al., 2022), although it most likely benefits remote workers' wellbeing and recovery from work. Article 3 addressed this (as of yet) rarely explored challenge by qualitatively examining ways to mitigate it. In line with the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) it was assumed that psychological detachment enhances recovery,

and the strategies that promote detachment were studied with the expectation that individuals would actively take part in their own recovery (Zijlstra et al., 2014). The results propose that individuals can self-promote detachment with *cognitive controlling* (e.g., conscious decision), *physical disconnection* (e.g., moving away from a workstation), *time-bound routines* (work-ending routines) *and engagement in nonwork activity* (e.g., reading a book). Previous literature has identified that individuals use detachment promoting strategies (Luta et al., 2020) and interventions such as goal setting and mindfulness (Michel et al., 2014; Smit, 2016), which are also cognitive means to facilitate detachment. However, this study identified these means more comprehensively and offered a categorization for them.

RQ4: How does working remotely blur the work/nonwork boundaries of employees?

The study conducted in Article 4 examined the impact of remote work on employees' abilities to maintain work-nonwork boundaries through the lens of Ashforth et al.'s (2000) boundary theory. The study identified three significant challenges specific to the remote work context: temporal spillover and emotional spillover from work to home, and simultaneous role expectations during typical working hours. *Temporal spillover* is suggested to occur when the concept of work time becomes vague, leading to blurred temporal boundaries and allowing work to extend into nonwork time (Carillo et al., 2021; Del Boca et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020). *Emotional spillover* is a product of social and professional isolation, where employees' social support at work is reduced (Charalampous et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). This manifests as work-related rumination with one's partner or during leisure time. *Simultaneous role expectations* occur when remote workers feel the urge to engage in home roles during working hours. The study found that temporal spillover and emotional spillover were emphasized for non-parents, while for parents, simultaneous role expectations were particularly pronounced, although they were also impacted by temporal spillover. Family-related activities further appeared to protect boundaries, while the absence of these activities made it easier for work-related tasks to encroach into leisure time.

RQ5: What kind of supervisor support do remote workers experience as helpful in reducing the effect of blurred boundaries between work and nonwork?

In Article 4, the qualitative research data was subjected to further analysis, utilizing the concept of Family Supportive Supervision Behaviours (FSSB) developed by Hammer et al. (2009). The FSSB dimensions were integrated with the identified challenges faced by remote workers in maintaining work-nonwork boundaries. This analysis aimed to explore how supervisors can effectively support

individuals dealing with each specific challenge. Novel knowledge was generated by this question, as to the best of my knowledge, this study was unique in investigating boundary support through FSSB. Instrumental support such as agreeing on common practices to safeguard the boundary is seen as vital in the prevention and mitigation of temporal challenges. The supervisor's role in securing the temporal boundary appeared to complement this support. For the prevention of emotional spillover, it is considered essential that a supervisor is reachable to ensure that challenges are addressed, and do not linger unnecessarily on an individual's mind. Simultaneous role expectations require instrumental support (i.e., allowing for flexibility) and creative work-family management, as remote workers can face unexpected situations at home that demand their attention. FSSB has seldom been used in studies in the remote work context, but there is evidence that it applies similarly to the ways seen within in-person work (Thomas et al., 2022). This study highlighted that support in the remote work context is conveyed through verbalization and low-threshold accessibility. As a result, and in addition to trust, it adds further dimensions of FSSB to the picture of supervisor support.

(RQ) What are the experiences of work-life balance among remote workers, and what factors influence this balance?

Returning to the main research question, the findings and output generated by the work in this thesis provide insights and information that contribute to answering this question. Remote employees have varied work-life experiences, and these experiences appear to be contingent upon their individual life situations but also on their own skills in managing the work-life interface. Employees' WLB may be effectively influenced by developing and strengthening individuals' personal resources. With these resources, individuals can effectively utilize available resources in the flexible and autonomous remote work context to secure their WLB. Employees can enhance their own WLB by developing personal skills and strategies that advance their psychological detachment from work, such as cognitive control and time-bound routines. Employers should also recognize the importance of personal resources. In addition to providing generic support such as policies and practices (e.g., flexible time and location arrangements), support should be offered to nurture personal resources, for instance via support for boundary maintenance. In this regard, a supervisor's support plays a vital role, such as fostering a culture of trust and serving as a role model.

Figure 5 summarizes the results of the studies. It identifies resources and demands that are relevant to building WLB. The resources are divided into contextual and personal resources (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Contextual resources (time

saving, job autonomy, flexible work) are thought to be improved by remote work (Carillo et al., 2021; Cornell et al., 2022; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). Personal resources are placed in a way that is believed to facilitate the effective use of contextual resources. Self-efficacy is proposed to enhance the use of e.g. job autonomy (Badri & Panatik, 2020), while strategies for psychological detachment are thought to enhance one's recovery experiences (Luta et al., 2020), which in this study, seemed to be closely related to one's WLB experiences (Wepfer et al., 2018). Supervisor support is, in turn, here proposed to strengthen the individuals' personal resources.

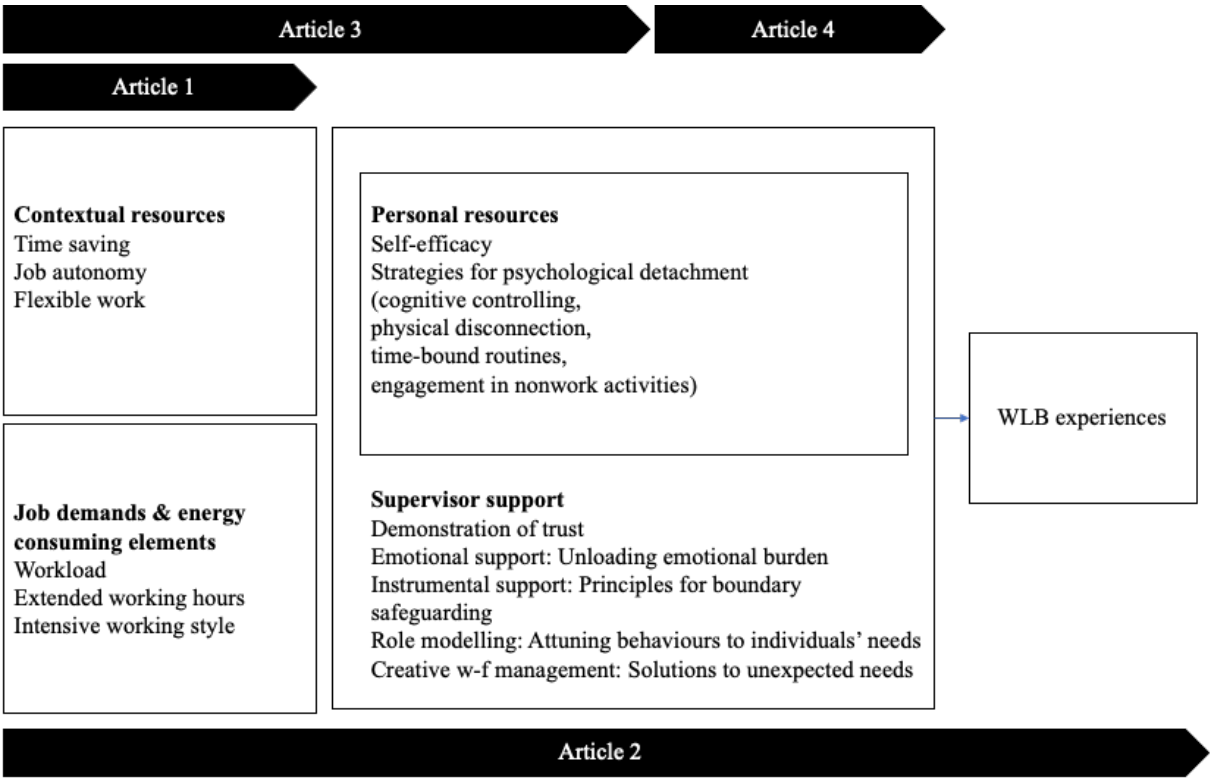

Figure 5. Summary of results

The following section further discusses the key conclusions of the studies in this thesis in the context of existing literature.

5.2 Conclusions

The results of the study prompted some more generic conclusions around the research topic. These observations attend to the broader work-life balance discourse introduced in Chapter 2.1.4. In this thesis, a perspective was presented where the focus of work-life balance (WLB) revolves around individuals and their subjective experiences. This perspective departs from the predominant bird-eye view in WLB literature, which investigates the effect of common work-life policies and practices on employees in general. It must be emphasized here that both perspectives, the bird-eye view and the individualistic view are equally important. Organizations must be encouraged to continue to provide sufficient common practices and work-life benefits, but similarly individuals need to be empowered to utilize them in a way that benefits them. This thesis naturally reflects the Finnish national context, where such practices and benefits are commonly found in organizations, and their absence or inequalities in accessing them are not emphasized in this context. Thus, in this context, the term "individual perspective" was found to be relevant. This study also recognized WLB as a concern for everyone (men, women, parents, non-parents), but acknowledged that individual needs may vary depending on different life situations. Regarding the context of remote working, the findings propose it has great potential to support WLB by offering flexibility and autonomy. However, there are some hazards and harmful working patterns (such as extended working hours, intensive working), which may become to hinder WLB and impede remote workers' recovery, unless individuals have sufficient personal resources, and those are being supported by the organizations. These conclusions will be further elaborated upon in the following sub-chapters.

5.2.1 Work-life balance is everyone's concern – Men's, women's, parents' and singles'!

The results of this thesis conclude that remote work poses specific challenges to WLB for both parents and non-parents. The remote context is specific in that it involves the intertwining of work and life roles, where an individual's nonwork responsibilities are assumed to have a greater impact on their WLB (Adisa, Aiyenitaju, et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2022). The differences between nonwork situations influence the types of challenges experienced by employees.

While examining the differences in parent's and non-parents' WLB over time (Article 1), the survey data revealed no noteworthy variations. Neither did the statistical analysis provide evidence of a significant relationship between parenthood and WLB over time. This could be interpreted as indicating that

employees with and without parenting responsibilities share similar concerns when it comes to WLB (Haar, 2013). These findings are somewhat surprising considering the increased family demands experienced by parents, especially women, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lonska et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has been generally suggested that parents with young children face more work-life challenges (Schieman et al., 2021), while non-parents experience fewer such challenges (Graham et al., 2021). The more nuanced interview findings (Article 4) indicate that remote work causes various challenges in maintaining WLB, regardless of whether individuals were parents or non-parents. However, there are differences between these groups in terms of the specific work-life challenges they report (Lawson et al., 2013; Reimann et al., 2022).

For parents, typically, the presence of family during remote work is not only perceived as an increased demand, but also as a pleasant and WLB-enhancing experience. But regardless of whether it is a positive or negative experience, parenting employees often navigate between their roles as a parent and a colleague during the workday. Although during the study period, school and day-care centres were only spontaneously closed (the lockdown period was over), participants in the interview study described that school-aged children arrived home during the parents' working hours with a need for attention. If parents are not granted flexibility in transitioning between their work and home roles and prioritizing home-related matters, they are likely to experience elevated work-to-family conflict (Reimann et al., 2022). This result suggests that such interference can be alleviated and turned into a positive experience through support.

Similar to parents, non-parents also face various nonwork demands, and some distinct challenges are emphasized within this group. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the non-parent group is not homogeneous, as individuals have their own unique priorities (Boiarintseva, Ezzedeen, & Wilkin, 2022). It cannot be assumed that non-parents do not have caregiving responsibilities such as taking care of elderly parents or adult children and grandchildren (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). However, these responsibilities may not occur as regularly during the workday compared to parents.

In the context of remote work, non-parents tend to experience work spillover into their free time, both in terms of time and emotional impact. This puts them at a risk of the work-nonwork boundary becoming permeable, allowing work-related issues to encroach upon their personal time. A distinguishing factor between non-parents and parents is that parents often have natural transitions such as attending to their children or engaging in household responsibilities, which help signal the end of the workday and facilitate role switching. Non-parents may not have such

clear transitions, resulting in the work role lingering beyond regular working hours. Therefore, it may be that family can also serve as a protective factor by helping to strengthen the work-nonwork boundary and create a clearer separation between the two domains (Santos, 2015). In the absence of such natural boundaries, the blurring of the work-nonwork boundary becomes more pronounced.

The interview study provides indications that to some extent, remote workers have been assumed to be working during unusual times, such as when they would normally be commuting home. In these situations, the expectations placed on non-parents may be different from those placed on parents, who are understood to have to leave for their children (Boiarintseva, Ezzedeen, McNab, et al., 2022; Foster et al., 2019). It may, therefore, be particularly important from a non-parent perspective to establish common principles for protecting boundaries.

The results further suggest that a group that may particularly need attention in the context of remote work are solo-living employees. The literature has emphasized the specific needs of this group, although it has not been extensively studied (Wilkinson et al., 2018, 2022). Remote work can be increasingly isolating for these employees, as they have to deal with challenging and emotionally demanding situations on their own, without the social support that would typically be available in a traditional workplace or within their homes (employees with spouses reported venting to their spouses when facing emotionally challenging situations at work). For those without a support person at home, the emotional burden may be particularly high (Reimann et al., 2022). It is therefore possible that the negative aspects of remote work may impact this group more strongly.

Although gender differences were not the main focus of this study, they are still a relevant aspect to consider in light of the significant emphasis on gender in the literature (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018; Favero & Heath, 2012; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). As the study was conducted in Finland where gender equality between men and women is typically high, it is not surprising that the results show only small differences in WLB. There was no statistical difference between the WLB of genders in the survey data at either of the measurement points. Also, WLB decreased over the course of remote work equally for both genders. Mothers with children and the youngest child's age were associated with lower WLB cross-sectionally, but not longitudinally, and no such association was found for men. There were also no gender differences in the development of WLB over time. These findings are surprising considering that gender has generally been found to impact WLB (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Gender-based research has been conducted in the Finnish context on remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing

on gender differences in boundary blurring and its impact on individuals' career advancement (Karjalainen, 2023). According to this study, women in particular experienced increased unpaid care breaks due to childcare responsibilities during remote work. As observed in the research conducted within a Finnish company, the COVID-19 lockdown was challenging. But in contrast, in the interviews that were conducted as a part of this thesis, both men and women (regardless of their parenting responsibilities or lack thereof) reported very similar challenges and needs for WLB support. This seems to underscore the so far rare studying of the WLB of men and that men equally desire WLB, although there is evidence that they may not always feel equally able to achieve it (Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019). While the studies in this thesis suggest that both men and women value a balance between work and home roles and face equal struggles in achieving it, it is indeed possible that further research focusing specifically on the gender perspective could uncover additional nuances regarding the challenges that vary between genders. Based on this study, however, we can conclude that in the Finnish study context, fathers also described carrying family responsibilities during their working hours. Therefore, employer expectations should not differ between men and women, as the findings suggest that both genders require flexibility.

Concluding these research results, it can be reasonably argued that remote workers, regardless of their gender or parental status, are concerned about achieving a satisfactory WLB. However, there may be differences in the specific WLB requirements among individuals based on their unique circumstances. Future research should continue to distinguish these differences among employees' work-life experiences, and particularly in research which seeks to explore support mechanisms for a diverse range of employees' WLB.

5.2.2 The Paradox of Work-Life Balance in the remote context: More time at home, but more time spent on work

The results show some contradictions in the remote workers' work-life experiences. Remote work can simultaneously be both beneficial and detrimental to WLB, even as experienced by a single individual.

To begin with, the results of this study provide an encouraging message and speak in favour of remote work. The remote workers who participated both in the survey and interview studies expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to work remotely, and expressed a desire for it to continue in the future. Furthermore, the results from the interview study (Article 2) emphasized that allowing remote work and fostering a perception of trust positively influenced employees' attitudes towards their work. This trust, which was newfound for many, was further

described as supporting one's autonomy and even as motivator at work (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Upon closer examination of the data, it becomes apparent that the claimed positive impacts of remote work on WLB are not as straightforward as they first appear. The survey study (Article 1) draws only a cautious picture and does not show that the remote work context improves WLB within the measurement window (but rather slightly decreases it). The interview data (Article 2) instead reveals some inconsistencies in remote workers' WLB experiences. The productive way of performing remote working (Carillo et al., 2021) may increase employees' sense of effectiveness, but this seems to happen at the expense of omitting breaks and losing energy. Remote working may improve employees' devotion to family thanks to their increased proximity at home, but it makes the establishment of work-home boundaries challenging and tempts people to overwork. Despite the advantages, remote work can be intensive and draining, leaving remote workers feeling more stressed and fatigued during their leisure time compared to a typical day in the office. The paradox of remote working is that even if employees are in the comfort of their homes, they tend to spend more time on work, leaving less room for recovery from work.

Although prior studies have highlighted some of the risks that are associated with remote work (Kniffin et al., 2021; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2021), this study (Article 3) investigated these challenges more closely, highlighting their underlying causes. Namely, the results indicate that these risks stem from harmful *behavioural* patterns. It is here acknowledged that some of these patterns are self-inflicted (*internal drivers*), while others are influenced by the organizational culture and work practices, which may be more difficult for individuals to impact (*external drivers*). Some of these hazardous behaviours were particularly alarming, such as omitting legislative breaks (such as lunches and bathroom breaks) that have an important restorative purpose and can have detrimental health consequences if passed over. While individuals can address these behaviours through daily routines and self-regulation, organizational practices such as an intensive meeting culture and undertaking after-work work correspondence require structural changes. Especially noted is that this kind of culture is likely to have long-term consequences on employees' mental health (Bondagji et al., 2022; Kirrane et al., 2017). This study also highlighted the emotional strain associated with the social and professional isolation of remote work (Wang et al., 2021). Previous research has noted a decline in social support (Charalampous et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021), but this study suggests that emotional burden occurs when employees are unable to unload their emotional issues. It seems that a self-inflicted reluctance to seek social support worsens this,

and the fact that the virtual context is conducive to misunderstandings and difficult working conditions can contribute additional emotional strain. It can be assumed that personal resources such as self-regulation, boundary management and a proactive personality (Allen et al., 2021; Aryee et al., 2005) can facilitate self-care habits and enhance WLB in the remote work context. In addition, low-threshold support appeared to play a role in this context (Article 4).

5.2.3 The Dual Effect of Remote Working Resources: a Double-Edged Sword

The paradox of remote working and its impact on WLB can be better understood when viewed through the lens of resources. As the results indicated, remote work is perceived to increase work flexibility and autonomy while saving time. Despite the potential for these contextual resources to positively support an individual's ability to maintain WLB in ideal circumstances, these very resources are also a source of negative aspects of remote work, thus rendering them a "double-edged sword."

Work flexibility as a contextual resource enabled by remote work, allows location-independency, even in unprecedented ways like working from a summer cottage or an elderly parent's house, and enhances people's ability to combine work and nonwork activities (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). The downside of this is that work follows an individual everywhere, and the threshold for accessing work-related tools such as email or chat, even if there is no real need for it, decreases. Additionally, remote work blurs the concept of work time. This may allow individuals structure their day according to their own efficiency and personal circadian rhythm, but similarly it increases the tendency to engage in extended working hours (Hilbrecht et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

Job autonomy, as the other contextual resource, yielded contrasting observations between the survey and interview data (Article 1 vs Article 2). While the survey study (Article 1) does not show a connection between autonomy and WLB, in contrast, the interview study (Article 2) participants frequently described how the "free hand" in working helped them to more effectively reconcile their work and home responsibilities. This suggests an increase in autonomy. However, within the survey study, there was a decrease in the reported level of autonomy between the points of measurement, and the survey findings also contradict some previous research (e.g., Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020) which has indicated that job autonomy is positively associated with WLB.

It seems unclear how autonomy works in the remote work context, especially the kind where remote working is not of one's own choice (Wang et al., 2021). This could allude to an individual's need for other skills to manage the highly autonomous work that features in remote working. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the remote work situation was new for many of the survey participants and their organizations. Initially, working remotely may have provided a sense of freedom and autonomy, until work routines (and perhaps more controls) were established, which could have reduced the feeling of autonomy over time. Another explanation could be related to individual perceptions of autonomy while working remotely. Explicitly, it may not be a positive experience for everyone, and for those who are inexperienced, it could result in feelings of helplessness and frustration (Karjalainen, 2023). Autonomy in remote work may also mean different experiences than in traditional office work, and utilizing it effectively may require specific skills. Thus, the new situation may also have meant that individuals could not effectively utilize autonomy.

Time saving was highlighted as a contextual resource within both the survey and interview data, which suggests that time saved from the work commute is important for WLB. While the survey study shows that the amount of time saved plays a role longitudinally, the participants in the interview study described that even a small amount of time saved feels significant in their everyday work routine. Even if the commute is short and does not take up much time, preparing for work and feeling rushed can be stressful (Emre, & De Spiegeleare, 2019). The interviews further reveal that the benefits of time saved depended on how individuals chose to use it. While certain participants were able to effectively utilize their saved time to enhance their WLB, the study uncovered that others may inadvertently or willingly allocate that time towards work-related activities. Additionally, it is worth noting that the absence of a work commute may not necessarily always be positive. From a psychological recovery perspective, the commute provides an opportunity for physical disconnection, making travel time a potential resource to save. But the participants in this study also recognized this challenge, and various replacing strategies were observed (as discussed in Article 3).

When remote workers were able to navigate independently in their work and had the necessary skills to regulate their work, they most likely experienced a good WLB. However, some individuals seem to struggle with this, either because of lack of self-efficacy, feelings of guilt, or a reluctancy to utilize opportunities. These results emphasize the importance of personal resources in achieving WLB in remote work.

5.2.4 The role of personal resources: Drivers of the resource caravan

As theorised by Hobfoll (1998), people's resources reserves can be likened to “caravans”, where the resources can be utilized to ensure one's own survival and coping with for example stressful and new situations. The caravan metaphor is apt because it captures the interconnected nature of resources. This means that possessing one resource can link to multiple other resources. As discussed in the previous chapters, the formation of WLB in remote work seems to largely rely on an individual's personal resources. In this regard, the role of personal resources can be seen as a vital connector of resources in the caravan.

Here, these personal resources here refer to an individual's ability to navigate autonomous and flexible work in a manner that enables them to maintain a balanced life, preventing work from encroaching into their personal domain or impeding their recovery from work. When employees work remotely, they must rely on their own ability and resources to a greater extent than in a traditional office environment (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that individuals themselves need to become aware of the routines, scheduling, and work methods that promote balance and recovery. In light of the findings of this thesis (Article 2), it can also be concluded that personal resources play a pivotal role in the hierarchy of resources behind WLB. Especially, they help individuals harness contextual resources (Hobfoll, 1989; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) such as job autonomy, and enable them to adopt strategies that enhance their well-being and effectively manage their work and personal life.

The studies in this thesis (articles 2 & 3) show that by developing these personal resources, employees can steer their use of other resources and cope with the stressors posed by remote work. Consequently, personal resources such as self-efficacy (which helped individuals cope with the flexible and autonomous nature of remote work), and recovery-promoting skills (which helped individuals detach from work) seem to enable employees to establish a healthy WLB in a self-disciplined and self-caring manner (Ngamkroeckjoti et al., 2022). It is thus fair to argue that without these personal skills, individuals may find it impossible to achieve their desired level of WLB.

It can also be stated that developing and maintaining personal resources require continuous effort and conscious investment. They are hardly static, but evolve and strengthen over time. The interviews with remote workers (Article 3) disclose examples of how individuals nurture their personal resources to counteract the energy-consuming elements of remote work. Some participants describe that working in the new remote context has demanded a need for self-coaching, especially in learning to detach oneself from work, as it was very difficult when

one's home became one's workplace. It is important to note that developing personal resources is a crucial aspect of supporting WLB.

This does not mean that generic support such as policies and benefits are not fundamental in supporting WLB (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021), but the message here is that for their effective uptake, it is crucial to support individuals' agency. Enriching people's resource caravans with not only by generic resources, but also nurturing individuals' personal resources (e.g. their self-efficacy, recovery skills, and boundary management skills) fosters an important agency.

5.2.5 The role of the supervisor: a tailor of resources

In addition to personal resources, the research findings highlight the role of the supervisor in an individual's WLB experience. In theory, individuals' resource caravans can enrich (or diminish) in different circumstances, referred to as the caravan pathway (Hobfoll, 1998). In the studies of this thesis it becomes apparent that supervisor support (trust, supportive behaviours) forms such a crucial pathway. From that standpoint, supervisor's role holds significance as this pathway may function as a buffer and enable the effective utilization of various resources. It may assist individuals in forging their unique balance by leveraging these resources in conjunction with the personal support bestowed by their supervisor.

Supervisor support has previously been recognized as an important factor in supporting WLB, as well as a potential barrier to it (Kossek et al., 2011; K. Y. Pan et al., 2021; Vaziri et al., 2020). Vaziri et al. (2020) have even suggested that supervisors act as a gatekeeper of resources, and either enable or hinder employees' access to them. This idea also emerges in the findings from the interview study (Article 2). However, the findings propose that supervisor support takes a new turn in remote working, and instead, the focus goes on trust, which strengthens employees' self-efficacy. This self-efficacy is important in the context of remote work, which shifts more responsibility from the supervisor to the individuals themselves. Without the trust of the supervisor, employees may feel guilt and not be empowered to use available resources such as autonomy and job flexibility. Also, a monitoring and micromanaging supervisor may disrupt this sense of self-efficacy, and the individual may not be able to utilize the opportunities of flexible work or saved time.

The interview study (Article 4) also highlights the importance of providing attuned support that is suited to an individual's needs. While general support such as policies and practices are necessary, having personal support from a supervisor

who can adapt and tailor them to the individual's needs can be a crucial part of this equation. This type of support can enhance the individual's personal resources such as their ability to maintain work-nonwork boundaries through instrumental support, and also help to develop their emotional resilience through emotional support (Hobfoll, 2012; Köse et al., 2021). These kinds of personal resources enable individuals to navigate the challenges of remote working (especially those that are beyond their control), and maintain a healthy WLB in a self-sufficient way.

Generally, it appears that there is no one-size-fits-all approach (Darcy et al., 2012) to addressing the needs for support, but as this study (Article 4) shows, successful leaders tailored their support and their own behaviour to respond to individual needs. The leader's manners and behaviours signal what is acceptable (e.g. taking care of home issues during working hours). This suggests that increasing the awareness of role modelling behaviours that reinforce employees' desired behaviours may help leaders become more effective in supporting WLB.

5.3 Theoretical contributions

This thesis addressed several research gaps identified in the WLB literature. While WLB literature has traditionally been largely limited to the work-family perspective (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Kelliher et al., 2019), this thesis followed a newer trend in the literature which views WLB as a multidimensional and individual experience influenced by nonwork situations and roles that also extend beyond the family (Casper et al., 2018; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). Behind the concept of multidimensional WLB is an assumed complex structure of various influencers (Haar et al., 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018), and this research contributed to understanding this structure, particularly in the new context of remote work. While organizational support and different work-life practices have been central in WLB research (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021), this study brought forth a rarer perspective by focusing on individual experiences and emphasizing the individual's ability as a builder of their own WLB (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). This research aimed to enrich the understanding of the WLB phenomenon by triangulating different theories (Denzin, 1970, 2006), and thus making several theoretical contributions, which are elaborated on next.

First, this thesis expanded the understanding of the factors that impact WLB from a broader perspective, not only including work-related factors, but also *nonwork-related* factors, which impact the individuals' balance (Article 1). Thus, it extended the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory to include nonwork demands and resources, highlighting the importance of considering both work and home factors

in research on WLB. So far, the theory has been rarely used to examine home-related influences (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008). However, in the context of remote work, the demands and resources of the home sphere become integral to the work-life experience and individuals' well-being. By accounting for the influence of home-related factors on WLB, the model can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that impact employees' WLB.

Second, this thesis contributed to the importance of qualitative research in WLB studies (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017), providing an in-depth and nuanced knowledge of the phenomenon. This research is one of the first to adopt the recently proposed framework by Casper et al. (2018) to qualitatively explore the WLB construct in a remote working context (Article 2). For example, this in-depth research revealed how remote work can simultaneously be beneficial or harmful to individuals' WLB, depending on whether the balance is examined from the perspectives of effectiveness or involvement experiences. The qualitative study also revealed some more factors that possibly define individuals' balance experiences. The involvement experience was suggested to not only affect time devotion, but was also described as the extent of *proximity* to family members or friends, meaning being physically close to them while working remotely. The sense of effectiveness was described as a sense of *accomplishment* by the remote workers (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Additionally, besides being demonstrated as satisfaction, the affective experience was indicated to have connections with the *rest and recovery* of employees (Santuzzi & Barber, 2018; Wepfer et al., 2018). By incorporating the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory into the qualitative investigation, the studies of this thesis added to the limited knowledge of the complexity of WLB and the underlying mechanisms of resources behind it (Haar & Brougham, 2022; Haar et al., 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). This investigation revealed a structure among the resources in which personal resources appeared to steer the use of contextual resources, while supervisor support seemed to boost personal resources. This structure lays a foundation for future studies which could continue to quantitatively examine these resource interconnections. They could also further explore additional personal resources (e.g. self-leadership, self-regulation), and types of supervisor support (role modelling, coaching) that form the underlying structures behind WLB.

Third, this doctoral thesis added to the discourse on the work-life interface beyond the traditional view of family (limited to parents and children) (Kelliher et al., 2019; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021), and acknowledged the challenges faced by employees with and without parenting responsibilities in maintaining work-nonwork boundaries (Article 4). While the concept of WLB itself has been expanded from its work-family focus (e.g. work-family balance and work-family

conflict) to include other non-family aspects of the nonwork sphere (Brough et al., 2014), research that explicitly focuses on the need for work-life support among employees with nonwork responsibilities other than primary caregivers of minors is still rare (Boiarintseva, 2022; Wilkinson, 2018; 2022; Richardson & Shirmohammadi, 2015; Haar et al., 2013). These needs can include caregiving to extended family members (elderly parents, spousal care), and other nonwork commitments such as hobbies and volunteer work (Arntz et al., 2020; Boiarintseva, Ezzedeen, & Wilkin, 2022; Lonska et al., 2021). This discourse is very important, because it helps future research and organizations to design interventions that are more responsive to individual needs. Neglecting these different life situations (including those not living in a traditional family context) when providing support can lead to feelings of resentment among those who do not fit the group (Haar & Spell, 2003).

Fourth, the findings from this thesis contribute to the rare studies of remote workers' psychological recovery from work (Mejman & Mulder, 1989). By examining the energy-consuming aspects of remote work and identifying strategies for psychological detachment to facilitate recovery, this thesis demonstrates that the effort required by work is not static and is subject to changes in working conditions, requiring specific means for recovery (Article 3). This also supports the previous view that recovery is not automatic (Zijlstra et al., 2014) but requires agency from the employee. The qualitative approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the energy-consuming elements and distinguished them as internal and external drivers that add to the workload of employees and are specific to the remote work context. The previous research on recovery and detachment has mostly been quantitative (Sonnentag et al., 2022; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) with some exceptions (Luta et al., 2020). The inductive research identified several different ways that could potentially help employees in achieving detachment, which led to the classification of detachment strategies. These could be tested quantitatively or be used as interventions in future research.

Fifth, this thesis brought a new perspective to the discussion of boundaries, which has so far been treated as an individual phenomenon where people themselves create role boundaries and use strategies to maintain them (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). This discussion was supplemented by a support perspective, investigating what kind of support individuals need to maintain the blurred boundaries of remote work (Article 4). This is an important perspective, as the studies in this thesis also highlighted external elements, namely organizational reasons for the challenges of remote work (Article 3). These were related to the lengthening of days and work correspondence continuing beyond office hours. The

need for instrumental support was especially emphasized, as well as the role modelling of supervisors.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the discourse on the role of the supervisor in supporting employees to maintain sufficient boundaries, as they can be assumed to facilitate one's WLB (Allen et al., 2021). Particularly, this thesis challenged the conventional understanding of family-supportive supervisor behaviours (FSSB) by broadening the concept beyond its initial emphasis on the work-family interface (Hammer et al., 2009). The findings from this research demonstrated that employees in different circumstances can benefit from FSSB support. It is here proposed that future research should replace the word "family" with "nonwork", for instance, *nonwork supportive supervisor behaviours* to be more inclusive.

5.4 Limitations of the studies and the agenda for future research

Despite the various contributions, this thesis acknowledges certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the suggested findings. It is fair to say that due to the diversity of Work-Life Balance (WLB) concepts and the extensive literature available, conducting research on WLB remains inherently complex. Limitations are inevitable in such research endeavors, and they are also present in the current study. Instead of striving to encompass every aspect and establish a definitive truth about WLB, it seems more essential to explicitly contextualize the research being conducted. Having a rich variety of contexts for WLB research could contribute to an understanding of the intricacies and dynamics inherent in this subject. The current study exclusively focuses on a specific national context and examines employees in the private sector. In this regard, the study refrains from attempting to generalize its findings. Instead, it offers an in-depth exploration of the WLB phenomenon within the Finnish context, recognizing that findings might substantially differ in other countries and sectors. Future research could investigate remote work and WLB in various professions within public organizations, as digitalization has made it possible for many practices and services (e.g., medical consultations, education) to be conducted remotely. The findings may look considerably different in these work environments. In addition to the in-depth single-country perspectives created in this thesis, it remains crucial for future research to continue engaging in cross-national investigations (Haar et al., 2019; Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017; Shockley et al., 2017). Such cross-national studies may play a vital role in uncovering the cultural and societal factors that influence WLB and can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of

policies and practices in various settings (Haar et al., 2014). This, in turn, can motivate the adoption of successful strategies in other nations.

A notable limitation of the present study is that it only involved a single round of interviews, which might not have fully captured the participants' experiences. To mitigate the influence of any temporary factors that could have affected their perceptions of balance, future research should continue to adopt longitudinal approaches. Furthermore, the COVID-19 context in which the study was conducted most probably influenced the results. The global pandemic was a unique time when remote work was strongly recommended, and many services and hobbies were put on hold. Therefore, certain aspects of people's lives may have been overemphasized, such as work for some and home life for others, as well as concerns about the health of loved ones. All of this may have affected how people perceive their WLB. One unfortunate limitation is that the study was not able to compare remote work and co-located work situations. Future research could study the comparisons between different work arrangements, such as post-remote work and the differences between hybrid and remote work. This study does not extend into the later period of the COVID-19 pandemic when it became possible to return to offices and when hybrid models were being developed. It would therefore be interesting to examine the impact of restrictions on remote work, such as limits set by organizations on the proportion of remote work allowed. The findings of the studies also emphasized some particular perspectives of WLB research that future research may continue to consider. This thesis has helped recognize the increasing importance of WLB research, the need for which is apparent in the dynamic work environment of today and the future. However, several findings suggest that the direction of WLB research needs to be rethought. Particularly, it is apparent that the significance of WLB as an indicator of well-being needs to be reaffirmed, as the continuance of remote working makes WLB an inseparable part of well-being research.

Similarly, this thesis explored employees needs for work-life support depending on their nonwork responsibilities. While family-related research continues to be an important perspective within WLB research, this study emphasized that employees with other nonwork roles than solely parental duties are also concerned for their WLB, and in fact, in the remote work context, their WLB may be even in greater jeopardy due to a lack of sufficient instrumental and emotional support. While this research only touched upon the non-family perspective, its findings encourage future research to continue to transparently consider the needs of non-parents such as spouses and solo-living employees (Kelliher et al., 2019; Haar et al., 2013; Wilkinson, 2022), and employees with other nonwork responsibilities such as caring for an elderly or ill relative or friends, or voluntary work role (Cho

et al., 2022; Kelliher et al., 2019), and considering WLB as a concern of different genders (Boiarintseva & Richardson, 2019).

Further research should aim to explore the resources that support the varying needs of different employee groups, with a particular focus on personal resources. The concept of WLB is highly individual and based on individuals' life priorities (Brough et al., 2014; Casper et al., 2018). To effectively support individuals in achieving WLB, research should focus on investigating means for empowering individuals and supporting their agency. Models for personalized support should be further developed and tested in intervention studies. In addition, various means of supporting agency by focusing on personal resources such as personalized goal setting, work organization routines, promoting self-compassion, and providing self-control strategies, could be included in interventions.

5.5 Practical recommendations

The practice of remote work has resulted in a permanent shift in our work habits, and there is a desire to continue with it in the future due to its significant benefits for employees. In the best-case scenario, remote work provides more time for leisure, rest and rejuvenation, reduces stress and the feeling of being rushed, and fosters a calm work environment. Location-independent work also enables people to be more mobile, and offers ample opportunities to blend work and leisure. Organizations should not curtail these benefits that have been gained. But at the same time, it is important to acknowledge that working from home may result in work habits that pose a significant long-term risk to employees' health. As a result, it is essential to establish best practices for scheduling remote workdays, ensuring that individuals have time to recover throughout the day, and effectively concluding remote workdays once work tasks have been completed.

5.5.1 Implications for Finnish working life

It is important to acknowledge that WLB research is dependent on its national context in which it is conducted (Greenhaus & Powell, 2016), as the understanding and perception of WLB can vary among different countries. The studies in this thesis represent the Finnish national context, which has its own specific features. In Finland, WLB is supported by advanced national policies, and overall work-life practices in Nordic organisations are typically on a very high level (Eurostat, 2009). It is not surprising that organizations in Finland report a higher WLB in comparison to many other European countries (Anttila et al., 2015; OECD, 2020),

and generally, Finnish organizations can be considered as family-friendly and supportive to WLB (Eurostat, 2009).

But despite these conditions, it is concerning that WLB among Finns has declined in recent years (Eurofound, 2023; Microsoft, 2022a). It is possible that existing work-life policies do not benefit everyone or that employees do not feel they can take advantage of them (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). The studies in this thesis are derived from a context where favourable contextual resources (policies, flexiwork, etc.) are in place. The findings yet suggest that the emergence of intensive work styles within organizations and individuals' slippage in extending working hours in the context of remote work contribute to the decline in WLB. These findings demonstrate the importance for Finnish organizations to increasingly focus on preventing the detrimental drivers within the organization that induce such intense working style. Simultaneously, they should provide instruments to help individuals establish boundaries and control their own workload, as remote work makes some work tasks invisible to the organization. One strategy could involve breaking down long-term goals into clear and actionable short-term objectives. This would make it easier to manage the workload by aligning it with the available time on a weekly basis. Implementing instruments for task prioritization help individuals in organizing their work and allocating time more efficiently.

The findings of this thesis also revealed that the needs of remote workers vary depending on their family situation. As in Finland, there is a significant number of one or two-person households without children (Eurostat, 2009), it is very relevant to design the support from an individual perspective, taking into account individuals' nonwork priorities (hobbies, responsibilities, volunteer work etc.), and through a holistic view and ensure that the overall workload does not become excessively burdensome.

Indeed, in the Finnish work context, rethinking work-life balance could help organizations to target the support to the right aspects, and adopt more personalized and active support models (with passive meaning that support is available but not utilized or picked up). Particularly, support is necessary to empower individuals to effectively utilize contextual resources and nurture the efficacy and skills required for establishing and maintaining WLB.

5.5.2 The adaptive support model

A key finding of this thesis is the individual's role in creating and maintaining WLB. However, this does not mean that achieving WLB should only be the individual's responsibility. Instead, it is proposed that achieving WLB requires

adaptive support that considers the unique needs of each individual. This kind of support is based on a comprehensive understanding of the employee's overall situation, including their personal and professional commitments. While there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for work-life balance, formulating an approach that can be applied fairly to all employees could provide adaptive support. By offering this support, organizations can help their employees attain better WLB, which can lead to increased job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being (Haar & Brougham, 2020; Johari et al., 2018; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015). Thereby, a model for adaptive support is shown in Figure 6, which builds on existing knowledge combined with the findings produced in this study.

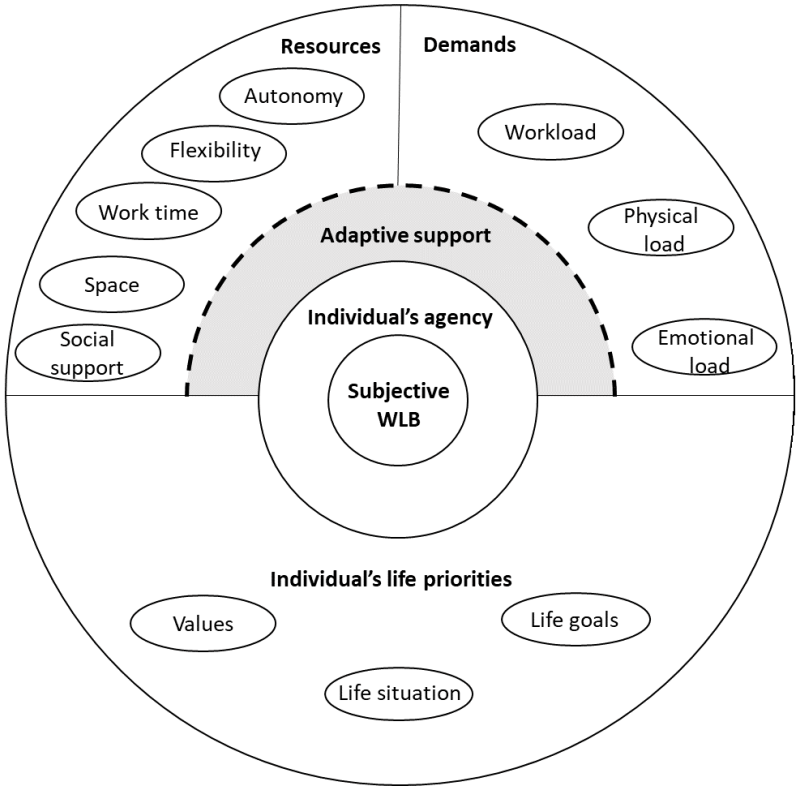

Figure 6. A model for adaptive support

This model is based on the following components:

Subjective WLB experience. The background assumptions of this model are that work-life balance is acknowledged as a highly individual experience, rooted in an individual's values and life goals (Casper et al., 2018; Brough et al., 2014). These values and goals are thought to shape individuals' life priorities, determining

which roles they prioritize in their lives. Moreover, these values contribute to the desired balance individuals seek and experience, which serves as the basis for evaluating their perceived WLB. As a result, the support needs are also individual, as common support measures may not apply to everyone.

Individual agency. This model emphasizes the individual's agency in constructing their own balance. This agency builds on personal resources (e.g. self-efficacy, cognitive strategies, and boundary management), which help an individual cope with the challenges of the work context. For example, in remote work, individuals can use flexibility and work autonomy to their advantage.

Adaptive support. The model emphasizes the importance of personal and "close" support around the worker. In this study it was highlighted as coming from the supervisor, but it could also be provided by a coach or other type of support. Adaptive support could effectively work as a passageway that helps individuals access and leverage their resources. The idea behind this support is its adaptiveness, where its role is to nurture the individual's resources such as their self-efficacy and regulation skills. Adaptive support could involve creative solutions in adjusting work hours, providing resources for personal affairs, personalized role modelling, and most importantly, verbalizing trust.

Balance of resources and demands. The model takes into account the available resources that are independent of the individual, as well as the demands that the individual faces in both home and work domains. The idea is to consider the overall load on the individual, and assess whether the resources available are sufficient. In the adaptive support model, both the demands and resources are tailored to the individual's needs, creating a living structure in which work and other aspects of life can be sustainably combined.

As an illustration, the model operates by having the employee and their close support (such as a supervisor, team leader, or coach) engage in regular dialogue regarding the individual's work-life needs. This conversation is grounded in the understanding that the support provider is aware of, comprehends, and respects the individual's life priorities and stage of life-related constraints. The individual's demands are assessed by considering their total workload, which encompasses both work and home factors. Available resources are then weighed against these demands. This allows the employee to become informed about the opportunities provided by the employer, and to be encouraged to use these support mechanisms. Additional support needs may also be identified. Work demands are adjusted to ensure that they can be accomplished within the individual's overall workload, while also keeping the employee's balance and well-being at sustainable levels. Demands may be temporary, in which case the adaptation is also temporary. For

instance, this could involve temporarily reducing objectives without affecting their compensation.

Some other examples of adaption could be adjusting work hours to accommodate a nonwork-related passion or hobby, allowing extended leave to care for an ill family member (e.g. elderly parent) or for attending to other personal matters. Coaching could be offered in evaluating and delegating workload in cases where the individual feels overwhelmed with the total load from home and work. If an employee finds commuting to work burdensome, remote connections can be arranged when possible. Interaction habits can be adjusted to respect the individual's boundary preferences (such as avoiding work correspondence during lunch breaks and outside of work hours). By acknowledging the extent of an individual's need for emotional care, additional support can be offered (e.g., a mentor or "wellbeing buddy" in the form of a workmate assigned for regular support talks). Individual needs for recovering activities during the workday could be identified (e.g. a walk outside, going to the gym, reading a book), and possibilities for them arranged. If a parent requires time to recover after work before picking up their children from daycare, and this improves their overall well-being and resilience, so an opportunity for this break could be provided during work hours. Overall, adaptation can take many forms, but the key aspect of this model is recognizing individual needs and providing an environment that enables individuals to take actions that enhance their well-being.

5.5.3 Recommendations for employees and employers

Based on the results from the research presented in this thesis, some further recommendations are considered at the individual, supervisor, and organizational levels. These are rounded up with some advice based on the literature view and empirical research of this thesis.

Recommendations for employees. The starting point is that all employees are an expert in and responsible for their own well-being, and the responsibility cannot be solely shifted to the organization (Manka, 2007, 2012). As a measure of well-being, work-life balance can be improved by taking care of an employee's sufficient detachment and recovery from work. Routines and a regulation of work times can be helpful for this. Taking breaks during the workday prevents overload, and it's important to leave enough time for pause and recovery between meetings. It's also a good idea to schedule time in the calendar when you are not available to others, and to turn off devices to prevent an overload of communication.

Particularly at the end of the workday, it's important to create a routine of reviewing the day's accomplishments and planning for the next day. This can aid in detachment, and cognitive methods such as making a conscious decision and permitting oneself to temporarily forget about work can be helpful. It's also beneficial to close work devices (or hide them) to support detachment. Additionally, employees could also mimic the opportunity a work commute provides, by ending their workday with a walk outside. This can help them to transition from work to personal time.

Recommendations for supervisors. As this study demonstrates, building trust and verbalizing it is key in a remote context. Expressing trust through words can help employees to feel confident in prioritizing their well-being and utilizing flexibility, while preventing feelings of guilt or pressure to be constantly on-call. Getting to know employees and identifying their priorities and goals builds understanding of their needs and offers opportunities to tailor support. This could be supported with developing 'other-orientated' approaches and behaviours (Urrila & Mäkelä, 2022). Achieving work-life balance is a personal endeavour and requires regular discussions between supervisors and employees. Through these conversations, a personalized plan can be developed and integrated into regular supervisor-employee discussions. It is also important to establish principles for tracking workloads in remote work, such as creating a transparent list of tasks and goals and regularly tracking progress. Finally, supervisors should not be afraid to use creativity in providing adaptive support, recognizing that improving an employee's work-life balance can lead to better work outcomes.

Recommendations for organizations. In addition to having shared work-life practices, it is important that individuals have the opportunity to align them with their life priorities. Thus, the support provided should be in accordance with their personal goals and values. This research highlighted that remote work placed a spotlight on the needs of non-parents and individuals living alone. Those who worked in isolation were hit hardest, whereas family obligations sometimes acted as a protective factor for drawing boundaries in the home-working setting. In work-life support planning, it is important to take into account these various nonwork responsibilities of individuals. In addition to this, there is a need for shared principles to safeguard leisure time and provide opportunities for breaks and less intensive work. A mutual agreement can be made that employees have autonomy over their calendar and that it is not overly packed with consecutive meetings. It is also crucial for organizations to empower supervisors to offer

tailored support and to think creatively about their solutions. A culture that is encouraging and supportive to new ideas also promotes overall wellbeing (Viitala et al., 2015). Thus, coaching supervisors in applying adaptive support may be needed to ensure consistency in access to work-life support. The level of supervisor support provided should not be influenced by the supervisor's personal preferences or their willingness to assist the employee. The support of a supervisor, work-life balance, and recovery could be added to the organization's well-being metrics (Orsila et al., 2011) so that they could be regularly monitored. Organizations and supervisors should communicate a shared message to employees that taking care of their WLB balance is not only essential, but heroic as well. By promoting a culture of WLB, organizations will create a healthier and more sustainable work environment for all. Actually, the means to improve work-life balance may be found within close reach, and could be rather simple to implement when the needs of individuals are properly understood and support sufficiently personalized.

EPILOGUE

Authoring this doctoral thesis was a journey for learning and also maturing for me. I began this work with the assumption that the issue with work-life balance currently faced in Finnish working life would be solved with generic employee benefits and practices (especially for families and households), and be directed as aid towards home demands. Over time, my thinking evolved and took a fundamental turn, specifically when interviewing remote workers in various life situations. To my surprise, remote workers did not describe needing new revolutionary methods for balance support, and the crucial WLB support appeared to be found much closer, namely in one's own abilities and the perception of efficacy. Alongside their experiences, they also described the personal and "close" support that is often provided by a trusting, caring and encouraging supervisor, to be as important.

With my study findings, I want to convey a message to organizations that building WLB should not be left to the individual, and support should specifically target strengthening an individual's own skills and resources. Even if an organization has sufficient work-life practices and benefits (which was the case in the studied organizations), not everyone may use them or benefit from them. Therefore, there is a need for personal dialogue and customized solutions to build the WLB and wellbeing of each person on a sustainable foundation. So, I encourage employees to be open about their priorities and wishes with their employers and supervisors, and similarly, I encourage supervisors to establish open, solution-oriented discussions about work-family issues with employees!

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CHAPTER 3

WORKING REMOTELY DURING THE COVID 19-PANDEMIC: WORK AND NON-WORK ANTECEDENTS OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE DEVELOPMENT

Liisa Mäkelä, Samu Kemppinen, Heini Pensar and Hilpi Kangas

ABSTRACT

This study investigates work and non-work antecedents for the work–life balance (WLB) development of remote employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Longitudinal data (N = 1,146, T1; N = 737, T2) was collected in May–June 2020 and December 2020 in one multinational company (MNC) in Finland. In data analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) with a cross-lagged panel model was utilized. The results revealed that during the pandemic, WLB slightly decreased. The quantitative job demands increased and predicted a decreased WLB at T2. Job autonomy decreased but did not have an effect on WLB development or buffer the negative effect of quantitative job demands on WLB. Time saved from commuting was positively related to WLB development, but the number of children living at home and the age of the youngest child had no statistically significant link to WLB development over time (similar finding for men and women). Although care responsibilities from the gender perspective is not the focus of our study, the additional

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analysis show that WLB at T1 was more challenging for women the more children they had, or the younger the youngest child was. For men, children did not make a difference for their WLB at T1. This finding indicates that WLB has been more challenging for mothers compared to fathers already when our first data had been collected, and the continuance of the pandemic did not change the situation in any direction. This research contributes to the knowledge about work and non-work related demands and resources as antecedents for WLB development during the pandemic. As a practical implication during the pandemic, the authors suggest that employers should follow development for employees' WLB as a measure of well-being in remote work. In addition, the workload of remote employees should be followed, and time saved from commuting should be preserved as employees' non-work time and protected from work-related tasks.

Keywords: Work–life balance; autonomy; workload; parenthood; longitudinal study; community

INTRODUCTION

Due to the corona pandemic, expert work has extensively moved from organizational sites to home offices. Remote work, that is, work that would normally be done at the employer's premises but has been agreed to be conducted externally relying on information technology (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Garrett & Danziger, 2007), has become far more common than ever before. Yet working from home is blurring the boundaries between work and personal life, and has been found to influence remote employees' experiences of their WLB (see Shirmohammadi et al., 2022 for a review), which is defined as an employee's subjective perception of how successful they are in their commitments to their work (e.g., as an employee, supervisor) and non-work roles (e.g., as a partner, parent, friend). Paying attention to the interface of employees' work and personal life spheres (which is close to the concept of WLB) is important, and its negative development during the pandemic has led to negative organizational outcomes, lower employee performance, and a higher intention to quit (Vaziri et al., 2020). Thus, there is a need to increase the knowledge about WLB in modern working life in order to ensure employee well-being, as well as the success of their employing organization. This study focuses on the antecedents and development of remote employees' WLB during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interface (Bakker et al., 2011) or balance (Jamal et al., 2021; Syrek et al., 2013) between work and non-work life spheres has previously been studied with the help of the Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory. In these studies, work–life interface or WLB has been considered as an indicator of employee well-being. The JD-R model typically focuses only on the characteristics of the psychosocial work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), and only

a few earlier studies take non-work related demands and resources into account (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008) as potential antecedents for employee well-being. However, taking into account the demands and resources from both life spheres may be especially important when phenomena involving both life spheres (e.g., WLB) is studied, and also when the main working environment is one's home. Therefore, this study adopts the JD-R model as its theoretical framework, and broadens its scope to also take into account non-work related demands and resources in the remote work context.

In the working life sphere, quantitative workload poses an essential risk for WLB (McCrea et al., 2011; Skinner & Pocock, 2008), and there is also some evidence that workload may increase with remote work (Allen et al., 2015) as seen during the pandemic (Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, job autonomy has been found to be an important job resource that improves employees' well-being (Nahrgang et al., 2011), and which has potential to buffer the negative effects of job demands on well-being (see, e.g., Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Earlier literature about remote work has shown that job autonomy is one essential positive element (Golden & Veiga, 2008; Nakrošien et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). In this study, quantitative workload and job autonomy are relatively considered as "job demand" and "job resource," having the potential to affect the development of remote employees' WLB. Furthermore, during the corona pandemic, the intensive period of remote working from home has increased the importance of issues from the non-work life sphere on employees' WLB. First, family role responsibilities (e.g., those related to parenting) are typical non-work demands linked to well-being also in the context of remote work (Allen et al., 2015; 2021). The corona pandemic caused occasional lockdown of schools and restricted children to attend daycare normally, and it is likely that parents working from home frequently had to take care of their children during work hours Thus, the situation in which remote employees' that have children living at home is approached as a non-work demand, with the potential to decrease their WLB. Although our focus in this chapter is not on gender-related questions, worth for mentioning is that care responsibilities between men and women vary in different countries, women typically being more involved on them than men (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018; Poortman & Van Der Lippe, 2009; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). Remote working from home can contribute to a re-sharing of the responsibilities between parents and reposition the established gender roles at home. However, it is also possible that remote working cause different implications for women and men, and there is some evidence that the increasing home demands related to remote working have added burden specifically on mothers (Kenny & Yang, 2021; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). We do not dig deep on gender-related questions in this chapter but take them account in the additional analysis, as reported in the discussion section. Furthermore, the time available for the non-work life sphere has increased because working from home saves time that was earlier used for commutes between work and home. Therefore, in this chapter, we also study the time saved from commuting as a non-work resource.

THE FINNISH CONTEXT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In Finland, where this study was conducted, a recommendation for remote working was given by the Government during both data collection rounds. It was only after February 28, 2022, that the Government issued a resolution ending the national recommendation on remote work (The Government decree VM/2022/34). The capital region of Finland had among the largest annual increases in the share of employed people usually working from home in 2020, compared to the time before the pandemic. Also, the share of people transiting to remote work was recorded as the highest in the EU (Eurostat, 2021). The willingness to work remotely after the pandemic is also seen to be high in Finland, and as many as 90% of the people working remotely wish to continue working from home after the pandemic at least 25% of the time (Tilastokeskus, 2021).

Restrictions and recommendations concerning, for example, restaurants, hobbies, and social gatherings were also in place during the period of our data collection (Parliament of Finland, 2021). Furthermore, schools were closed and the parents of young children were recommended to keep the children at home from daycare between the 16th of March 2020 and 14th of May 2020 (Government decree A 191/2020). It was also advised to cut down contacts with elderly and people outside of people's own households. In Finland, it is not typical that several generations would live in a same household, and consequently, grandparents were not able to help with child care, and the possibilities to take care of elderly relatives was limited. During the first data collection, schools started to open after having been mainly closed for two months, and during the second data collection, schools were mainly open, although local closures and quarantines due to exposures were typical.

Although our focus in this chapter is not on gender-related questions, worth mentioning is that in the gender division of housework and caring for children, Finland is among one of the most equal countries in EU. In 2016, in the EU, 93% of women aged 25 to 49 (with children under 18) took care of their children on a daily basis, whereas in Finland the figure was 91%. For men, the percentage was 69% in the EU and 79% in Finland. In the ranking of countries on the basis of their equity between women and men in daily childcare, Finland was the fourth most equal, and for housework and cooking, Finland was the fifth most equal (Eurostat, The life of women and men in Europe, 2021).

JD-R THEORY

The JD-R theory is based on the idea that every job has its own characteristics, and that job demands and resources in particular help to explain the processes leading to either employee ill health or well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands refer to aspects of the job requiring physical or psychological effort, and are therefore usually related to physiological and psychological costs leading to ill-being (Kinnunen et al., 2011). Job resources may

be instrumental in achieving work goals, and in stimulating personal growth and development (Demerouti et al., 2001, 2002). Having adequate job resources leads (via a motivational process) to well-being, and adequate job resources are likely to buffer the negative effects of job demands, thus compensating for the losses in energy that high job demands may cause (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

The JD-R theory has been found to be applicable in the context of work and personal life interaction (Bakker et al., 2011). Negative work–home interference has been shown to function as a job demand (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p. 64), and also as a negative well-being outcome (Bakker et al., 2011). Additionally, WLB has been studied with the help of the JD-R model (Syrek et al., 2013) in the context of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jamal et al., 2021).

JD-R theory focuses only on the characteristics of the psychosocial work environment, and ignores those factors that are not related to work. However, some studies (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008) have included home demands and resources in the ill health and motivational processes. In those studies, home demands and resources have not been found to play a specific (Hakanen et al., 2008) or less significant role than job demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2005) when work engagement or burnout are studied. However, as this particular study focuses on phenomena related to both work and non-work life spheres (i.e., the development of WLB in the context of working from home), then non-work related demands and resources are worth including, in addition to those related directly to work.

REMOTE WORK AND WLB

WLB refers to an employees' subjective experience of the compatibility between work and non-work activities (including family), in respect of their life priorities (Brough et al., 2014; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). A sense of balance is generated when individuals feel they can spend enough time and successfully respond to demands in roles they value (Brough et al., 2014; Casper et al., 2018; Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Traditionally, remote working has been considered as a means to improve employee WLB, and a way for employees to more efficiently reconcile their work and home commitments (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). Earlier studies concerning the interface between employees' work and family lives (concepts closely related to WLB, although not exactly same) have shown that remote employees' experience lower levels of work–family conflict than those who work full-time on site (Madsen, 2006), and one meta-analysis showed that high-intensity remote working (more than 2.5 days/week) is related to lower work–family conflict (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). In addition, it has been found that the more extensive the remote work is, the less work interferes with family life, but the more family interferes with work life (Golden et al., 2006). Therefore, although it seems that a better WLB may be possible due to lowered work-to-family conflict (WFC), increased conflict arising from the family-to-work among remote employees indicates that the situation may not be that simple, and that both life spheres play an important role once the balance between life spheres is considered.

Previous research related to the interface of work and family/non-work (Golden et al., 2006; Lautsch et al., 2009; Madsen, 2006; Maruyama et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2009) has mainly been based on samples where the choice of remote working has been voluntary, or seen primarily as a part-time arrangement. Therefore, the results may not be relevant in the working life situations experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic, during which remote work has been very intensive and based on rules and strong recommendations (i.e., non-voluntary). So far, literature has shown that during the pandemic, WLB has been harder to achieve among parents who continued working outside their home, compared to those who worked from home (Del Boca et al., 2020). It has also been found that WLB remained relatively stable during the pandemic, despite some positive and negative development paths being identified by Vaziri et al. (2020), their sample including both remote and non-remote employees. However, we were unable to find studies utilizing longitudinal data that explored what happens to remote employees' WLB during the pandemic. Therefore, this particular study focuses on the development of WLB in the context of intensive remote work.

Although the empirical evidence concerning remote employees' WLB is not very extensive, earlier literature has identified several factors that may promote or inhibit it. On one hand, remote work has been shown to involve many beneficial factors, such as greater flexibility and autonomy, time saved from commuting, an opportunity to invest more time in non-work activities, and reduced stress levels (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Lautsch et al., 2009; Maruyama et al., 2009). On the other hand, it has been argued that remote working increases the tendency for increased workload (Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021), and a blurring of the work–family boundary leading to interferences between the work and home domains (Allen et al., 2015; Lapierre et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2009). Given the exceptional situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of how remote working affects WLB is accentuated (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Particularly, periods of intense working from home combined with partial closures of schools and daycare has also increased the importance of the non-working sphere on employees' WLB. However, we were unable to find any research that explores the essential work and non-work related antecedents for WLB development in the context of remote work during the pandemic.

JOB DEMANDS AND RESOURCES AND WLB IN THE REMOTE WORK CONTEXT

Quantitative Workload and WLB

Quantitative workload is an often-studied job demand, and refers to the amount of work expected from an employee in a prescribed time. A high workload influences employees' perceptions that they have too much to do, their work is piling up, and that they might have to overwork (Greenglass et al., 2003; Wännström et al., 2009). When the demands of work exceed employees' capabilities, they are

likely to intrude into their non-work life (Skinner & Pocock, 2008). Work overload is an experience of being expected to accomplish more than one can deliver, and can impede an employee's ability to achieve a WLB (Boxall & Macky, 2014). Quantitative workload is a common work attribute related to work–life interference, and generally found to be a stronger predictor of work–life interference compared to other time related demands such as worked hours (McCrea et al., 2011; Skinner & Pocock, 2008). Excessive work pressure (a concept close to workload) has been found to be related to increased work–family conflict (Glavin & Schieman, 2012), and actual working hours, role overload (i.e., too much work to complete in the time available), and job-related time demands have been associated with a greater work–life imbalance (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Pirzadeh & Lingard, 2021).

There is also some evidence that remote employees have perceived that their workload has increased during the pandemic (Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). This is reasoned by the increase of virtual correspondence (online calls, etc.) required in remote working, and also by the additional and urgent work caused by the COVID-19 emergency itself (Wang et al., 2021). It has further been suggested that remote workers adopt a productive working style, and therefore take on more work (Carillo et al., 2021). Overall, quantitative workload seems to be an essential work demand in the context of remote work during pandemic, and therefore is likely to have effect on WLB development.

Although we did not find any earlier empirical studies exploring the link between workload and WLB in remote work contexts, in this study, we follow the JD-R theory assumption that high job demands lead to impaired well-being, and following earlier empirical evidence from contexts other than remote work, we hypothesize:

H1. High quantitative workload decreases remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

Autonomy and WLB

Autonomy has been found to be an important job resource for employees (Nahrgang et al., 2011; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Autonomy refers to what extent a person is able to structure when, where and how the job is performed, and also allows freedom, independence and discretion in making decisions related to tasks and how those tasks are completed (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Spector, 1986).

In previous studies, job autonomy has been shown to have a positive influence on WLB (Haar & Brougham, 2020; Ronda et al., 2016; Walia, 2014). As autonomy increases the flexibility and possibility to modify the temporal and spatial elements of one's job, it has been seen as adding a flexibility to deal with family matters (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012) and improve possibilities to plan leisure time and allocate home duties (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Moreover, it has been reported that adding more flexibility in work tasks and schedules (i.e., autonomy) positively affects WLB (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008; Kelly et al., 2011).

Autonomy has been recognized as a positive element of remote work (e.g., Golden & Veiga, 2008; Harpaz, 2002; Nakrošienė et al., 2019). It has been found that high-intensive remote work is linked to higher autonomy related to one's job (see the meta-analysis of Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gajendran et al., 2015). However, the transition to intensive remote work due to the pandemic was sudden, and as employees needed to find novel ways of how to organize their work and collaborate with their team, it can be assumed that the level of their work autonomy was high.

Autonomy in remote work has been found to partially mediate the link between remote work and positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance (Gajendran et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). We found three studies (Andrade & Petiz Lousã, 2021; Elfering et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021) that took autonomy and work–family issues into account in the context of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially, the studies have shown that high autonomy is linked to lower WFC (Andrade & Petiz Lousã, 2021; Elfering et al., 2020), although Wang et al. (2021) reported that autonomy was not related to either work-to-family interference or family-to-work interference. However, as stated earlier, there is a stream of research to support the notion that remote working increases job autonomy (e.g., Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Allen et al., 2015; Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Lange & Kayser, 2022), and employees with low autonomy have been suffering from higher interference from work to home (Golden et al., 2006). Additionally, the field would benefit from further empirical evidence about autonomy and the positive side of work/non-work issues, for instance, WLB in the remote work context. As resources are especially important for positive well-being outcomes (following the motivation path in JD-R theory), we base our second hypothesis on the JD-R theory and earlier empirical evidence concerning the positive role of autonomy on WLB in work contexts other than remote work:

H2. High job autonomy increases remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

Moreover, JD-R theory states that in addition to job resources' direct positive effects on employees' well-being, job resources have the potential to buffer the negative effects of job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; 2002). In the remote work context, job autonomy has been found to buffer the negative association of commuting time on commitment and well-being (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2019), but again, studies that explore the possible buffering effect of job autonomy on the relationship of quantitative job demands and WLB (and especially in the remote work context) were not found. However, we may assume that autonomy plays an especially important role in helping employees to cope with high workload and achieve WLB in the context of pandemic. Even if workload is high, autonomy allows a flexible sharing of time between different life spheres, for instance, with helping children at home school during the day and continue working later in the evening. Therefore, based on JD-R theory and the available empirical evidence of the buffering effect of autonomy on other kinds of demands on WLB, we hypothesize the following:

H3. Job autonomy buffers the negative effect of quantitative workload on WLB over time during the pandemic.

NON-WORK DEMANDS AND RESOURCES

Although earlier studies concerning work well-being (in particular, work engagement and burnout) have found that non-work demands and resources have a minor or non-significant influence (Bakker et al., 2005; Hakanen et al., 2008), their role is likely to be more important when focusing on phenomena involving both life spheres, for instance WLB, and in the specific situation of the pandemic, when different kinds of restrictions in society kept children at home more than normally. Non-work demands and resources may also be especially important when the work place is one's home, and therefore in this study, having children at home has been considered as a non-work demand, and time saved from commuting as considered as a resource.

NUMBER AND AGE OF CHILDREN AT HOME AND WLB

Homeworking employees may have the company of other members of the household while working, and their physical presence at home might trigger greater expectations from others in relation to the employee's participation in home-related responsibilities, regardless of the employee's commitment to working times (Allen et al., 2015).

At times during the pandemic peaks, a majority of children were home-schooled in many parts of the world (see, e.g., ONS, 2020). Consequently, the impact of the non-work demand created by having children at home cannot be neglected. Parents with children at home have been found to be "time-starved" (Perrons, 2003), wanting more time for both work and family. It has further been found that especially small children create a feeling of time pressure, while older children demand less physical care, thereby creating less time constraints (Del Boca et al., 2020; Schieman et al., 2021; van der Lippe, 2007). However, a study examining the balance between work and non-work life spheres found that having children (regardless of their age) was found to lead to impaired WLB (van der Lippe et al., 2006). Also, a more recent study that compared changes in WLB during the COVID-19 emergency between employees with children and those without children, indicated that the presence of children under the age of 18 in the household is an important factor that negatively affects the work–life balance, possibly due to an additional burden of responsibilities related to the presence of children (Lonska et al., 2021). In addition, it has been found that work–life conflict has remained stable during the pandemic for the parents of younger children, and is decreased if employees do not have children or have teenage children living at home (Schieman et al., 2021).

In Finland, the experiences of parents during the first wave of the pandemic (in the spring of 2020) were polarized, and although one third of parents perceived that meaningful family time increased, over half of the interviewees experienced higher stress and a weakened support network (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022). In the study of Salanko et al. (2021), although caring for young children at home during the spring of 2020 resulted in a reduced WLB, many respondents felt that this time increased their satisfaction toward family-life.

In the context of remote work, there is some evidence that remote work eases employees' possibilities to manage work and caring responsibilities, especially if they have children (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). Furthermore, Golden et al. (2006) found that the size of the household (including every person living in the household, i.e., partner, children and other dependents) is related to the interface of work and family in the context of remote work. Here, we assume that the size of the household can be taken to indicate the number of employees' children living at home. In Golden et al.'s study, no direct link between the size of the household and work–family conflict or family-to-work conflict was found, but the size of the household moderated the link between the extent of remote work and family-to-work conflict (Golden et al., 2006). In particular, among those with large households, the more employees did remote work, the stronger their FWC, while for those with small households, the difference in the extent of remote work was not significantly related to FWC.

However, the extent of remote work has been very high during the pandemic, and due to closures of schools and day care, children may have been demanding attention even during work days. By applying the JD-R theory's proposition of the negative effect of demands on well-being, earlier empirical evidence, and taking account of the specific context of the pandemic, we hypothesize:

H4a. A higher number of children living at home decreases remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

H4b. The younger the age of the youngest child living at home, the stronger the decrease in remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

TIME SAVED FROM COMMUTING AND WLB

By working from home, remote employees avoid commuting travel between work and home, and thus save time (Bai et al., 2021; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). This may be beneficial especially for employees who have lengthy and time-consuming commutes, since the released time may be transformed to a contribution to the non-work life sphere without compromising work (Golden et al., 2006; Hilbrecht et al., 2013). Research findings regarding commute travel and its impact on the reconciliation of employees' work and personal and family life are indecisive. Long commutes have been found to reduce employees' energy, well-being and overall life quality (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2019). It has also been found to increase employees' work–family conflict (Bai et al., 2021), especially if the freedom of choice of the time and location of working is low (Elfering et al., 2020). Yet, Maruyama et al. (2009) in their study of 1,566 telecom employees found no support for a prediction of employees' WLB by way of commute travel. Nevertheless, they found that remote workers who spent a higher number of working hours at home (90–100%) and thus avoided commuting, were still likely to report a more positive WLB compared to those who worked only 0–40% of their working time from home. They further concluded that extensive remote work provided

employees with the possibility to respond to the needs of work and home life, through flexibility and time gain.

The COVID-19 context discouraged people to commute to work during the pandemic by government recommendation, thus reducing their freedom to choose whether to work from the office or from home (Elfering et al., 2020), and limiting the theoretically proposed (Ashforth et al., 2000) benefit of using commuting time as a possibility for boundary management between work and non-work roles. But despite these possible downsides of reduced commuting, the new situation has given people the possibility to experience a no-commute lifestyle and its benefits (Cornell et al., 2022) and to value the time saved as a new resource. Thereby, we study time commuting as a resource in the home sphere.

Following the core assumption of JD-R theory about the positive role of resources on well-being, and in alignment with earlier empirical findings, we therefore hypothesize:

H5. Time saved from commuting increases remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

As a further consideration, Tremblay (2002) found that for employees with children, remote work can be a preferred option as it allows them to spend more time at home with the family in the mornings and evenings, with a better balance between work and family as an outcome. Reduced commuting saves time (Bai et al., 2021; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012) that can be allocated to cope with non-work demands, for instance, childcare. It is possible that this was especially important in the context of pandemic related restrictions and the increased need to take care of children at home. Aligned with this empirical finding and with the help of JD-R theory suggesting that resources may buffer the negative effects of demands, we pose our last two hypotheses:

H6a. Time saved from commuting buffers the negative effects of the number of children living at home on remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

H6b. Time saved from commuting buffers the negative effects of the age of the youngest child living at home on remote employees' WLB over time during the pandemic.

METHODS

The data used for this study (N = 1,218, T1; N = 776, T2) was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic in May–June 2020 (T1) and December 2020 (T2), from employees in a large multinational corporation in Finland that operates in the field of industrial technology development and manufacturing. As a consequence, the study had an eight-month time lag. The data were collected via an online questionnaire sent to the employees. The questionnaire was originally sent to 2,483 employees in May–June 2020, and 1218 (49% response rate) returned the questionnaire. The same questionnaire was sent again in December 2020 to those who had responded to the previous questionnaire, and 776 (64% response rate) returned the questionnaire.

The employees of the corporation had very little previous experience with remote work. Before the pandemic, most (80%) of the employees used less than 10% of their working time to remote work. Demographically, the sample consisted mostly of men (64%). At T1, the mean age of respondents was 43.9 years (SD = 10.3; range = 20–68), and most participants were in a relationship (70%). Most employees were highly skilled (senior salaried employees).

WLB was measured with four items and had a good reliability at both time points (T1 $\alpha = 0.89$; T2 $\alpha = 0.92$). The scale used was developed and validated by Brough et al. (2014), and participants responded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is: "Overall, I believe that my work and non-work life is balanced."

Quantitative workload was measured with four items and had a good reliability at both time points (T1 $\alpha = 0.83$; T2 $\alpha = 0.83$). The scale was based on the QPS-Nordic questionnaire (Wännström et al., 2009), and participants responded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is: "Do you have too much to do?"

Job autonomy was measured with six items and had a good reliability at both time points (T1 $\alpha = 0.82$; T2 $\alpha = 0.83$). The Job autonomy scale was based on the Nova-Weba questionnaire (Houtman et al., 1994) and has also been used by Runhaar et al. (2013). An example item is: "I am free to decide how I do my work." Participants responded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Time saved from commuting was measured with a single question: "How long does your one-way commute take in minutes?" The mean value of the time saved from commuting was approximately 28 minutes with a standard deviation of 16. The number of children living at home was measured ranging from 0 (no children) to 10 children living at home. Over half of the respondents (53%) did not have children living at home, 17% had one child, 20% had two children, and 10% had more than two children living at home. The mean for the number of children was approximately 0.83 with a standard deviation of 1.08. The age of the youngest child living at home ranged from 0 (no children) to 18 (children aged one year and under were coded as 1). The mean age of the youngest child was approximately 3.63 with a standard deviation of 5.27.

Quantitative workload, job autonomy and WLB were used as sum scores in descriptive and attrition analysis. Attrition analysis was conducted with logistic regression. After the descriptive analysis and attrition analysis were conducted, SEM was used to investigate the temporal associations between WLB, and work and non-work demands and resources in a remote work context with a cross-lagged panel model. A robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR) was used due to slightly non-normal distributions, and missing data were handled using a full information maximum likelihood (FIML) method. Quantitative workload, job autonomy and WLB were modeled in the SEM as latent variables with multiple observed indicators. First, tests of longitudinal measurement invariance were conducted to confirm the structural stability of the measured variables in time. Second, the means of the latent variables were compared between time points by constraining the means at T1 to 0 and allowing the means at T2 to be

freely estimated. Third, structural paths and covariates were added to the model. Finally, interactions between latent and observed variables were investigated using the LMS-method (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000). Standard cutoff values (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999) were used to determine an adequately fitting model (non-significant χ^2; RMSEA < 0.06; CFI/TLI $\geq 0.95/0.90$; SRMR < 0.08). For longitudinal measurement invariance, the cutoff points suggested by Chen (2007) were used (ΔCFI ≥ -0.01; ΔRMSEA ≥ 0.015; ΔSRMR ≥ 0.03). We investigate the overall development of WLB with latent factor mean comparisons, and the predictors of WLB over time with the cross-lagged panel model.

In the cross-lagged panel model, we adjust for WLB at T1 to adjust for any previous differences in WLB outside the study period. We included control variables that typically have been found to relate to employees' work and non-work issues, such as WLB (Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020; Park et al., 2022; Thrasher et al., 2022). Therefore, our model controls gender (0 = male, 1 = female), age (in years), and relationship status (0 = single, 1 = in relationship). These variables could influence the direct effects of job autonomy, quantitative workload, age of the youngest child, and number of children on WLB at T2.

In the analysis, those who were not remote working in T1 ($n = 72$) or T2 ($n = 39$) were excluded and the sample size used for analysis was 1,146 at T1 and 737 at T2. Gender, age and relationship status were adjusted in the final cross-lagged panel model. Descriptive and attrition analysis were carried out using IBM SPSS version 26, and the cross-lagged panel model was tested with Mplus version 8.6.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations and correlations between variables are shown in Table 3.1. A descriptive analysis of the means reveals WLB to have been quite high among the employees as the means were 4.04 at T1 and 3.77 at T2, on a scale of 1 to 5. Job autonomy was also high, and quantitative demands were moderate among the employees. Correlations between the variables indicated that the hypothesized associations of quantitative workload, autonomy and time saved from commuting were all significantly related to WLB. Attrition analysis did not reveal any significant predictors of dropout in the demographic or other variables included in the study.

The CFA model with latent variables had acceptable standardized factor loadings, indicating valid latent measures. Standardized factor loadings of WLB at T1 had a range of 0.70 to 0.90, and WLB at T2 had a range of 0.75 to 0.92. Factor loadings of job autonomy at T1 had a range of 0.56 to 0.73, and 0.60 to 0.78 at T2. Quantitative workload at T1 had a range of 0.68 to 0.84, and 0.65 to 0.84 at T2. The model chi-square test ($\chi 2 = 873.603$; df $= 321$; $p < 0.001$) indicated a model misfit, but the chi-square test is sensitive to sample size. Thus, the model fit for the measurement model was deemed to be adequate as indicated by RMSEA (0.039), CFI (0.953), TLI (0.945) and SRMR (0.048) values.

The longitudinal measurement invariance of the model was confirmed as the tests of configural, metric, scalar and strict measurement invariance did not show

Table 3.1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of the Study Variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. WLB T1	4.02	0.87	1								
2. WLB T2	3.77	0.97	0.571**	1							
3. Autonomy T1	3.83	0.72	0.320**	0.218**	1						
4. Autonomy T2	3.75	0.73	0.263**	0.326**	0.567**	1					
5. Quantitative workload T1	2.70	0.98	−0.499**	−0.385**	−0.337**	−0.290**	1				
6. Quantitative workload T2	2.99	0.98	−0.355**	−0.520**	−0.245**	−0.375**	0.620**	1			
7. Time saved from commuting	27.7	15.7	0.065*	0.105**	0.056	0.001	−0.03	−0.062	1		
8. Number of children	0.83	1.08	−0.052	0.007	−0.028	0.054	0.066*	0.025	0.061*	1	
9. Age of the youngest child	3.63	5.27	−0.011	0.015	−0.044	−0.010	0.077*	0.024	0.025	0.579**	1

Note: T1 ($N = 1{,}146$), T2 ($N = 737$), * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$.

Table 3.2. Fit Statistics for Tests of Longitudinal Measurement Invariance.

Model	$\chi 2$	df	p	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA (90 % CI)	BIC	$\Delta\chi 2$ (p)	ΔCFI	ΔTLI	ΔSRMR	ΔRMSEA	ΔBIC
Configural	873.603	321	< 0.001	0.953	0.945	0.048	0.039 (0.036, 0.042)	64747.037						
Metric	887.011	332	< 0.001	0.953	0.946	0.050	0.038 (0.035, 0.041)	64683.422	12.868 (0.302)	0	0.001	0.002	−0.001	−63.615
Scalar	906.924	343	< 0.001	0.952	0.947	0.050	0.038 (0.035, 0.041)	64624.972	18.974 (0.062)	−0.001	0.001	0	0	−58.450
Strict	914.654	357	< 0.001	0.953	0.950	0.052	0.037 (0.034, 0.040)	64549.266	15.217 (0.364)	0.001	0.003	0.002	−0.001	−75.706

any significant reduction in model fit (see Table 3.2). After strict longitudinal measurement invariance was confirmed, the means of latent variables were compared between time points by constraining the means at T1 to 0 and allowing the means at T2 to be freely estimated. All latent mean differences were significant between WLB, job autonomy and quantitative workload across time. WLB ($-0.32, p < 0.001$) and job autonomy ($-0.13, p < 0.001$) had decreased during the eight-month period and quantitative workload ($0.33, p < 0.001$) had increased.

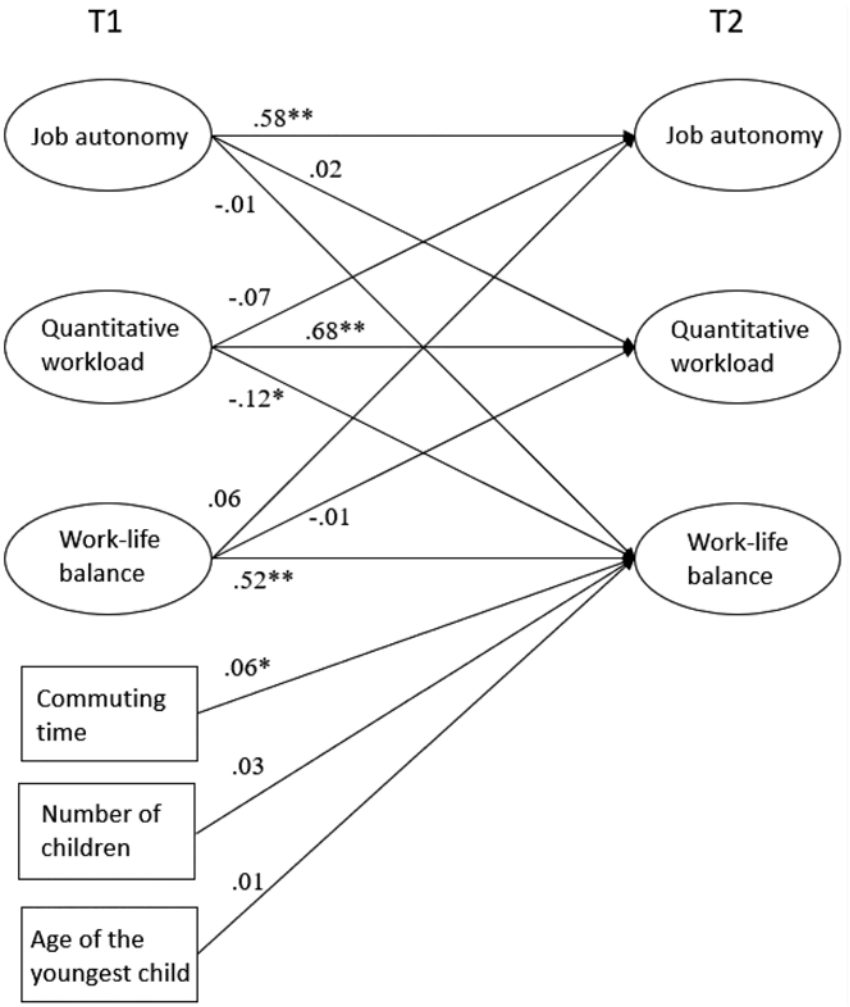

Fig. 3.1. Full Cross-Lagged Panel Model with Standardized Regression Coefficients. *Note:* * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$. For simplification, indicators, measurement residuals, disturbances, and correlations between variables are not shown in the figure.

After the measurement model was tested, structural paths and covariates were added to the model. The model chi-square test ($\chi 2 = 1174.167$; df = 489; $p < 0.001$) again indicated a model misfit, but the model had an adequate approximate fit with the data indicated by RMSEA (0.035), CFI (0.945), TLI (0.939), and SRMR (0.046) values. The cross-lagged panel model showed that the temporal directions of the studied variables were only one-directional, as the cross-lagged effects from WLB at T1 to quantitative workload and job autonomy at T2 were non-significant, and the cross-lagged effect from quantitative workload at T1 to WLB at T2 was significant (see Fig. 3.1). The autoregressive paths between all three studied measures at T1 and their counterparts at T2 were significant.

The results from the cross-lagged panel model (see Fig. 3.1) indicated that according to our hypothesis (*H1*) based on the JD-R-model, quantitative job demands had a negative cross-lagged effect ($\beta = -0.12$; $p = 0.01$) on WLB while controlling for their autoregressive effects and demographic variables. This indicated that increasing quantitative workload reduced WLB and therefore *H1* was supported. Surprisingly, job autonomy did not have a significant cross-lagged effect ($\beta = -0.01$; $p = 0.92$) on WLB, and therefore *H2* was not supported. The hypothesized buffering effect of job autonomy on the negative effect of quantitative demands on WLB (*H3*) turned out to be non-significant ($\beta = 0.04$; $p = 0.24$). Table of all associations in the final cross-lagged panel model can be found in the Appendix (Table 3.3).

Time saved from commuting was positively related ($\beta = 0.06$; $p = 0.04$) to WLB, but neither the number of children ($\beta = 0.03$; $p = 0.36$) nor the age of the youngest child ($\beta = 0.01$; $p = 0.83$) were related to WLB. More time saved from commuting indicated a better WLB at a later time. Therefore, neither *H4a* nor *H4b* were supported, and *H5* was supported by the data. Both interaction effects between the time saved from commuting and the number of children (*H6a*; $\beta = 0.02$; $p = 0.49$), and between the time saved from commuting and the age of the youngest child (*H6b*; $\beta = 0.03$; $p = 0.28$) were non-significant, and thus neither *H6a* nor *H6b* were supported by the data.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate the temporal associations of work and non-work antecedents for the WLB development of remote employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research contributes to the literature of WLB in a situation of intensive remote work caused by the global pandemic. During the pandemic, remote work was strongly recommended by authorities (ILO, 2020; Parliament of Finland, 2021; WHO, 2021) – thus, remote work was involuntary, a main mode of working, and home-based. Earlier research has mainly studied remote work before the pandemic, and treated it typically as a benefit that an employer provided to their employees, or as an opportunity for a company to make cost savings. Unfortunately, we do not yet know how long different kinds of restrictions around the globe will continue due to the pandemic, or if some other global crises will arise in the future which may also lead to involuntary remote

work. But it has become clear that working life won't be the same after the pandemic, and it is likely that remote work will be much more common in the future than it was before the pandemic.

Our results revealed that the WLB of remote employees decreased during the pandemic. Earlier literature has found that remote working increases the strain of WFC if the remote work was non-voluntary (Lapierre et al., 2016). However, there are also studies that report the positive effects of remote working on WLB (e.g., Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Lautsch et al., 2009; Maruyama et al., 2009), and those studies include a variety of remote working arrangements (including part-time and voluntary remote working), and could reflect a preferred choice of the employees and a better matching to their lifestyle. Our results seem to be aligned with these findings to some extent, and WLB decreased the longer that involuntary home-based remote work lasted. On the other hand, the WLB of remote employees seems to be at a relatively high level (with a mean at the first measurement point of 4.04 and 3.77 at the second, with a maximum value of 5), thus indicating that finding a balance between work and non-work in the context of involuntary remote work is very likely. It is also possible that the pandemic actually provided a long-awaited opportunity of remote work, which may have previously been denied by an employer or "presence cultures" in companies, leading to high perceptions of WLB, especially at the beginning. However, studying WLB in the context of the global pandemic may have affected our findings, and for instance, constant restrictions have led to a lack of hobbies, social gatherings, and other important non-work activities in remote employees' lives. With the situation continuing over many months and without any knowledge of how long it might last, may have decreased people's experiences of how satisfied they were with the possibilities to combine their work and non-work life spheres. Therefore, more research is needed regarding the development of WLB during and after the pandemic, and how future work models that combine on-site working and remote work are related to it. In addition, a conceptualization of remote work needs to be developed in order to recognize, for instance, different types of remote work, and taking into account factors such as voluntary versus non-voluntary remote work, the division of working time between remote and on-site, home-office or some other place, etc.

Furthermore, we found that job demand (quantitative workload) and non-work resource (time saved from commuting) predicted remote employees' WLB, whereas job resource (autonomy) and non-work demands (number of children and age of the youngest child living at home) did not. Thus, it seems that non-work related resources and demands should also be taken into account in addition to those related to work, if the focus is to be on phenomena that link to both life spheres of employees, such as WLB. The findings of our study align with earlier findings arrived at during the pandemic (Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021), and show that quantitative workload (as an indicator of job demand) grew between the time points, and it is possible that it is because of the challenging work setting posed by remote working (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017) and a decreased access to support (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012), all of which could add to the effort required from remote working employees. However,

as we do not have a possibility to compare the development of workload between employees working remotely and them who worked on offices, we are not able to confirm if remote working was the reason to increase of job demands. Moreover, we found that increasing workload had a negative impact on WLB over time. It seems that the remote working situation has been perceived as burdensome, negatively affecting employees' experiences of their overall WLB. Earlier studies have found that work pressure and worked hours (concepts close to quantitative workload) are related to lower WLB and higher work–family conflict (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Glavin & Schieman, 2012), and our results show that it is also the case in a remote work setting in the context of the pandemic. A possible explanation could be drawn from the blurring of boundaries between work and home domains (Allen et al., 2015; Lapierre et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2009), allowing a greater intrusion of work into the non-work sphere (Barber et al., 2019; Suh & Lee, 2017) which may happen easily when demanding work is carried out from home.

The time saved from commute travel that would normally take place between work and home, was in practice almost fully negated in the COVID-19 context. Specifically, it was considered as an indicator of a non-work resource because commuting to work is usually done in the employees' own time. Earlier research has reported that longer commuting time increases the conflict between work and family (Elfering et al., 2020), and in our study, the length of time saved from commuting was found to be a significant factor in the increasing the WLB of remotely working employees. Earlier research has shown that saved commuting time can be spent on family and non-work related activities (Bai et al., 2021; Maruyama et al., 2009), which may also be the case in our study. In addition, it is possible that once employees did not need to commute, it created a less stressful atmosphere for the start and end the working day, avoiding traffic jams or crowded public transportation. However, it is important to note that commute travel itself, and the physical transfer between work and home, has not been seen as entirely harmful in previous literature. Looking at the commuting through a lens of boundary theory, the commuting time could be seen as useful preparation time for workers to psychologically relax and shift into a different role (e.g., from employee to parent/partner or vice versa) (Ashforth et al., 2000), although we were not able to find empirical studies supporting that suggestion. The loss of this routine in remote working during the pandemic, even with the limited possibilities of the freedom to choose whether to work from home or in an office (which is a situation closely related to temporospatial autonomy that has found to decrease the harmful effect of long commutes on WFC: Elfering et al., 2020) did not seem to lead to difficulties for employees in relation to their WLB. Given these considerations, we suggest further research to study the different mechanisms of why and how time saved from commuting promotes remote employees' WLB, how that time is actually spent, and what kinds of benefits employees link to it.

Our study revealed that job autonomy does not have a significant cross-lagged effect on WLB, nor did it buffer the negative effect of quantitative job demands on WLB. This finding did not support our hypothesis in which we expected that autonomy would promote WLB in remote work, based on JD-R theory and

earlier findings from other work contexts (Haar & Brougham, 2022; Ronda et al., 2016; Walia, 2014) than remote work. However, our finding was aligned with one study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wang et al., 2021). In that study, autonomy was not related to either work-to-family interference or family-to-work interference as a negative indicator of work and non-work, and based on our study, it does not have an effect on WLB as a positive indicator. However, two studies have shown that high autonomy and low WFC are related, both before (Elfering et al., 2020) and also in the context of the pandemic (Andrade & Petiz Lousã, 2021). This may mean that although recognized as a typical feature of remote work, autonomy does not always function in a similar way as seen in other work contexts. In fact, it may even be that in order to cope with the high autonomy present in a remote work context, people need to have some additional personal skills (e.g., self-leadership) or traits (e.g., self-discipline) that help them to organize their work in a way that enhances their WLB. Future studies should therefore focus on the role that these kinds of personal resources (which are also acknowledged in JD-R theory: Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) may play in the relationship between job autonomy and different outcomes, for instance WLB. In addition, while this study had an eight-month time lag, more research is needed about the temporal relationships and development of quantitative workload, job autonomy and WLB over longer time periods. Comparison between remote employees and employees working in offices is also needed, especially when hybrid work models are taking place after pandemic restrictions are eased or not existing. In addition, studying only one sector, we acknowledge that some of the changes we have identified may be caused by changes happening in that particular company or sector and more research is needed in other sectors and environments.

As a final area for reflection, our results showed that having children at home was not related to WLB in our study period, despite it having been hypothesized based on earlier research (van der Lippe et al., 2006). Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic meant extraordinary life disruptions such as temporary closures of schools and daycare services, and thus added pressure on parents in way of juggling between home and job demands. At the time of the first data collection, schools and daycare facilities were just opening after being closed for two months in Finland, and this may have had a positive effect on remote employees' thoughts about their WLB. It is therefore possible that their experiences might have been different if the data would have been collected, e.g., two weeks after the restrictions started and families had not yet learned to cope with the situation. Anyhow, it seemed not to have affected their experiences of WLB during pandemic. In fact, being present at home could have contributed to a better reconciliation of home and work duties (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012), and improved the proximity to family simply by being there and being able to spend additional time in the non-work life sphere. It is also possible that the rhythm of life slowed down when parents did not need to take children to their hobbies in the evenings, or they did not need to worry about young children staying at home alone after short school days that are typical in Finland. In this study, we only asked the age and amount of children under 17 years of age living at home, and more detailed information (e.g., if children were at home during the working day) could have led to different

results. As we did not find the relationship between time saved from commuting and the number of children living at home to be statistically significant for WLB, we may conclude that time saved from commuting seems to be equally important for employees who had any number of children living in the same household, as it was for those who had none. However, it is likely that the way that the saved time is spent is different for these groups, and this provides an area of examination for future studies.

In addition, existing research has shown that during the pandemic, women (especially mothers) have used more time on childcare and household chores than men (Craig & Churchill, 2021; Giurge et al., 2021), and are more eager to return to work in offices after the pandemic than men (Caligiuri & De Cieri, 2021). Our model was adjusted for gender, and gender was not related to WLB at T1 or T2. We also performed additional multigroup analysis (see Appendix for Table 3.4) to see if the model has different direct effects on WLB at T2 based on gender, and no relationships were found. However, the associations between the age of the youngest child and the number of children and WLB at T1 were different based on gender, which means that WLB at T1 controls their effect on WLB at T2, and therefore, there are no significantly different direct effects on WLB at T2 based on gender. There could be different total effects based on gender through an indirect path from the age of child or number of children to WLB at T2 through WLB at T1, but we were interested in the direct effects observed during the measurement period between T1 and T2 as that period was during the pandemic. Based on the additional multigroup analysis, WLB at T1 was more challenging for women the more children they had, or the younger the youngest child was. For men, children did not make a difference for their WLB at T1. This finding indicates that WLB has been more challenging for mothers compared to fathers already when our first data had been collected, and the continuance of the pandemic did not change the situation in any direction. We studied remote workers' WLB in the Finnish context, a country ranking high in gender equity, which reflects a situation where family responsibilities are typically shared between parents, and men are likely to participate in daily childcare. Despite of that, WLB was more challenging for mothers than father as a starting point (T1). However, the good news is that the development of WLB was not related on gender nor parental status and we can assume that men and women both carried the possible added childcare responsibility related to the COVID-19 precautions in schools and daycare services. However, future studies should utilize longitudinal data with several data points, optimally with at least the first of them collected before the pandemic, in order to explore this phenomenon in more depth. Also, identifying possible confounders and adjusting for them in the analysis would be important to address in future studies.

In studying the topic through a gender specific lens, looking at dual-earner couples in which both partners have a possibility for remote work would be an interesting perspective. For example, research focusing on their experiences of how work and non-work demands and resources are linked to their strategies to combine work and family life with their partner (Shockley et al., 2021), and through that to their WLB, would provide novel knowledge about families in

modern working life. However, it is important to acknowledge that gender is a nonbinary spectrum, and still too often, categorizations based on a demographic variable of men and women is applied (Cameron & Stinson, 2019). Thus, the diversity of employees as well as families should be taken into account in future research concerning remote work.

As practical implications drawn from our study findings, we encourage employers to follow development for employee WLB as a measure of their well-being, especially if their work is conducted fully or partly at home. We also recommend the introduction of organizational policies and practices to protect the important time resource gained from reduced commuting (e.g., by not letting worktime flow over into the time previously used for commuting), and for supervisors to maintain regular contact with employees to monitor their general workload.

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APPENDIX

Table A3.1. All Structural Paths and Correlations Between the Variables of Interest in the Final Cross-Lagged Panel Model.

Association	β	R
WLB T1 → WLB T2	0.52**	–
WLB T1 → Autonomy T2	0.06	–
WLB T1 → Quantitative workload T2	−0.01	–
WLB T1 ←→ Quantitative workload T1	–	−0.54**
WLB T1 ←→ Autonomy T1	–	0.36**
Autonomy T1 ←→ Quantitative workload T1	–	−0.39**
Autonomy T1 → Autonomy T2	0.58**	–
Autonomy T1 → WLB T2	−0.01	–
Autonomy T1 → Quantitative workload T2	0.02	–
Quantitative workload T1 → Quantitative workload T2	0.68**	–
Quantitative workload T1 → WLB T2	−0.12*	–
Quantitative workload T1 → Autonomy T2	−0.07	–
WLB T2 ←→ Quantitative workload T2	–	−0.46**
WLB T2 ←→ Autonomy T2	–	0.27**
Autonomy T2 ←→ Quantitative workload T2	–	−0.40**
Time saved from commuting → WLB T1	0.07*	–
Time saved from commuting → WLB T2	0.06*	–
Time saved from commuting → Quantitative workload T1	−0.05	–
Time saved from commuting → Quantitative workload T2	−0.04	–
Time saved from commuting → Autonomy T1	0.06*	–
Time saved from commuting → Autonomy T2	−0.03	–
Time saved from commuting ←→ Number of children	–	0.06
Time saved from commuting ←→ Age of the youngest child	–	0.02
Number of children → WLB T1	−0.06	–
Number of children → WLB T2	0.03	–
Number of children → Quantitative workload T1	0.06	–
Number of children → Quantitative workload T2	−0.01	–
Number of children → Autonomy T1	−0.01	–
Number of children → Autonomy T2	0.11**	–
Number of children ←→ Age of the youngest child	–	0.58**
Age of the youngest child → WLB T1	0.03	–
Age of the youngest child → WLB T2	0.01	–
Age of the youngest child → Quantitative workload T1	0.03	–
Age of the youngest child → Quantitative workload T2	−0.03	–
Age of the youngest child → Autonomy T1	−0.04	–
Age of the youngest child → Autonomy T2	−0.03	–

Note. * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$. Correlations (R) are represented as (←→) and regressions (β) as (→).

Table A3.2. Post-Hoc Multigroup Analysis of All Structural Paths and Correlations Between the Variables of Interest in the Final Cross-Lagged Panel Model.

Association	β_M	R_M	β_W	R_W
WLB T1 → WLB T2	0.50**	–	0.59**	–
WLB T1 → Autonomy T2	0.01	–	0.25**	–
WLB T1 → Quantitative workload T2	0.01	–	−0.08	–
WLB T1 ←→ Quantitative workload T1	–	−0.54**	–	−0.50**
WLB T1 ←→ Autonomy T1	–	0.36**	–	0.33**
Autonomy T1 ←→ Quantitative workload T1	–	−0.39**	–	−0.39**
Autonomy T1 → Autonomy T2	0.59**	–	0.57**	–
Autonomy T1 → WLB T2	−0.02	–	0.02	–
Autonomy T1 → Quantitative workload T2	0.05	–	−0.01	–
Quantitative workload T1 → Quantitative workload T2	0.73**	–	0.59**	–
Quantitative workload T1 → WLB T2	−0.16**	–	−0.03	–
Quantitative workload T1 → Autonomy T2	−0.10	–	0.03	–
WLB T2 ←→ Quantitative workload T2	–	−0.44**	–	−0.49**
WLB T2 ←→ Autonomy T2	–	0.25**	–	0.34**
Autonomy T2 ←→ Quantitative workload T2	–	−0.38**	–	−0.47**
Time saved from commuting → WLB T1	0.08*	–	0.04	–
Time saved from commuting → WLB T2	0.10**	–	−0.09	–
Time saved from commuting → Quantitative workload T1	−0.04	–	−0.07	–
Time saved from commuting → Quantitative workload T2	−0.04	–	−0.05	–
Time saved from commuting → Autonomy T1	0.08*	–	−0.01	–
Time saved from commuting → Autonomy T2	−0.03	–	−0.07	–
Time saved from commuting ←→ Number of children	–	0.06	–	0.07
Time saved from commuting ←→ Age of the youngest child	–	0.01	–	0.10
Number of children → WLB T1	0.01	–	−0.26**	–
Number of children → WLB T2	0.02	–	0.05	–
Number of children → Quantitative workload T1	0.02	–	0.23**	–
Number of children → Quantitative workload T2	0.01	–	−0.01	–

Table A3.2. (*Continued*)

Association	β_M	R_M	β_W	R_W
Number of children → Autonomy T1	0.06	–	−0.26**	–
Number of children → Autonomy T2	0.09*	–	0.16	–
Number of children ←→ Age of the youngest child	–	0.56**	–	0.68**
Age of the youngest child → WLB T1	−0.01	–	0.23**	–
Age of the youngest child → WLB T2	−0.03	–	0.06	–
Age of the youngest child → Quantitative workload T1	0.02	–	−0.06	–
Age of the youngest child → Quantitative workload T2	0.01	–	−0.11	–
Age of the youngest child → Autonomy T1	−0.07	–	0.15*	–
Age of the youngest child → Autonomy T2	−0.04	–	0.01	–

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$. Correlations (R) are represented as (←→) and regressions (β) as (→). Subscript M represents men ($n = 845$) and W represents women ($n = 262$).

ARTICLE 2

The Resources to Balance – Exploring Remote Employees' Work-Life Balance through the Lens of Conservation of Resources

Heini Pensar & Rebekah Rousi

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how employees' work-life balance (WLB) can be supported by various resources, and what mechanisms steer the use of these resources to achieve WLB. The research is based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and a multidimensional balance construct by Casper et al. (2018). Through thematic analysis of 89 semi-structured interviews with remote workers, the study identified three key resources that support employees' ability to maintain WLB: flexible work arrangements, autonomous work, and time saving. More importantly, the results revealed that employees' use of these resources is steered by their self-efficacy, as well as experiences of trust from their supervisors. The study contributes to work-family research by providing a comprehensive understanding of the balance construct and how it can be supported in the remote working context. The findings emphasize the importance of promoting employees' agency in building WLB with enhancement of individuals' self-efficacy. It is suggested that employers should ensure that supervisors facilitate rather than hinder this process. Therefore, it is important to establish common principles for work-life support to avoid discrepancies in support based on individual supervisors' judgments and personal preferences.

Keywords:

Remote worker, work-life balance (WLB), employee self-efficacy, conservation of resources (COR), well-being

Introduction

For many, work-life balance (WLB) poses a challenge throughout their career (Babin Dhas & Karthikeyan, 2015; Chittenden & Ritchie, 2011). There are numerous reasons for this. Reasons include excessive workload, responsibility, demand (physical, cognitive, emotional), and/or even passion for progress (Brough et al., 2020; Fleetwood, 2007; Sørensen, 2017). Many also face constant negotiation of expectations, both personal and interpersonal, during various stages of their working life (Karkoulian et al., 2016). This is coupled with the need to match resources to expectations, in order to fulfill them, which demands time and prioritization. The dynamics of work-life balance morph according to changes in conditions, expectations and the resources required to address these altering factors (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Work-life balance (WLB) is a state of well-being in which individuals evaluate their own ability to combine or alternate work and home roles in alignment with the values that they attribute to those roles (Casper et al., 2018). For instance, if individuals value the role of parenting and spending time with their children, i.e., through hobbies, leisure and assisting them with their homework, and managing to achieve this without work-related interruption, this may be considered a product of balance. Equally, the ability to concentrate on work-related tasks without the necessity to engage in housework activities or childcare is another product of WLB. From a combined perspective, the will and ability to engage in both work-related and household tasks in a seamless way with the intent of freeing extra time around working hours (i.e., doing the washing or cooking during meetings) can also be viewed as a positive by-product of remote work. Thus, more resources are enabled for purely nonwork-related activities (workplace or domestic).

In recent years, WLB as a measure of well-being, has attracted increasing attention among employers. It is generally known that high WLB supports employees' work engagement (Wood et al., 2020), performance and commitment to work (Raza et al., 2018; Vaziri et al., 2020), while experienced conflicts between work and family roles have been associated with a higher number of absences (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011) and various negative health outcomes (Gisler et al., 2018). Past research has shown the effectiveness of employer-initiated benefits and work-life practices (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Casper et al., 2007; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Among them, flexible working arrangements (FWA), such as flexitime and remote working, have been seen as a key way to support the reconciliation of work and nonwork demands encountered in everyday life. However, until very recently the convenience of remote work has remained underutilized (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018).

Undeniably, the COVID-19 pandemic served to change discourse from that of remote work being a "privilege", to remote work being a "necessary", or at least recommended form of work to reduce the spread of the virus (Eurofound, 2022). The many benefits of remote working were unlocked to a much larger population of professionals than before. This in turn, triggered an expectation for such flexibility to continue even after the pandemic conditions subsided (ILO, 2022; Teevan et al., 2022). In response, organizations have established new hybrid working methods, which entail a combination of remote and onsite work (Vyas, 2022). However, there is an increasing worry among employers that prolonged remote working may bring about negative effects on employees' well-being (Charalampous et al., 2022).

Although remote working positively affects people's WLB, e.g., increasing many working parents' life quality (Sullivan, 2012), recent research has also revealed hazards in prolonged periods of remote work. Not only does the work intrude into one's home life, turning homes into daytime offices, but people seem to experience increased work burden, loneliness and lack of access to sufficient support (Como et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021)). In the long-run, these combined factors may deteriorate the individual's ability to maintain manage their work-life interface and achieve WLB (Daraba et al., 2021). At the same time, recent trends seem to favor work models that include remote working (George et al., 2022; Vyas, 2022). These contradictory discoveries encourage a more thorough investigation of the factors impacting remote workers' WLB, especially when full remote work mode is in question. A key question behind the present study pertains to why remote work is experienced positively by some and not for others.

The answer may be found by looking at the underlying mechanisms contributing to these experiences. Namely, WLB relies on resources, such as time and energy, which individuals utilize to be able to perform their everyday roles (Tejero et al., 2021). Work-family research in WLB (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021) also commonly refers to the Conservation of Resources (COR) which argues that people strive to preserve and protect their resources in order to apply them to activities of importance or priority (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Literature to date has examined the associations of various work-life programs (as a resource offered by employers) with employees' WLB, and positive influences have been observed (see, e.g. Putri and Amran 2021). Also, it is known that high workload and number of worked hours negatively impact WLB, while job autonomy, work flexibility and support at work predict higher WLB (George et al., 2022; McCrea et al., 2011; Skinner & Pocock, 2008).

Most research has focused on studying the level of conflict between responsibilities and roles, and individual's ability to reconcile work and home duties (Adisa et al.,

2021; Casper et al., 2018; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). This is furthered by research focusing on how the conflict of work and home duties can be reduced (Allen et al., 2021). In their recent work, Casper and colleagues (2018) propose that an individual's WLB builds on affective and cognitive experiences, that involve a satisfaction measure (affective), time resource (involvement) and performance measure (effectiveness), which together form global balance, i.e., experienced harmony between work and nonwork roles. Research to date has mostly focused on measuring the effect of time and various performance-related demands on WLB. Yet, there seems to be less focus on the affective experiences and their role in WLB. Although, there are indications that affective balance could be the most consequent predictor for positive outcomes of WLB, such as health and organization commitment (Wayne et al., 2021).

Overall, the WLB construct is suggested to be a complex system of resources and interrelations. There is still much to be unraveled about its mechanisms. Further exploration of the antecedents of WLB and their interrelations, especially in flexible working conditions, is needed (Haar et al., 2019; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Moreover, researchers have suggested that individuals' ability, along WLB policies and practices plays a role in achievement of WLB, but further investigation of this ability is more important than actual work-life practices (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022).

To attain a deeper understanding of the complexity behind WLB, and especially the emotional experiences tied to it, the current study explores the work-life experiences of employees, who were suddenly forced to work from home. These employees lost access to vital resources needed for their everyday work. In particular, the study focuses on exploring remote working in its mandatory context, since people who do not work remotely by choice, may lack sufficient resources to maintain a positive WLB (Wang et al., 2021).

The present study makes a contribution to work-family literature by being the first to use the framework of Casper and colleagues (2018) to qualitatively explore WLB and extend this framework into the remote work context. Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as a basis, the study aims to understand how employees' affective and cognitive balance is supported or hindered in light of the availability or lack of resources. This research provides insights into the mechanisms that support individuals' WLB. The paper addresses two research questions: 1) What factors influence employees' perceptions of their work-life balance in remote working?; and 2) How can employees' work-life balance be supported via resources?

In the following chapter, the concept of WLB will be presented, and the principles of the COR theory relevant to the current study will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the existing knowledge on factors that influence employees' WLB in the remote context.

The concept of work-life balance (WLB)

WLB (even called work-nonwork or work-family balance) means employees' subjective perception of how successfully work and nonwork roles are managed in accordance with their life values and priorities (Casper et al., 2018; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Haar, 2013; Wayne et al., 2021). The concept originally evolved from role theories, and the idea of work and family inter-role conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77), which later came to include the idea of positive synergies and enrichment between roles in the various domains (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). A role conflict on its own is defined as, the "simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (Kahn et al. 1964, p. 19). An inter-role conflict describes how pressures from one organizational membership (work, family or otherwise) conflict with a membership of another. This can be understood in cases where time spent with family shortens or impedes time spent at work and vice versa (Kopelman, Greenhaus, and Connolly, 1983).

The idea of a balance was drawn from role balance theories and first defined as work-family balance (Greenhaus et al., 2003), which evaluated the compatibility of home and family roles to an individual's life priorities. Understood from the perspective of person-environment fit (Voydanoff, 2005), work-family balance can be considered an assessment of the compatibility of an individual's home and family resources to the demands of different roles. Considering that a great portion of peoples' lives outside work revolves around family and family-related issues, the concept has been further broadened to apply the family component to everything outside work (Brough et al., 2014; Haar et al., 2014). A recent meta-analysis by Casper and colleagues (2018) introduced a new perspective on WLB.This perspective includes a concept known as global balance, which refers to the experience of harmony between work and non-work roles. Global balance also includes a multidimensional view, consisting of two cognitive experiences: people's evaluation of their effectiveness and involvement; and their affective experiences in the roles they value. Casper et al. (2018) define WLB as:

> *Employees' evaluation of the favorability of their combination of work and nonwork roles, arising from the degree to which their affective experiences and their perceived involvement and effectiveness in work and nonwork roles are commensurate with the value they attach to these roles.*

Wayne, Vaziri, and Casper (2021) later developed measures for the three dimensions of the balance construct, and validated their items. Based on this validation, the dimensions can be described as follows. The *effectiveness balance* alludes to perceived performance and success in the valued roles. For example, this may be the level of quality that an individual feels they are performing at, or how effectively they have been able to combine their most important work and nonwork roles. *Involvement balance* indicates the level of devotion to the roles that people consider to be the most important. This refers to, for example, the extent to which individuals feel they can allocate time and attention to roles that they value. *Affective balance* refers to the emotions connected to roles that are most important to people, for example, how happy, contented, and satisfied they are in these roles.

By adopting the framework of Casper and colleagues (2018), this study investigates remote workers' subjective work-life experiences, taking into account both cognitive (e.g. time allocation in roles, role performance) and affective aspects (e.g. contentment in roles). This approach allows for an understanding of the resources that enhance specific experiences. It is assumed that different resources will have varying effects on different dimensions of WLB. In addition, Casper and peers' (2018) balance construct recognizes individuals' priorities as the basis for balance, thus considering their life priorities as well.

Work-life balance and Conservation of Resources (COR) model

The COR model (Hobfoll 1989) is commonly used to explain work and family life dynamics (Casper et al., 2018; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). COR has also been used in more recent studies that have studied the wellbeing of remote workers during the COVID-19 pandemic context (Chong et al., 2020; Fukumura et al., 2021). The concept of resource can be defined as a supply, means or support to enable actions in knowledge and enhance the quality of human life (MerriamWebster, 2022). In other words, resources are enablers that maintain the equilibrium of process flow and quality (standard or degree of satisfaction) within the course of daily life and operations. Thus, COR provides an adequate basis for understanding the types of resources individuals utilize, for example in their work and family lives (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

According to the COR model (Hobfoll, 1989; 2018) resources can take many forms, including personal resources such as skills and traits, objects such as houses and tools for work, conditions like employment and marriage, energy resources like money and time, as well as social resources (Hobfoll & Freedy 1990; Wayne, 2007) such as loyalty and intimacy. As the theory suggests, resources are typically interconnected and rarely exist in isolation. This is why the theory refers to these clus-

ters of resources as "*resource caravans*". Within these caravans, resources are often interconnected. Gaining one resource can lead to the acquisition of other resources, while losing one resource can lead to the loss of others. This concept is known in the theory as "*gain* and *loss spirals*". Resources caravans are also influenced by their external circumstances, which in turn, impact individuals' ability to acquire and maintain resources. These circumstances, referred to as "*caravan passageways*", are maintained by other people, and in a work-life context they could be shaped by work culture or family circumstances. At their best, the passageways contribute to the individual's conservation of resources. However, passageways may also be harmful, and may serve as a source of resource loss.

When examining resources, it is important to understand these structures. In particular, in stressful situations, such as changes or unforeseen events, available resources become important. This is because they help people adapt to new circumstances by creating space, support, flexibility, and safety (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Wayne et al., 2007). According to the COR principles, individuals with sufficient personal resources and work-life support are more likely to achieve positive work and life outcomes (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Hobfoll and Freedy (1990) also posit that an individual's social resources, such as the work-life support, and personal resources are intertwined, and that both of these resources are influenced by the environment in which the individual operates.

In the current study, the COR-model is not only utilized as a basis for identifying resources that enhance WLB, but more importantly, for understanding those pathways that lead to these resources. Therefore, this study seeks to explain the circumstances that strengthen or weaken access and utilization of the resources that remote workers need for maintenance of WLB.

Work-life balance and remote working

Much of the work-family literature has focused on examining the impact of various work-life policies, including flexible work arrangements such as remote working, flexitime, and reduced work hours, on WLB or work-family balance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Singh et al., 2022; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Remote working, in turn, has been considered a resource that can improve employees' ability to reconcile their work and nonwork duties, and thus WLB (Maruyama et al., 2009; Maruyama and Tietze 2012; Kossek and Lautsch 2018). In addition, remote working has been seen as beneficial because it increases job autonomy (Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021), creating time savings from reduced work commuting (Bai et al., 2021). However, with the increase in the amount of research on remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing understanding of WLB in the con-

text of extensive and prolonged remote work. Recent studies indicate that employees may experience negative consequences and potential decline in their WLB when engaged in excessive remote work (Galanti et al., 2021).

Findings from recently published research have reinforced some of these indications of the disadvantageous consequences of remote working (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Some reasons why remote working may jeopardize one's WLB can be inferred based on earlier findings related to changes in resources that influence the construct of WLB. One obvious observation is the loss of office-based support (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Proficiency in technology and its usage are essential for remote workers. Those who lack these skills may experience isolation (Prasad, 2020), which can further reduce their access to peer support. During the pandemic, organizational workers were observed to lose access to co-worker support, exacerbating the issue (Kniffin et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). In addition to support, remote workers may also miss out on enjoyable moments with colleagues, which can further contribute to negative experiences (Prasad et al., 2023).

Resource constraints are not limited to work, but can also accumulate in the home sphere. Remote workers who are present in the home may face greater expectations from household members to engage in household chores and childcare (Allen et al., 2015). This was specifically the case in the COVID-19 context, when many families experienced reduced external childcare support as schools and daycare centers were occasionally closed down. Thus, families reported an increased burden (Lonska et al., 2021). Such resource losses can force individuals to prioritize differently between the two life spheres, impacting WLB (Cho et al., 2022; Syrek et al., 2022).

Recently published literature in the context of intensive remote working, equally demonstrates the important benefits of this mode of working. A large study of European remote workers (n=5748) by Ipsen and associates (2021) observed significant improvements in WLB, control over work, and perceived efficiency. However, the study did not reveal the specific mechanisms that had led to such improvements. Fukumura and peers (2021), in turn, conducted two open-ended surveys (N=648, N=366), showing that remote workers gain resources from increasing flexibility in scheduling work and from the time saved through reduced commuting. These factors seemed to contribute to productivity, work satisfaction, and WLB. Similarly, it was demonstrated that remote workers experienced challenges within their intersections of work and home life. Due to blurred boundaries and difficulties in switching off from work, participants reported having spent increasing amounts of time on work-related tasks. In contrast, in a multiwave study Allen

and colleagues (2021) showed that home-working employees (N=155) achieve a better WLB through a sufficient segmentation of work and home domains, including a dedicated office space within the home. In a mixed-method study, Wang and colleagues (2021) further indicated that with the help of social support, job autonomy, and self-discipline, employees are more likely to achieve both a sense of effectiveness in remote working, and better WLB. Another study by Cho and peers (2022), involved a sample of voluntary caregivers of elderly adults, who volunteered outside of paid working hours during the COVID-19 emergency – a context slightly different to the current study. However, they introduce a concept of work-family balance self-efficacy (i.e. the belief in our skills to balance work and non-work roles). In their study, Cho et al. demonstrated volunteer work's positive connection with WLB. These findings emphasized the individual's own ability to allocate time in their chosen way and its contribution to achieving desired balance. Furthermore, Chu et al. (2021) found that working from home increases time spent with family, which thus enhances the bonds experienced between parents and children. Moreover, there is research published during the time of the pandemic, showing that during this period more attention was placed on family support due to pressures induced by the state of emergency. This was compounded by increased attention placed on mental health matters (Al Dhaheri et al., 2021).

Acknowledging the complexity of employees' work-life experiences, the current study aims to explore the structure of resource caravans that contribute to WLB among remote workers. Here, the authors identify the mechanisms that are significant in the formation of WLB in the specific context of forced remote work, in which employees are recommended to work from home, rather than using remote work as a way to enhance their own life quality (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Once again, this approach emphasizes the heterogeneity and inequality of employees who are obliged to work from home, rather than choose to work from home.

Antecedents of Work-life balance

While work-life research has focused on understanding the effect of various work-life policies and work arrangements on WLB (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021), there is still limited knowledge about the resources and their interrelations that support people's perceptions of WLB (Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020).When looking at the hindrances of WLB, it is currently known that WLB is negatively influenced by job and family stressors, quantitative workload, long working hours, work overload, and role ambiguity (Mäkelä et al., 2023; Karani et al., 2022). An increase in demand on one life domain may be patched with resources from the other domain, causing a sense of imbalance (Khateeb, 2021). For instance, Haar and Brougham (2020) used the COR model to examine the resource losses caused

by work demands. Their study found that higher work demands, specifically in terms of working hours, resulted in a loss of energy, which had a negative effect on WLB.

The available literature has found several job resources to have positive effect on WLB, such as job flexibility in terms of timing and work location (Hill et al., 2001; Irawanto et al., 2021). In addition, some studies have found job autonomy to predict WLB (Haar and Brougham 2020; Haar et al. 2019), there is also evidence that autonomous work may not predict WLB in the remote work context, and in fact, remote working can reduce autonomy (Mäkelä et al, 2023). Similarly, social support from co-workers (Ferguson et al., 2012; Uddin et al., 2021) improves the facilitation of WLB. Supervisor support regarding employee family demands has also been positively related to WLB (Allen, 2012; Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005). When supervisors care about employees' family needs, employees can better manage their work-home interface (Rondi et al., 2022), and the supervisor may also encourage (or discourage) the usage of various work-life practices (Fiksenbaum, 2014). In the home domain, it is the various family resources, such as family support (Russo et al., 2016) and spouse support (Ferguson et al., 2012), that enhance WLB (Haar et al. 2019; Russo et al., 2016; Wan et al. 2022).

Research has also highlighted the importance of personal resources in the development of WLB. Proactive personality (Aryee et al., 2005), psychological capital, such as work-family self-efficacy (Siu, 2013; Chan et al., 2016), and the individual's ability to establish sufficient role boundaries (Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Matthews et al., 2010) have been identified as factors that can help sustain WLB. Self-efficacy, which as a personal resource, refers to one's beliefs in their ability to achieve specific goals or outcomes (Bandura, 1977), has been found to moderate the positive impact of autonomy on WLB (Badri & Panatik, 2020). It is further suggested that the relationship between WLB and its antecedents is not straight forward. Rather, there are complex mechanisms at play and the resources that influence WLB are likely to be interconnected (Haar et al., 2019; Haar & Brougham, 2020).

Despite findings of previous studies, only limited research has examined the antecedents of WLB and their interrelations (Haar and Brougham 2020; Fan et al., 2021; Wan et al. 2022). As a result, there is a lack of knowledge regarding how people shape their decisions on utilization of available support (Fan et al., 2021). The current study utilizes a qualitative approach to study employee experiences of resource availability and usage during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this approach was to identify the possible connections between different resources, enabling deeper insight into antecedents and how they operate and exist

according to context and other related factors. From the perspective of COR-model, the current study not only investigates the structure of the resource caravan, i.e., what resources are required for achieving work-life balance in remote work, but also examines the links between these resources and the social environment, or the passageway, that catalyzes their use. The rationale of this approach in light of a relatively large qualitative sample size is to generate a scientific contribution that builds on earlier work via prevailing societal conditions. Through observing patterns within the qualitative sample, there are more certainties for developing an advanced COR-related model that can be validated in future studies.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was deployed to conceptualize the subjective experiences of remote workers (Silverman, 2013). As we base our work on the previously described theoretical framework of WLB and COR-theory, we take a deductive approach (pp. 226) to interpret the collected data. A thematic analysis was carried out in six stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which are described below. Empirical reporting begins with a description of the study's participants.

Participants

In total, 89 remote working employees participated in the interviews from six large- sized corporations (Telecommunications, Technology Industry, Information Technology, Insurance and Services) with >1000 employees. Participants were recruited using random purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). Only employees who worked remotely were invited to participate in the interviews. The large sample was gathered to ensure that there was a sufficient number of remote workers from different professions, industries, and life situations. Companies designated a single point of contact who internally communicated the opportunity to participate in the interviews. Team leaders provided a list of team members, and invitations to participate in the interviews were sent randomly until at least three people from each team had agreed to participate. The participants typically worked in sales and marketing, product development, service delivery and customer support, as well as internal service organizations. Most participants lived in Finland at the time of the interviews, but two lived elsewhere in Europe.

The national recommendation for remote working took place in March 2020, and thus, mandatory remote working had been undertaken for some months by the time of the interviews. All of the participants were primarily working from home. The average age of the participants was 41.64 (range 23-60). Over half of the participants (62.9%) were women, and nearly half (48.3%) had children under 18 years of age living in the same household. Approximately one-third of them

(34.8%) were supervisors. The majority (70,7%) had some previous experience of remote working, but only a small portion (5,6%) were principally working remotely before the pandemic. Nearly one-fifth of the participants (17,9%) had not worked remotely before the pandemic. A summary of the participants' demographics is provided in Table 1, and the detailed data is provided in appendix 1.

Table 1: Demographics according to gender, age, family situation & remote work experience

	All	Men	Women
Number of participants	89	33	56
Lowest age	23	25	23
Highest age	60	60	60
Mean age	41,89	42,75	41,34
Live with minor children	44	18	26
Live alone	18	3	15
Represents supervisor in the interview	31	9	22
Working primarily remotely before	5	3	2
Working occasionally remotely before	67	21	46
No previous experience in working remotely	16	8	8

Data collection

A team of six researchers conducted 89 one-to-one interviews via audio or video conferencing, from October to December 2020. The duration of the interviews varied between 40 and 90 minutes. All interviews were semi-structured based on preformulated interview guides (Kallio et al., 2016). This helped the interviewers to consistently ask the same questions in the same manner, while providing room for spontaneous dialogue adjusted to the situation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).The interview questions were formed based on Casper et al.'s (2018) dimensions of the WLB construct. Following this framework, the questions were designed to take into account the individual's life priorities and create an understanding of what is important to the respective interviewees. As the guide was prepared, each of its questions was reviewed and validated by the research team and selected in the interview guide according to its purpose and contribution (Galletta, 2019). The formation of the questions aimed towards openness. The questions were designed to prompt the respondents to describe or list things, to encourage interactiveness. For instance, instead of directly asking about performance, dedication, and satisfaction in their important roles (as per Caspers' dimensions), the interviewees were asked to describe their experiences of WLB and how they maintained it in the context of remote work. The interview guide was tested in advance through three pilot interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). As a result, some questions and their order were adjusted. It was noticed that by asking participants to describe their work and

working environment in general within a typical remote workday, richer data was produced.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked to tell their age, role, and living situation. The interviews were initiated with generic questions about the employee's remote working environment and equipment. Thereafter, participants were asked to describe what life domains they most valued, and what a good balance between the work and home domains meant to them. They were then requested to evaluate how satisfied they were with their own WLB, and to describe what aspects had supported and hindered their balance in remote working in particular. Participants were also asked an aspirational question regarding the kinds of additional support they would have needed in order to maintain balance while working from home.

The interviews were recorded with the participant's consent and pseudonymized when transcribed verbatim. The data was stored on an encrypted shared drive only accessible to three members of the research team.

Data analysis

The thematic data analysis was carried out in six stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, familiarization took place. To build a generic understanding of remote workers' work-life experiences, the main author together with a research assistant studied 25 of the transcribed narratives. The findings were then compared. As a result, initial research findings were documented in the form of a report. Second, coding was carried out. As the early findings were discussed, initial code labels emerged, and coding instructions were constructed. All 89 transcripts were reviewed equally and coded in NVivo by the first author. Third, the themes were searched. The codes were assembled within predetermined categories, drawn from the WLB definition by Casper et al. (2018) and for resources according to COR. Fourth, the themes were reviewed. The coded data in each of the themes was iteratively reviewed by the authors. The second author independently coded three interviews, and the findings of the two authors were compared. The coded data was tested by a logic of exclusion from other themes and categories, and to eliminate any double-entries of data in several themes. A final review was conducted to confirm that no additional themes were found. Fifth, defining and naming the themes took place. Once the codes in each category were reviewed, the naming of themes could be finalized. In the final phase of the analysis, a report was assembled. The authors discussed the results and considered how those corresponded with the literature (Burnard, 1991; Morse & Richards, 2002). The findings were assembled in a report, which is presented in the next chapter.

Findings

The current study investigated the factors contributing to remote workers' WLB and how the balance may be supported with access to and protection of resources. With the help of the WLB construct by Casper and colleagues (2018) we analyzed the remote worker's balance experiences in affective, effective, and involvement perspectives. Additionally, basing the work on the COR-principles, we identified the key resources that contribute to the remote worker's balance experience, and the resources that steer utilization of the key resources, which may trigger spirals of losses or gains of resources.

Remote worker's work-life balance

The extensive remote working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way employees view and value their WLB. Most participants felt that the possibility of working remotely had increased their own influence over WLB. Yet, working from home also challenged their ability to maintain WLB because of the constant spill-over of work into the home domain. Unlike previously, many employees found themselves working late hours, even at weekends, and skipping necessary breaks during the daytime. Although theoretically there was a possibility to take longer breaks during the day, some participants did not utilize it. On the other hand, there were participants for whom remote working had only caused positive consequences on their well-being and WLB. These participants had benefited from the remote working arrangements compared to earlier onsite work modes.

Experiences of involvement and effectiveness in important roles

The perceptions of involvement in the work domain divided the participants. Some expressed negative experiences from losing control over the working hours due to the constant technological presence at home. This resulted in spending an increased amount of time and effort on work, at the cost of nonwork time. This was exacerbated by an emerging work culture characterized by excessive amounts of meetings and exhaustive working styles. It was also accompanied by a reduction in spontaneous social interactions between co-workers, which led to a sense of imbalance in being sufficiently involved at work on a social level. On the other hand, some participants felt that remote working allowed them to regulate their involvement in work because they could decide when to respond to digital correspondence, and when not to be interrupted. This led to a positive experience of effectiveness at work, as uninterrupted remote workers could use their working time more efficiently and increase their productivity. For some, this freed up time and space for involvement in the nonwork domain, while others took on more work.

In the nonwork domain, remote working has contributed to highly positive experiences of involvement. Working from home meant increasing involvement and success in the nonwork related roles*: "I can follow my sons' teenage life, and I can have control over things when I am at home*" (Erin, 47, Group Manager, 30.10.2020 9:00 EET), and "*...I am a much more present mother now...*" (Tina, 41, Service Manager, 10.11.2020 13:00 EET). Thus, working from home offered parents the possibility to dedicate more time to children, and even non-parents to spend more time with their close ones. For instance, a father describes that "*...when there is not a meeting going on, I can at times briefly discuss with my spouse or pamper my kids ... I really enjoy being with my spouse and children "* (Tom, 31, Development Manager, 11.11.2020 15:00 EET). Remote work has enabled ways of spending time with family, which have previously been impossible or unheard of for many of the participants: "*I have now twice spent a week in my 86-year old mother's company, and could work from there...She knows there is someone present with her*" (Ellen, 36, Service Specialist, 6.11.2020 9:00 EET).

Although working from home did not necessarily mean shorter working days. For some it meant spending the time saved from commuting on being present at home. This increased proximity to family members. This context is at least partly specific to COVID-19 as some families were forced to increase their involvement in family activities, such as school help and cooking, while schools and daycare centers were closed. There seemed however, to be an attitude of "*just pulling through*" due to the temporary nature of the situation. However, the situation had an interesting effect. Some participants described that the pandemic had forced them to rethink their own values. Being forced to spend increasing amounts of time with family while being prevented from work travel, and having to reduce normal work pace had made some participants value nonwork time more than before. Their life priorities had changed. Thus, the perceptions of involvement in the nonwork domain had improved in two ways. On the one hand, remote working released resources that helped participants control their time and dedicate it towards activities they valued. On the other hand, a higher level of dedication to the nonwork domain also potentially triggered a higher valuation of this domain. Thus, the nonwork domain increased in perceived value alongside extra investment of time by the participants. In this instance, a participant describes a personal re-evaluation which may have not taken place without the extraordinary circumstances: *"First with the Corona, I noticed how tired I was, it stopped me and got me to think more of the values"* (Demi, 58, Service Director, 30.10.2020 13:00 EET). Another participant describes the result of such re-evaluation: *"My work plays a smaller role – in a good way - compared to my other life, it used to be the other way around"* (Mary,

43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET). This kind of re-evaluation has led to re-allocation of time:

> *"Somehow, because of the Corona-time, and this remote working, I have understood, and remembered, to invest in the free time, friends, family and my private time … you realize that the busy everyday life is really stressful."*
>
> (Amy, 30, Order Handling Specialist, 13.10.2020 10:00 EET)

Apart from the involvement experiences, the participants also expressed an enhanced sense of effectiveness. They described multitasking during the workday, doing household chores in breaks or while attending an audio meeting, meant that tasks did not pile up for the evening: *"Straight away when I finish work, I can drive kids, I can prepare the evening meal at lunchtime and it's ready to eat after work. Things run smoother"* (Hannah, 45, Group Manager, 23.10.2020 15:00 EET). Although stopping work at the end of the day proved a challenge for many, the participants seemed to accept it in exchange for spending the work breaks on nonwork chores, and thus, perceived their work and life were in balance.

Affective experiences in important roles

On the affective note, the participants consistently described that a sense of balance for them meant a positive feeling or mood at the start of the workday. This entailed that they did not feel bad about returning to work on Mondays. It also meant that they could complete a work day with an energized feeling and good conscience. As one participant describes, they have achieved a balance when "… *I don't feel that I have to use all of my resources within the eight hours that I work, but I feel glad and have energy even for life outside of work"* (Vera, 48, Sales Agent, 9.11.2020 11:00 EET).

In turn, a sense of imbalance meant that work-related issues would keep bothering one's mind during nonworking hours. It even imposed on sleep. The idea of a beneficial balance seemed to be connected to the absence of guilt and emotional burden. The participants could feel guilty about being away from their work stations, and having colleagues or the manager wonder if they were working at all. They also worried that co-workers believed that they were taking care of home duties during traditional working hours. Emotional burden would keep spilling over to the home domain if conflicts and stress were not sufficiently solved at work. Some participants admitted that unlike before, in remote working without the support of colleagues around, they would be ruminating about work to their spouses.

Positive affect linked to work was generated through a sense of security, and not having to worry if a nonwork issue (usually family issue) would interrupt their day, meaning a temporary break from work. Some participants explained that having a support network at work meant that they would be defended if such a situation would happen. *"We are like one big family, if I drop the ball I can trust my colleagues will pick it up."* (Anette, 36, Application Specialist, 10.10.2020 10:00 EET). Again, the employee could shift their attention to nonwork issues without additional stress and guilt. The positive affect connected to WLB seemed to depend on the employee's ability to decide how they wanted to deliver their own work. For some of the participants, remote working had not been a possibility before the pandemic. This was due to corporate principles, and lack of trust for instance, from leadership.

The participants also discussed the effect of sleep, rest and recovery from work on their sense of balance. The balance experience was often described as being sufficiently recovered from work. There were notions that work had not consumed all their resources, leaving more for the spare time activities.

> *For me, a good work-life balance means I can recover well after a busy day and enjoy activities that help me relax. Next morning, I feel it's pleasant to start the workday, I have energy and feel rested. That's when I feel I've succeeded in leading myself in both spheres of life.*
>
> (Laura, 53 years, Group Manager, 27.10.2020 15:00 EET)

Small things enhancing this recovery (e.g., sitting by the window, or more time for sleep) were also reported to have enhanced the overall positive affect in both life domains, including the overall well-being of employees: "*I've noticed that [remote working] has reduced my pulse and taken away my stress reactions. I feel much healthier*." (Britney, 49, Specialist, 18.11.2020 13:00 EET).

These positive affective experiences connected to remote working were enforced by feedback from family members who showed satisfaction with the participants' increased presence and involvement at home:*"Being at home more often can be really beneficial. My wife, who works in a shop and has several weekdays off, likes it when I'm home, even if I'm working"* (Gary, 52, Sales Manager). This also appeared to be a positive factor that evoked pleasant emotions in the individuals themselves:*"A big motivator for me is the fact that I can be present for my family during my work days. I enjoy being with my spouse and children"* (Tom, 31, Development Manager, 11.11.2020 15:00 EET).

Resource changes connected to remote worker's work-life balance

In order to understand the distinct work-life experiences of remote workers, it seemed necessary to thoroughly identify and examine the resources that potentially could determine these experiences. Three key resources: flexible working, job autonomy, and time saving from commute travel, emerged as important for WLB. Two more resources: work space, and social support, had been fundamentally changed in the remote context. Yet, these changes were not considered as meaningful for the WLB experiences. The changes in resources and their connection to WLB is briefly explained below.

Flexible working (condition resource)

The transfer to remote working itself had caused a major change in the participants' working conditions. The recommendations from the government had forced employers to change their policies for remote working, which in many cases had been limited earlier to special roles and exceptional situations only. Consequently, remote working introduced a culture that allowed employees to work regardless of place, and in many cases the flexibility had been extended to the time dimension as well. These changes were considered fundamental to the employee's ability to combine home and work priorities, and had improved their experiences of effectiveness. The participants discussed that the conditional changes were particularly helpful for families who could more successfully handle their childcare responsibilities. The new conditions enabled employees to not only work from home but also from other places, and invest more time on leisure and recovery. As explained by a participant, such flexibility contributed to "*…freedom! You can work anywhere. If you have a weekend trip planned, or you are going to the summer cottage, you can leave two days earlier if only the communication works there*" (John, 31, Group Manager, 22.10.2020 13:00 EET). Not only the nonwork sphere was enhanced by the flexibility, but some of the participants explained that by not being bound to time, they could choose to work at times that best suited them. This was seen to enhance their performance: "*I've been able to adjust working to my own rhythms. I am a morning person, and I've always been most productive in the morning*" (Mary, 43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET).

Autonomous work (energy resource)

Remote working physically separates the employee from the workplace and the work society connected to it. This limited supervisor control in relation to the work and conditions of employees, which in turn imposed job autonomy. The participants explained that their work had become much more autonomous because of this separation: "*I was able to do it in a totally different way, like building the*

day, I now can take much longer breaks at work." (Susanna, 49, Accountor, 10.12.2020 13:00 EET). The increased autonomy also extended into task prioritization, "*I can decide for myself whether I will participate in something [meetings etc.] and it feels important for me.*" (Anneli, 54, Team Manager, 26.10.2020 10:00 EET). The autonomy not only admitted prioritizing and arranging work activities, but also enabled a more comprehensive arrangement of work and nonwork items in order to adapt to needs: "*I have got free hands to act on the job. I can take my vacation when I want, and in as many periods I want, and since we don't have formal work-time monitoring, I can start later, or at six o'clock in the morning*" (Gary, 50, Sales Manager, 14.10.2020 13:00 EET).

This development helped employees more effectively reconcile home and work duties. One participant explained that if he needs to take children somewhere or look after the children for a while during office hours: *"No one is monitoring if I am at my computer. It's enough that I do my job. My supervisor has told me it doesn't matter if I use 10 hours or one hour a day, just if I do my job"* (Matt, 31, Operational Excellence Manager, 12.10.2020 15:00 EET). Participants who particularly felt they enjoyed high job autonomy, also felt they could organize work in a way that improved their performance at work:

> *"I feel like I can succeed [in those life domains which I consider important] now that we are remote and I can do things arbitrarily or within the limits that have been given to me and I can utilize [my freedom] better."*
>
> (Mary, 43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET)

Time saving (energy resource)

One common factor was recognized by all participants, and this related to the fact that they had all stopped commuting to work since the transfer to the extensive remote working. For some, it also included reduced work-related travel. Participants mentioned that time was similarly saved from the pressure of getting properly dressed and ready for work, as exemplified in the below excerpt:

> *"I have quite a short commute to work, and I never considered its impact on my time until I realized how much time it takes to get ready for work, commute to and from the office, and settle back into home life. It can feel like being in a constant cycle."*
>
> (Amy, 30, Order Handling Specialist, 13.10.2020 10:00 EET)

Apparent differences emerged however, in how employees chose to utilize the time saved. Some felt that they gained an extra hour to help them perform at work, or felt they were expected to attend meetings or work correspondence during the time usually spent commuting. Other participants explained that they allocated the saved time on themselves, in leisure activities, rest or even sleep – "*take all advantages and use the saved time all to myself*" (Mary, 43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET). They felt that the time saving significantly improved their WLB, especially if they were able to use the gained resource on activities they desired and valued. This comes across in the following citation:

> *"I feel that [remote working] has given me energy and possibility to succeed with my goals because it saves time, and there is also more time to use for leisure, when the commuting does not happen. I have more peace to do what I am currently doing, and I can focus better."*
>
> (Laura, 53, Group Manager, 27.10.2020 15:00 EET)

Space (object resource)

While working from home, the participants had to allocate some of their domestic space for working. Many had assembled a permanent workstation at home, partly at their own cost. Depending on the space and equipment available, the participants reported various consequences, mainly poor ergonomics or lack of domestic space. Participants with the possibility to arrange a separate work room or hide work-related devices at nonwork time, claimed that such physical separation helped them to psychologically detach from work. This hindered their engagement in work-related thoughts during nonwork time: "*I use my son's room. He is not at home, he comes home for the weekend. So, I shut down the equipment and leave it here. I don't return here in the evening*" (Samuel, 58, Senior Design Engineer, 21.10.2020 10:00 EET). However, even if some participants felt they had lost some of the home space for working, while also losing access to office-based equipment, they described no substantial impact on their sense of WLB.

Social support (social resource)

Most participants felt the type of social contact with co-workers leading to exchange of support, had reduced since the transfer to remote working. The perceptions of the support received from supervisors varied among the participants from no change in relation to earlier times, to major improvements, or weakened support. The supervisor's support had changed in form, and trust emerged as the most important form of support. The role of family support had also taken a turn. Some felt their family relations, for instance the relationship with a spouse, had improved because of the increased time spent with each other. At other times, the

spouse was used as a place to offload the emotional burden of work. They were even targets for work rumination.

Remote worker's self-efficacy as a key link in the resource caravan

While all the resource changes that could potentially contribute to one's WLB (time saving, flexible working, job autonomy) were commonly reported, not everyone felt they utilized these possibilities. Nor did all participants perceive that they had achieved similar gains in WLB. For many, remote working had meant a new way of working. With reduced boundaries between the work and home domain, they felt confused and lacked sufficient methods to control their work involvement: *It is difficult to cut off my work day, in the beginning I didn't succeed at all. I have found no solution … I basically work all the time* (Anne, 36, Service Coordinator, 27.11.2020 11:00 EET).

In time, some of the participants had developed skills (routines and self-control) to more effectively balance their involvement in their home and work roles according to their desire and personal priorities. This strengthened the remote worker's self-efficacy (i.e. ability and courage) to steer their own WLB. They would develop new ways to utilize the work flexibility, for instance, by taking a longer break to exercise or even attend meetings while walking. From feeling as if work was taking over their homes and homelife, they developed ways to control work, and prioritize their own needs.

> *"In the beginning I worked long days. It was a big change and required some adjusting, it was easy taking the PC from my bag and just fix something in the evening. Then I thought I can't go on like this. I need to start controlling it. I need to shut down and start my freetime… Now I don't feel like I am forced to work, but I can use the flexibility. I can do a shorter day tomorrow. I can plan my day according to deadlines but I am able to take time off with a good conscience if I've completed the stuff I planned for today. I can just shut down the PC with a good conscience, thanks to remote working."*
>
> (Amy, 30, Order Handling Specialist, 13.10.2020 10:00 EET)

Individuals who possessed or had developed self-efficacy seemed to more effectively utilize necessary resources in order to navigate their balance in the new remote context. Those resources (e.g., flexibility) would then contribute to more productive working and efficient reconciliation of daily duties. This resulted in additional time saving, which could be used in favor of the desired WLB, for instance on leisure activities. In other words, together with the new resources (e.g., autonomy) given to in the remote context, self-efficacy formed a resource caravan. When

utilizing the accessible resources effectively, even more resources (additional time saving, more time for resting and thus more energy created) could be generated.

Participants who lacked self-efficacy, on the contrary, tended to feel guilt about taking a break from work instead of practicing healthy life habits: "*I suffer from bad conscience. If I am offline in Teams, and away a while, to fill the washing machine, I get the feeling that I need to quickly go back to the laptop, to show that I really am at work - and working*" (Mary, 43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET). They usually admitted that it was themselves to blame for not utilizing the possibilities available to them: "*Remote working would have given a possibility [to prioritize important life areas], I haven't necessarily utilized them or the possibility [to utilize them]*" (Anne, 36, Service Coordinator, 27.11.2020 11:00 EET). One participant explained their work morale and the feeling of liability that drove him to work during nonwork time. This was coupled by his admittance of a lack of self-regulation:

> "*You could achieve a better balance if you knew how to control the balance yourself. I know what I should do, I should plan my free time weeks in advance, but this is my weakness and I fail to do it. For instance, if we have a layoff day [without pay] and I, by all means, should take the day off, when the day comes, my entrepreneur mentality strikes through, and I feel liable to attend important meetings anyway. This is partly because of my attitude, and I admit it is a personal weakness.*"
>
> (Robert, 45, Trainer, 03.11.2020 15:00 EET)

This group of participants also claimed they tended to take on a heavy workload and felt that it was unbearable. They often needed their supervisor's help in prioritization of work tasks, while lacking the needed efficacy to limit their own resource consumption, which would eventually lead to depleted resources. Thus, with lack or loss of personal resources, in this case self-efficacy, the individual would effectively fail to optimally utilize available resources. If flexible working and time saved from commuting was used undesirably by increasing working hours, the situation was likely to be experienced as loss of resource (time, energy) in the home sphere and lost opportunity to sufficiently recover from work. Thus, individuals would face a potential loss spiral if they failed to develop self-efficacy.

The role of supervisor trust on employee as a caravan passage in the remote work context

As it seemed, remote working had unlocked many positive resources that potentially could enhance the employee's WLB. With the support of self-efficacy, the individuals had developed ways to utilize new conditions and energy resources in

order to balance work and life in the new situation. However, there seemed to be one fundamental mechanism that either strengthened this self-efficacy or hindered how employees utilized the relevant resources, namely the perceived trust of the supervisor.

The participants described the role of the supervisor's trust as being a crucial enabler of work flexibility and job autonomy: "*[My] supervisor plays a very big part [in achieving maintaining the balance], that he trusts you and let you do your thing*" (Erin, 47, Group Manager, 30.10.2020 9:00 EET). It appears that there is a mutual understanding of where the limits lie as long as work is completed:

> "*The supervisor makes [my work-life balance] possible and understands I've got other life than just work, I have children too. She permits working regardless of time, as long as I stick to the agreed amount of work. I can start early, and maybe someone else likes to work late, she supports that*."
>
> (Mary, 43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET)

Such trust came as a new experience for many of the participants. Many explained that remote working had previously been limited, if allowed at all: "*I have always liked working remotely, but my supervisor… He did not understand what remote working was. Luckily, that has now changed*" (Mary, 43, Order Handling Specialist, 28.10.2020 09:00 EET). Instead, remote workers had been pressured to justify their work results achieved at home, and to work excessively hard to prove these results.

The experience of trust was recognized in various ways, such as the absence of monitoring and being given free hands. In many cases trust was also expressed and reinforced verbally by the supervisor: "*My balance has been supported by my supervisor's encouragement. She has particularly mentioned that if we ever have things we need to take care of in the middle of the working day, it's more than fine to do it."* (Liza, 28, Assistant, 11.11.2020 11:00 EET). We noted that there was a connection between the clear expression of trust and the employee's experience of empowerment. This is exemplified in the excerpt of a person who felt her supervisor had begun to show more trust since the remote working began: *"[The trust from my supervisor] feels like such a strong message to me. It motivates and inspires, and encourages you - that you can do as you prefer*" (Amy, 30, Order Handling Specialist, 13.10.2020 10:00 EET). Thus, there seemed to be a connection between the perceived trust of the supervisor and the employee's affective work-life experiences.

Supervisor trust was described to operate in two distinct ways. First, the demonstration of trust from the supervisor reduced the guilt of the remote workers, and contributed to self-efficacy via self-regulation activities, such as structuring or scheduling of work. Encouraged by the supervisor's trust, employees would feel permitted to use the freedom that remote working offered. For instance, this was exhibited through working from the summer cottage (flexibility), doing laundry in between meetings (autonomy), and ending a work day early (time saving). Second, the experience of being trusted by the supervisor reduced stress in situations where work and home duties collided. For example, this was seen in acute family/non-work issues that needed to be taken care of during working hours (a common scenario in the remote working context). The opposite effect of not feeling trusted and not feeling enabled, was also true. In cases where participants did not feel sufficient trust from the supervisor, rather feeling that they were "*micromanaged*", the participants also likely experienced struggle with WLB. They claimed the feeling of needing to participate in meetings and correspondence after work hours. Thus, it seemed that the supervisor's trust was a passageway for the individual's resource caravan. Supervisor trust would enable or disable the individual's self-efficacy that, in turn, formed the important link to resources that enhanced their WLB.

> "*I feel a difference because previously remote working was not viewed positively, and now I feel I've been given free hands, which encourages me to plan my day as it suits me. It makes me motivated and enthusiastic.*"
>
> (Amy, 30, Order Handling Specialist, 13.10.2020 10:00 EET)

Discussion

By investigating the work-life experiences of individuals who worked extensively from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, and analyzing the resources that impact those experiences, this study offered novel insights into the construction and support of WLB. To summarize the findings, the authors developed a theoretical model (Figure 1) that illustrates key resources for maintaining WLB. This includes the factors that enhance the utilization of those resources.

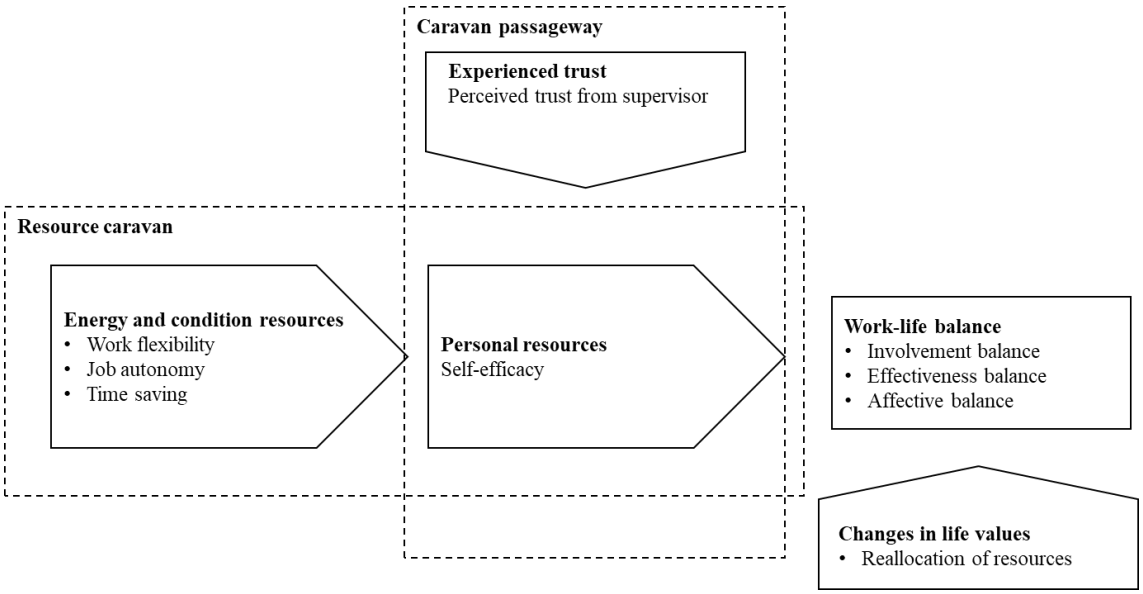

Figure 1. The theoretical model of an underlying support structure for remote worker's WLB

The figure illustrates a caravan of resources, including contextual and energy resources such as *work flexibility* (ability to perform work independently of time and location), *job autonomy* (ability to perform work according to one's own schedule), and *time savings* (from commuting and preparing for work), which are believed to potentially facilitate WLB in the context of remote work. The model also suggests that the effective utilization of these resources depends on the individual's ability to make use of these resources. Therefore, to reap the benefits of contextual and energy resources, such as personal characteristics in this case, employees' *self-efficacy* (belief in their ability to successfully manage work and home demands) is necessary. The caravan is situated in a passageway,, where employees perceive a sense of *trust* that comes from their supervisor. The passageway that consists of perceived trust, creates the conditions for the caravan to be enriched with resources (or weakened with the loss of resources) via individuals' personal resources. Thus, the model proposes that the perceived trust from the supervisor plays a crucial role in activating the personal resources. For example, when remote work increases job autonomy, individuals can better utilize this autonomy when

they feel empowered to make decisions that are in their own best interest. These decisions include those of creating space for household chores during the workday and using the time saved in remote work to focus on activities that promote personal well-being. As an additional finding, it was observed that the extraordinary time of the pandemic had changed the way resources (e.g., time) was allocated, triggering a re-evaluation of life values and priorities. In this model, such events are suggested to influence WLB.

Theoretical implications

This study qualitatively explored the work-life experiences of remote workers by using Casper and peers' model (2018) and the COR-model (Hobfoll, 1989) to gain an understanding of the resources that support different aspects of WLB construction, and the connections that these resources have. The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical framework in three ways: 1) the study extends the framework of Casper et al. (2018) to the context of remote work; 2) it emphasizes the role of self-efficacy as an important mechanism for achieving WLB; and 3) it identifies supervisor trust as an enhancer for the self-efficacy of individuals, and WLB.

Extending the recent concept of work-life balance (Casper et al., 2018) into remote work context

The first important contribution of this study was the application of theoretical frameworks in a new context. This study was the first to use the theoretical framework proposed by Casper et al. (2018) in a qualitative exploration of the WLB construct, specifically in the context of remote work. By applying this framework, the researchers were able to identify how the experience of WLB is formed in both its cognitive dimensions (effectiveness and involvement) and affective dimensions.

Previous research has primarily focused on exploring how various energy and resource conditions in the remote context, such as flexibility and time-saving, impact the development of WLB (Franken et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2013; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). Such resources are likely to affect WLB in terms of involvement and effectiveness. For instance, remote working has been found to improve employees' ability to balance work and home duties (Galanti et al., 2021) as well as strengthen family relationships (Evans et al., 2020; Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Through a qualitative approach, this study explored the elements that form people's affective balance. However, the role of affective experiences in achieving WLB has been understudied. Thus, the purpose of the qualitative approach was to provide an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the factors that contribute to the emergence of affective experiences and their impact on WLB. The study's findings revealed

that people commonly experience a sense of balance when they have sufficient energy and vitality in both their work and personal lives. This often results from adequate rest, sleep, and recovery. Therefore, it is likely that affective balance is closely related to sufficient recovery from tasks during and after work (feeling energized in the morning, and not feeling exhausted after the day). This is coupled by good quality sleep (i.e., reducing work-related stress at night).

The findings also demonstrated that the remote work context can have different effects on the dimensions of WLB. This implies that individuals' work-life experiences in remote work can be both positive and negative at the same time. For instance, as demonstrated in the current study, remote work enhances productivity and thus one's sense of effectiveness. At the same time, it often happens at the cost of one's nonwork roles (i.e., reducing time spent on breaks and leisure) hinders an individual's ability to balance their involvement in the home domain. Additionally, the resources that are often enhanced in remote work, such as flexibility and job autonomy, may have a dual effect on WLB. On one hand, they may increase the time spent on important tasks, but on the other hand, they may also increase the time spent on perceived obligations. These findings highlight the complexity of WLB (Haar and Brougham 2020) and suggest that its building blocks are interconnected.

In addition to the study's focus on resources, the findings reveal that some individuals underwent a re-evaluation of their life priorities due to the extraordinary circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 context. Spending more time with family or engaging in leisure activities has led to increased involvement in nonwork roles. This has also triggered a re-appraisal of their importance. As people place greater value on their non-work roles, this is likely to influence their assessment of WLB. Therefore, it is suggested that future research pay more attention to the value aspect of the WLB construct and investigate how sudden life events or changes in life priorities may impact an individual's WLB.

The role of self-efficacy as a building block of work-life balance

The second contribution of this study was the identification of the critical role of an individual's personal resources, namely *self-efficacy* as building blocks of WLB. Only a handful of studies have previously studied the work-life management related dimension of self-efficacy (e.g. Chan et al., 2016; Chu et al., 2021). One study has indicated that self-efficacy may steer the use of job autonomy (Badri & Panatik, 2020). Nevertheless, prior research has not fully conceptualized the importance of personal resources in an individual's ability to control their WLB. The current study highlights the individual's own agency in achieving WLB and stresses the

necessity to enhance an individual's personal resources in order for them to effectively utilize various other resources.

Consistent with some previous studies, the findings from the current study suggest that remote work enhances employees' autonomy, flexibility, and time saving (e.g., Shirmohammadi, 2022; Wang, 2021). It also found, however, that these factors can have different effects on WLB and do not always directly support the creation of it. This is because managing highly autonomous work may require employees to draw upon personal resources, which can be more challenging when working remotely (Mäkelä et al., 2023). On the one hand, these resources provide opportunities to prioritize important roles, such as family and leisure time. On the other hand, they can unintentionally increase the time spent on work, leading work to spill-over into personal time. Upon closer examination of the utilization of these resources, it becomes apparent that it is the individuals who must make the most of the available resources. Some individuals are successful at doing so. Others, due to lack of skills, poor self-esteem, or fear of guilt, are unable to take advantage of these opportunities. They may simply find it difficult to navigate in the virtual work context because of poor skills, which may increase workload, the feeling of isolation, and overall ill-being (Prasad et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2023). The creation of WLB, therefore, depends on the employee's ability to effectively utilize available resources (Fan et al., 2021; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022).

It appears that in a remote work situation where work is autonomous and flexible, personal resources are essential for individuals to construct their own WLB. This is operationalized by having the courage to pursue one's own priorities. As a side note to the study's findings, it was also observed that there were several likely personal resources that steer people's WLB. These resources include healthy selfishness (taking the liberty of maintaining healthy lifestyle habits), where an individual dares to prioritize themselves, and self-regulation. In these instances, people are about to set boundaries according to priorities in flexible work, take breaks throughout the day, and end the workday on time. As an implication for future research, the findings of this study provide a compelling reason to investigate different personal resources and their role as mechanisms for achieving WLB.

The role of supervisor's trust in enabling individuals' self-efficacy

The third contribution of this paper is the underscoring of the pivotal role of the supervisor's perceived trust in the WLBexperience. Prior research has indicated that supervisor support regarding employee work and family demands is positively related to WLB (Allen, 2012; Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005; Rondi et al., 2022). Furthermore, supervisors also influence the utilization of work-life practices (Fiksenbaum, 2014). To the authors' knowledge, no other studies have deconstructed the

WLB concept and recognized the detailed underlying structure where trust from supervisors (and trust culture) is considered. The present study contributes to this important work and reveals that supervisor support plays a significant role in supporting individual agency, i.e., their capacity to take intentional and self-initiated actions to achieve WLB goals. Through the lens of COR theory, the trust culture created by the supervisor can be seen as a crucial passageway for enabling other resources, specifically individual self-efficacy. Without the supervisor's trust, individuals may be less likely to feel enabled to utilize available resources to contribute to their non-work domain, such as utilizing autonomy or work flexibility to take needed time off for private purposes. Supervisor trust as experienced by employees, significantly contributes to the overall affective experiences of remote workers. A lack of trust prevents employees from fully exploiting available resources.

Limitations

This qualitative study's large sample size (N=89) contributes to rich and nuanced data. However, our interviews were limited to a single interview with each employee six months into the mandatory remote working period. A longitudinal or diary study could have given more information about the day-to-day fluctuations in both satisfaction and challenges with remote working. It may have also revealed trends during different stages of this new way of working. The study excludes comparisons between remote workers and non-remote workers, and similarly voluntary and involuntary remote workers. This could have offered greater understanding of the contextual features of the work-life experiences. Because this research took place after the relocation to remote working, we do not know the experiences of the employees prior to the crisis. A future study could compare remote working during and after the crisis.

Practical implications

Based on the findings, the supervisor can be seen to play a role of gatekeeper to resources that individuals need in order to maintain a fulfilling balance in life. Therefore, organizations must establish work-life policies and avoid variations in supportiveness based on an individual supervisor's judgment or personal preferences. The researchers recommend consequent methods across organizations to be utilized when agreeing upon remote working practices at the team level. This is in order to avoid differences in individual supervisors' perceptions of work-life support and organizations' conceptualizations of work-life support (MasMachuca et al., 2016; Talukder, 2019). One such method may indeed be the support for supervisors themselves (Talukder, 2019). Supervisors should engage in discussions on trust and autonomy, and what it means within their teams. It is noticed that self-efficacy helps employees utilize the beneficial resources that help them

achieve WLB. We suggest that employees benefit from tools and self-leadership skills. These skills aid in the establishment of controls between work and nonwork (Allen et al., 2021), which operate bi-directionally – helping to prevent procrastination (Wang et al., 2021) and violation of trust. Even more importantly, these skills may help people to protect their leisure time and well-being, while increasing work pride (Mas-Machuca et al., 2016).

Appendix 1 Background information of interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender	Year of Birth	Role	Children in the household	Age of children	Remote working prior to pandemic	Remote working at the time of the interview
Amy	Female	30	Order handling specialist	0	-	Primarily	Never
Ian	Male	48	Product marketing manager	3	7, 7, 10	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Brooke	Female	49	Linemanager	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Paul	Male	52	Marketing and sales manager	1	10	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Marcus	Male	[not reported]	[not reported]	2	[not reported]	Primarily	[not reported]
Mary	Female	43	Order handling specialist	2	9,14	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Bobby	Male	53	Line manager for developers	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Henry	Male	53	Marketing development manager	1	18	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Gary	Male	50	Sales manager	0	-	Primarily	Never
Nathan	Male	48	Design engineer	0	-	Primarily	Never
Harry	Male	34	Product developer	1	5	Primarily	Never
Samuel	Male	58	Design engineer	1	17	Primarily	Never
Rebecca	Female	47	Design engineer	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
William	Male	50	Product manage	2	16,18	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Thomas	Male	46	Product line manager	2	10, 12	Primarily	Never
Mason	Male	55	Test director	0		Primarily	Never
Thea	Female	43	Finance director	2	7,14	Partly	Partly / regularly
Owen	Male	60	Operative manager	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Matt	Male	31	Operational manager	7	0-9	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Josi	Female	38	HR-manager	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Sophy	Female	57	General Manager	0	-	Primarily	Never
Oliver	Male	49	Project manager	1	17	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Sue	Female	40	Finance manager	3	6, 10, 12	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Leah	Female	40	Finance manager	2	4, 9	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
July	Female	50	Controller	2	13,15	Partly	Never
Peter	Male	43	Manager	2	10,12	Partly	Seldom / occasionally
Robert	Male	45	Trainer	1		Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Iris	Female	55	[not reported]	[not reported]	[not reported]	[not reported]	[not reported]
Jill	Female	37	Specialist	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Andy	Male	39	[not reported]	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Fawn	Female	32	Line manager	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Emilia	Female	40	Customer service manager	1	13	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Cindy	Female	50	Marketing Director	1	17	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Molly	Female	44	Team Manager	3	12, 14, 17	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Ryan	Male	32	Quality Assurer	0	-	Primarily	Primarily
Oscar	Male	35	Designer	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Freya	Female	45	Marketing specialist	2	14, 17	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Anette	Female	36	Application specialist	2	9, 12	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Martin	Male	57	Custome advisor	0	-	Primarily	Primarily
Sarah	Female	29	Specialist	0	-	Primarily	Primarily
Evie	Female	38	Custome service assistant	2	2,5	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Max	Male	55	Application specialist	0	18	Primarily	Never
Ayla	Female	31	Application specialist	0	-	Primarily	Never
Lucas	Male	38	Application specialist	1	1	Primarily	Primarily
Asher	Male	26	Application specialist	0	-	Partly	Seldom / occasionally
Zofi	Female	46	Sales agent	2	14, 18	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Jacod	Male	33	Sales agent	1	1	Primarily	Never
John	Male	31	Group manager	0	-	Partly	Seldom / occasionally
Hannah	Female	45	Group manager	2	10,13	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Laura	Female	53	Group manager	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Erin	Female	47	Group manager	1	15	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Liam	Male	32	Customer service specialist	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Sharon	Female	45	Customer advisor	3	12, 15, 18	Partly	Partly / regularly
Dan	Male	34	Customer advisor	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Samatha	Female	41	Group manager	2	10, 14	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Sabrina	Female	38	Development manager	2	10, 12	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Sandra	Female	[not reported]	Development manager	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Tina	Female	41	Service manager	2	10, 12	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Crhistina	Female	[not reported]	Service manager	2	5,8	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Charles	Male	38	Service manager	2	7, 9	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Amanda	Female	35	Service manager	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Ava	Female	35	Manager	2	9,14	Partly	Seldom / occasionally
Lucy	Female	[not reported]	[not reported]	[not reported]	[not reported]	Primarily	Never
Sinitta	Female	37	Risk manager	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Dylan	Male	36	Specialist	1	3	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Britney	Female	49	Service manager	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Vera	Female	48	Service manager	0	0	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Andrew	Male	25	Team leader	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Minnie	Female	26	Sales clerk	0	0	Partly	Never
Marie	Female	[not reported]	Claim handler	2	16,18	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Marianna	Female	28	Specialist	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Mariella	Female	[not reported]	Claim handler	2	17,18	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Tom	Male	31	Service manager	2	0,2	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Isla	Female	37	Service specialist	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Liza	Female	28	Assistant	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Jada	Female		Claim assistant	0	0	Primarily	[not reported]
Ellen	Female	36	Service specialist	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Joyce	Female	41	Team manager	1	15	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Nancy	Female	53	Process owner	0	-	Primarily	Primarily
Anneli	Female	54	Team manager	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Demi	Female	58	Service director	1	16	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Susanna	Female	49	Accounting director	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Latoya	Female	31	Process specialist	0	-	Primarily	Partly / regularly
Birgitta	Female	33	Process specialist	1	1	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Macy	Female	40	Service manager	5	5,7,11,12,15	Primarily	Partly / regularly
James	Male	51	Accounting consultant	2	17,18	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Janet	Female	60	Accounting specialist	0	-	Primarily	Never
Anne	Female	36	Service coordinator	0	-	Primarily	Seldom / occasionally
Jo	Female	23	Office assistant	0	-	Primarily	Never

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ARTICLE 3

Roads to recovery in remote working. Exploration of the perceptions of energy-consuming elements of remote work and self-promoted strategies toward psychological detachment

Heini Pensar & Liisa Mäkelä

Abstract

Purpose – This paper examines an employee's recovery process in the remote-working context. We aim to explore which elements of remote work employees perceive to be energy-consuming and which actions employees can take to foster the essential recovery strategy of psychological detachment.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on 89 semi-structured interviews with employees working from home with six large corporations from multiple industries. The data were interpreted using thematic analysis.

Findings – The study groups the energy-consuming elements of remote work under three main themes: *extended working hours*, *intensive working style*, and *decreased social support*. Each theme incorporates elements controlled by individuals (internal) and those beyond their control (external). We identified four themes related to strategies that helped individuals to detach from work and labeled them *cognitive controlling*, *physical disconnection from work*, *time-bound routines*, and *non-work activities*.

Originality/value – This is the first study to focus on recovery as a process in the context of remote working and contributes to the fields of knowledge concerning psychological detachment and strategies for recovery and the literature on contemporary remote working.

Keywords: Remote work, Psychological Detachment, Recovery strategies, COVID-19

Introduction

The pandemic has made remote working the new normal, and a complete return to pre-pandemic life is unlikely (ILO, 2022; Teevan *et al.*, 2022). This trend is creating a demand to understand remote working and employees' experiences of it. For many remote workers, their primary workplace is their home (Eurofound, 2022), but combining home and work locations blurs the boundary between them (Haun *et al.*, 2022). Then the home environment can spur reminders of work outside working hours, which can create a barrier to psychological detachment from work (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2016; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). Psychological detachment is an essential prerequisite of effective recovery (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). It is a process that restores employees' energetic and mental resources consumed by the demands imposed by their work (Zijlstra *et al.*, 2014). In addition to psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control over leisure can aid recovery (Sonnentag and Fritz 2007). Nevertheless, prior studies identified psychological detachment as the most significant of these recovery experiences (de Jonge et al., 2012; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015) and remote work as a context in which it might be very challenging to achieve (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022). Recent research has begun to unveil how employees' own actions can affect their psychological detachment (Luta *et al.*, 2020; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2022; Sonnentag and Niessen, 2020). The current study complements that research stream by focusing on the recovery achieved through implementing strategies fostering psychological detachment in a remote-working context.

Psychological detachment from work and the subsequent recovery process is necessary because failure to recover can impair health and well-being (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Continued exposure to workload and strain without appropriate recovery can result in negative physical and psychological health effects; fatigue, problems sleeping, and exhaustion (Sianoja et al., 2018; Siltaloppi et al., 2009; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Impaired well-being is sequentially linked to negative organizational outcomes like reduced performance levels (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Tanskanen et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand the process of recovery from work and how psychological detachment can be promoted to support well-being among employees working remotely (Charalampous et al., 2022). However, psychological detachment in the context of remote work remains relatively understudied and none of the earlier research focuses on strategies for psychological detachment (Gillet et al., 2022; Haun et al., 2022; Kubicek et al., 2022; Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2021; Sonnentag et al., 2010; Tedone, 2022; Trógolo et al., 2022). That new focus illuminates how psychological detachment occurs and which strategies can foster it (Luta et al., 2020;

Sonnentag et al., 2022; Sonnentag and Niessen, 2020). Accordingly, our study aims to shed light on this phenomenon.

Effort-recovery (E-R) theory (Meijman and Mulder, 1998) has been utilized in earlier recovery studies (e.g., Minkkinen, Kinnunen and Mauno, 2021; Pereira and Elfering, 2014). It proposes that people routinely strive to meet demands arising from work. Doing so activates the individual's stress system, leading to energy consumption and an elevated need for recovery (Geurts and Sonnentag, 2006; Meijman and Mulder, 1998). The theory suggests that recovery occurs when the individual is no longer exposed to work demands. However, that suggestion has been criticized for being too simplistic and ignoring the processual nature of recovery and the variety of demands caused by different kinds of jobs (Zijlstra *et al.*, 2014). In this study, we follow the basic assumptions of the E-R theory and focus on aspects of remote work that demand effort that consumes energy and thus potentially increase the need for recovery. We acknowledge that by focusing only on the demands imposed by remote work, we are not covering the full spectrum of employee experiences. The positive side and resources provided by remote work are beyond the purview of this study. Furthermore, in recognition of Conservation of Resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 2001), we assume that remote employees aim to replenish the resources (i.e., energy) consumed by their work and that their personal resources (e.g., self-regulation skills) play an important role in the dynamic process of recovery via strategies for psychological detachment (Zijlstra *et al.*, 2014).

Most empirical recovery studies are based on a quantitative research design (e.g. Gillet et al., 2022; for a review, see Sonnentag et al., 2022). We found only two studies focusing on self-promoted strategies to improve psychological detachment. One relied on a qualitative approach to elicit students' experiences via group interviews (Luta et al., 2020), while the other was conducted in a laboratory setting and utilized quantitative research methods (Sonnentag and Niessen, 2020).

The current research adopts a qualitative research design to comprehensively understand this little-researched phenomenon. It explores 1) what elements of remote work employees perceive to be energy-consuming and 2) what self-promoted strategies foster the essential recovery strategy, psychological detachment. This study contributes to knowledge of remote working and recovery from work.

Recovery from work in the context of remote working at home

Specific elements related to remote working at home

Remote working was previously considered a privilege and a voluntary arrangement adopted to improve flexibility and enhance work-life balance (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). The response to the COVID-19 pandemic transformed remote working from a voluntary arrangement to an enforced form of work, which led to the extensive adoption of remote working across the globe (Eurofound, 2020, 2022). Now a mixture of office and home-working is far more established than previously. One reason for that is remote working offers benefits in the form of flexibility and enhanced work-life balance that employees want to retain (Adekoya *et al.*, 2022; Gajendran *et al.*, 2015; Golden and Gajendran, 2019). However, remote working can be burdensome for employees when undertaken extensively and jeopardize their well-being and working ability (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022).

Some research indicates that remote-working employees believe their workload increased during the pandemic (Carillo *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2021). Recent studies also suggest that the growth of remote working has spurred a new overwork culture in which employees devote more time to work, regardless of whether they chose remote working at home or if it was mandated by their employer (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė *et al.*, 2022). Enhanced effort directed at work might reflect gratitude for the privilege of being permitted to work flexibly or a heightened sense of responsibility (Eddleston and Mulki, 2017). The burgeoning of work-related technology available at home might also trigger an urge to work (Barber *et al.*, 2019; Suh and Lee, 2017).

Lapierre and colleagues (Lapierre *et al.*, 2016) conducted a longitudinal study following the implementation of a new cost-saving policy in worldwide operating financial services organization's sales operations in Netherlands. They found staff worked more hours each week when the proportion of remote working increased, even when remote working was not entirely voluntary. In addition, those employees who worked remotely involuntarily were likely to experience heightened strain-based work-family conflict and, thus, negative consequences of remote working. Greater work demands and longer working days are likely to tally with a greater need for recovery (Sonnentag and Zijlstra, 2006).

Another explanation for the increased need for recovery connected to remote working might relate to how work is delivered. In general, remote workers report they are more focused on work and more efficient owing to fewer interruptions than in their office environment (Maruyama and Tietze, 2012). As a result, em-

ployees can invest greater effort into their work (Felstead and Henseke, 2017; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Shirmohammadi *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the absence of interruptions and willingness to put extra effort into work leaves less room for recovery during working hours and increases the need for recovery after work (Bosch *et al.*, 2018; Coffeng *et al.*, 2015; Demerouti *et al.*, 2012).

Moreover, remote working cannot be separated from an increased sense of professional and social isolation (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Kossen and Berg, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2021) and the consequential lack of social support (Sardeshmukh *et al.*, 2012). The social isolation is likely to extend over time as remote working continues while social networks and related support reduce (Collins *et al.*, 2016). Subsequently, prolonged exposure to negative experiences, such as worry and lack of sufficient support, may eventually hinder restoration and increase the need for recovery after work (Radstaak *et al.*, 2011; Sonnentag and Zijlstra, 2006).

Researchers have committed to developing strategies to manage the challenges of remote working (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Grant *et al.*, n.d.; Kubicek *et al.*, 2022). However, to the best of our knowledge, only one study (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022) expressly explores detachment from work as a well-being challenge stemming from remote work and related coping strategies. The study showed that time saved commuting enhanced detachment, although access to work through technology, an expectation of availability, and limited experience of remote working were obstacles to detachment. However, Charalampous and colleagues (2022) only covered detachment briefly, among other important themes related to well-being, whereas our study digs deeper into it. As remote work is likely to be a central form of future working, we need to identify mechanisms encouraging recovery and forestalling the harmful effects of remote working (Moreno-Jiménez *et al.*, 2012; Sonnentag and Zijlstra, 2006). Therefore, in the following section, we review existing knowledge on psychological detachment as a recovery experience and the mechanisms that can help individuals balance the need for recovery attributable to remote working.

Psychological detachment from work in the context of remote working from home

The concept of psychological detachment was initially introduced by Etzion and associates (Etzion *et al.*, 1998) and described as "*an individual's sense of being away from the work situation*." Psychological detachment, also termed s*witching off*, refers to both a physical and mental distancing from work and involves not doing work or entertaining work-related thoughts (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2022; Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Sonnentag and Niessen, 2020).

People's ability to psychologically detach from work is determined by personality traits (Potok and Littman-Ovadia, 2014; Reis and Prestele, 2020), their preference for detachment (Jalonen *et al.*, 2015; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015), and their social environment (Hahn *et al.*, 2014; Hahn and Dormann, 2013; Sonnentag and Schiffner, 2019). At the same time, a high cognitive load and stressors at work can prevent detachment from it (Kubicek *et al.*, 2022; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). Kubicek and colleagues (Kubicek *et al.* 2022) found that in the case of remote working, the daily demand to coordinate work with others increases daily cognitive load and therefore hinders sufficient detachment from work at home. Interestingly, the same study did not identify the daily demands of structuring work enhanced cognitive load and jeopardized detachment for individuals; instead, those demands encouraged routine learning and, thus, cognitive flexibility.

Psychological detachment sometimes occurs automatically, but people may also deliberately induce it through activity (Luta *et al.*, 2020; Sonnentag and Niessen, 2020). Detachment literature introduces interventions linked to cognitive paths that prevent and override work-related cognition and emotions from intruding into leisure time (Althammer *et al.*, 2021; Karabinski *et al.*, 2021; Smit, 2016). Pursuing hobbies or socializing that encourage a shift of focus offers another way to detach (Hahn and Dormann, 2013; Luta *et al.*, 2020; Sonnentag and Lischetzke, 2018).

Detachment literature shows people's ability to set boundaries for their work is an important denominator of psychological detachment (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Haun *et al.*, 2022). A high degree of work-home segmentation predicts more efficient psychological detachment. Establishing sufficient temporal, physical, and technological boundaries from work enhances a person's detachment from work (Haun *et al.*, 2022; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2017; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). Boundary creation around work-related technology (e.g., keeping separate devices for work and personal use) can reduce intrusive work thoughts during non-working time and nurture efficient psychological detachment (Barber and Jenkins, 2014; Michel *et al.*, 2014; Sandoval-Reyes *et al.*, 2019).

Overall, recovery literature indicates a need to understand what makes breaks from work successful and how recovery can help address future work challenges (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2022). We would benefit from understanding what employees can do to foster recovery processes when they face high levels of load factors connected to work (Sonnentag, 2018), like those experienced during remote working (Grant *et al.*, 2013; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Kubicek *et al.*, 2022).

Luta and colleagues (2020) authored the only qualitative study exploring the detachment strategies of university students. Students have similarities with remote

workers, as they tend to integrate studying and home life. Although the sample was limited (n=25 female students) and the group interview method selected might have restricted how candid the participants were in the interviews (Luta *et al.*, 2020), the study establishes that students use various leisure activities and strategies to safeguard their well-being and implement a mental separation from their studies. The research suggests some activities, including physical activity and listening to music, are more effective than others such as socializing or napping. However, the authors acknowledged further exploration of more diverse samples and using other methods would be worthwhile (e.g., individual interviews). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that a study conducted by Charalampous and colleagues (2022) touched upon this topic and mentioned that remote-working employees contributing to their study mentioned coping strategies that aided detaching from work. Those coping strategies were having dedicated offices at home, separate phones for work and private use, and setting rules around email. The current study continues that discussion and explores the phenomenon further.

In light of the above, our study aims to explore answers to the following research questions: 1) what elements of remote work do employees perceive to be energy-consuming, and 2) what kind of strategies can be identified as promoting the essential recovery strategy of psychological detachment. Next, the data and methods of this study are presented, followed by our findings.

Method

This section describes the methodology of our qualitative study and the data collection procedure and also offers a step-by-step view of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Study participants

We interviewed 89 employees from six large-sized private corporations in the fields of telecommunications, the technology industry, information technology, insurance, and services during October and December 2020. All companies had adopted directives for remote working in response to the COVID 19-pandemic at the time of the interviews. Managers of remote teams were invited to join the study in each company. Team managers who accepted the request were invited to an interview. They were also asked to randomly select three to five members of their teams and forward our interview invitation. All but four of the participants were working fully from home at the time of the study and had done so for at least six months. Those other four participants were partly working from home, although the participants would normally work mainly at the employers' premises. The majority of the participants lived in Finland at the time of the interviews, but two of

them lived elsewhere in Europe. The participants were aged between 23 and 60, with a mean age of 41.64 (six participants did not report their age). More than half of them (62.9%) were women, and nearly half of all participants (48.3%) had children under 18 years living at home. The background information on the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Data collection

We followed a thematic interview guide to ensure that different themes the research team was interested in were addressed. The interview guide was loosely structured and allowed room for the participants to raise spontaneous issues and for the researchers to ask follow-up questions (Mason, 2002; Weller *et al.*, 2018). The interviews included three themes; remote workers' work-life balance, leadership, and well-being. For instance, as a part of the work-life balance theme, the participants were asked to describe their remote working environment and a typical remote working day from start to finish and elaborate on how they managed to shift between the two life spheres.

The interviews were conducted by a six-person research team via an audio or video conference link and recorded. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and were transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The interview excerpts used here were translated into English by the authors.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted, and NVivo 11 software was used to assist with the analysis.We aimed to identify and interpret key features of the data, guided by the research questions that evolved throughout the coding and theme development process (Braun and Clarke, 2016).

The data analysis was conducted in different stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006). First, one of the authors reviewed the complete data to understand how participants spoke about their work well-being and how they linked mandatory remote working to their experiences. Our interviewees' explanations of how they managed to switch off from work became one central theme in their narrative about their well-being. After discussing the findings, the authors identified the psychological detachment from work as a key theoretical concept related to those narratives. Therefore, we returned to the literature to absorb the information on psychological detachment from work, which helped clarify our research question. We subsequently focused on the elements of remote work employees perceive to be energy-consuming (representing perceptions of an increased need for recovery) and how

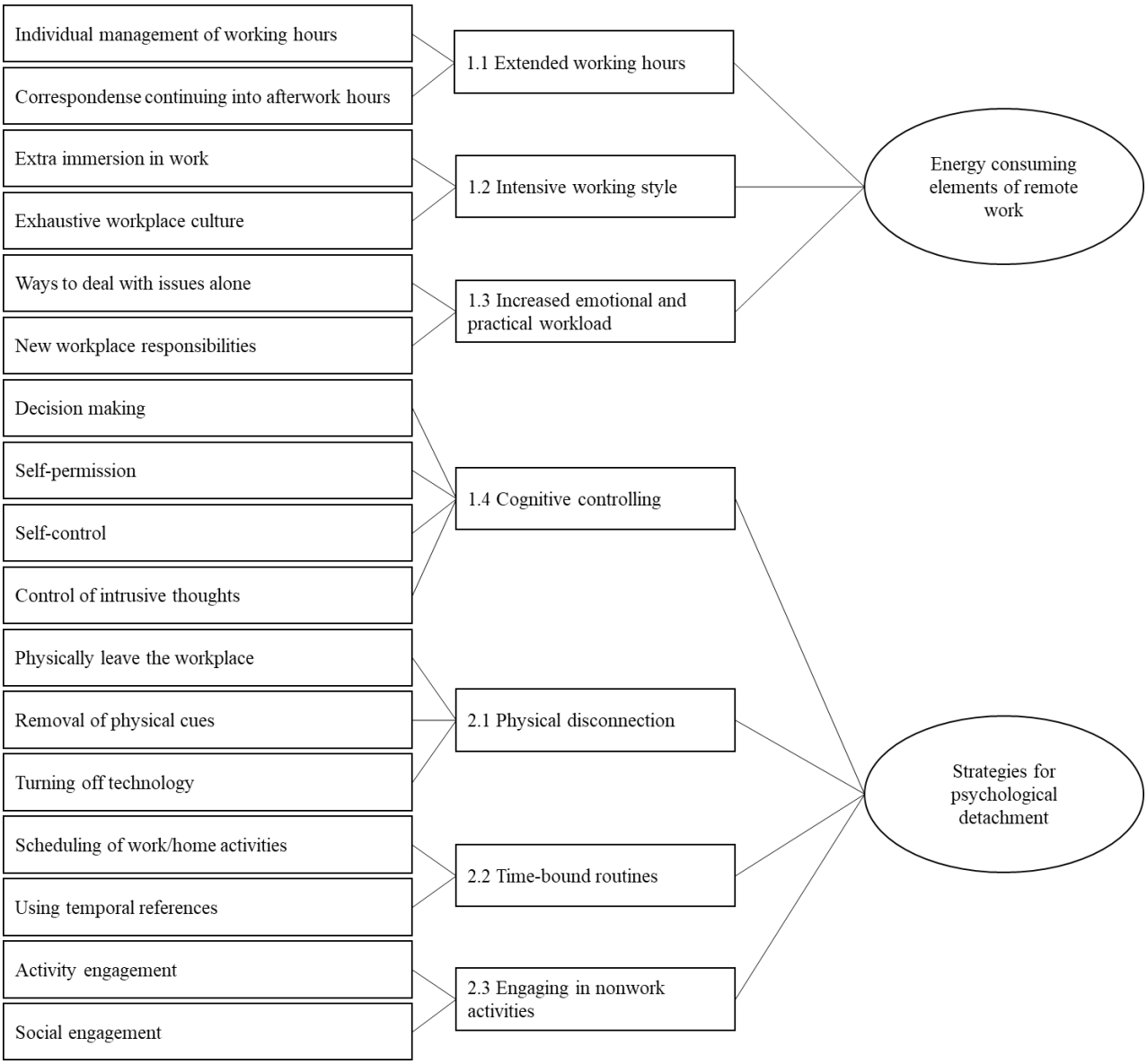
our participants described strategies applied to facilitate a psychological detachment from work.

In the next phase, the first author conducted open coding of the whole data, and all the transcripts were analyzed to the point where it was impossible to identify new codes. Six codes were identified in the experiences related to elements of remote work that reinforced the need for recovery or induced recovery, and 11 for strategies to cope with them, representing the activities or actions related to psychological detachment from work.

The codes were compared, and interpretations were discussed several times among the research team, which involved going back and forth between the original data and the literature. The authors carefully reviewed and interpreted the content of each theme.

A logic for inclusion and exclusion was followed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Three main themes were identified as energy-consuming elements of remote work (*extended working hours, intensive working style, and decreased social support*). Within each theme, we recognized narrative patterns representing internal and external elements. Furthermore, four themes promoting recovery were found (*cognitive controlling, physical disconnection, time-bound routines, and engaging in non-work activities*). The codes and themes are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Codes and themes derived from the analysis



Findings

Our findings indicate employees perceived the intensive remote work and homes being transformed into a working environment had changed their experience of working life. First, they talked about elements that consumed their energy and fostered a distinct need for recovery. We identified three themes relating to why that happens: Theme 1.1: extended working hours, Theme 1.2: intensive working style, and Theme 1.3: decreased social support. Two narrative elements were evident in each theme a) elements relating to the participants' own choices and behavior (internal elements) and b) elements relating to perceptions of changes in the context, such as in organizational practices at work (external elements). Second, employees talked about deliberately developed methods to promote detachment to aid recovery from the energy-consuming elements of remote work, which we categorized into four further themes: Theme 2.1: cognitive controlling, Theme 2.2: physical disconnection, Theme 2.3: time-bound routines, and Theme 2.4: engaging in non-work activities.

Elements of remote work employees perceive to be energy-consuming

The participants described various elements of remote work that seemed to increase the effort they put into their daily work and thus consumed their energy. Within each of these three themes, we found both *internal* (self-caused behavior) and *external* reasons (pressure beyond the control of the individual) for them.

Theme 1.1 Extended working hours: Our participants felt the transition to home-working had extended their working hours. While some of our participants managed to align their work with normal office hours, a majority told that they had experienced changes in them, and numerous participants reported challenges managing those working hours. Although avoiding the daily commute was often reported as a positive and time-saving change, the interviewees also brought up energy-consuming elements. The available technology at home was also said to encourage long working hours. Our interviewees reported they started their working day earlier than usual or finished it later, typically without additional compensation.

Internal reasons for extended working hours were related to participants feeling tempted to start working as soon as they woke, for instance, checking emails and handling urgent issues. Moreover, the participants commonly talked about the struggle to detach themselves from work at the end of the working day, preferring to finish off incomplete tasks even if that meant doing so after standard working

hours. As the next interview excerpt shows, extended working hours were perceived as a new habit and changed behavior followed by the new working circumstances:

> *The difference [with working at home] is that you leave the office to go home at four pm and leave your work behind. Even if I used to take my (work) phone home, I rarely had to take care of work stuff in my spare time. But now that work is here [at home], I'll take care of just one more thing and another thing, and then I realize that I sit there for much longer. You experience a sort of burnout because of your [increased] productivity. (Male, 45 years, Trainer)*

Beyond personal choices, external reasons for extended working hours were identified. Some employees reported feeling pressured by collective behavior and new norms that developed due to everyone working remotely. For example, meetings could be scheduled for periods that were usually spent commuting (mornings and evenings), yet there was an expectation that employees would attend.

> *It is noticeable that the working days are getting longer. Previously, in the afternoon, people would be asked whether it would be possible to have a call or a meeting at four; nowadays, you automatically get invitations to start at five. We assume people are more available in the evenings when they don't have to drive home from the office. (Female, 43, Finance Director)*

Theme 1.2 Intensive working style: The home-working regimen also introduced a new and intensive working style resulting in perceptions of a greater need for effort and energy consumption. That intensified working style typically comprised uninterrupted working periods with no (or only very short) breaks and increased demand for the coordination and organization of work.

The participants mentioned that the home workplace was an environment conducive to uninterrupted work and was thus an internal element in increased effort liable to develop into an over-focus and immersion in working. Because the extra focus contributed to increased efficiency, some employees deliberately chose to work in the most productive manner and skipped restorative breaks. Our participants were also concerned about a significant reduction in physical activity during the day, leading to them becoming too sedentary.

> *At home, I work much more intensively, am more focused, and do more work, which is also a bad thing…Coffee breaks are a totally ridiculous notion. I actually don't even want to have them. And for lunches, I quickly eat in front of my computer; if I eat, that is…I practically work all day. (Female, 23, Office worker)*

Moreover, virtual working seemed to foster a working culture underpinned by a far more exhausting working style, which we interpreted as a sign of external reasons spurring increased effort. Our interviewees talked about remote working curtailing spontaneous conversations, resulting in a mass of daily correspondence quantified by the number of meetings, emails, and the content of information channels. This trend forced employees to constantly remain alert and led to multitasking, which hindered taking restorative breaks; instead, they described their remote days as wearying.

> *Now [during remote working], everyone's on their PC all the time, which means there are a lot of contact makings from many different channels and meetings, and there are a lot of interruptions. I remember we used to brag about having six meetings a day; then, you were tough. Now it's all history. Now it is 12 or more. And some calls between them. The work pace has accelerated and is getting out of hand. People's demand for response speed has increased and causes frustration. (Female 49, Accounting Manager)*

Theme 1.3 Decreased social support: Most participants assessed working in isolation from other employees diminished the social support available (both instrumental and emotional) and hindered their own social activity. That change was perceived as energy-consuming. Our interviewees' narratives on this theme included essential elements relating to the lack of naturally occurring social interaction. That reduced the emotional support available, made them hesitant to ask for it, and made them feel they should address problematic work situations without calling on others for help.

As internal reasons for decreased social support, some of our participants felt that they had become reluctant to contact colleagues, as doing so involved the extra effort required to write a note instead of just shouting for help. They also described how they had developed a barrier to social contact in fear of interrupting a colleague's work. As a result, they referred to less available help with practical work issues and emotional support, for example, when facing hardship at work. In the long run, our participants reported that the lack of a sufficient social network of colleagues had affected their mental state and caused an emotional burden.

Overall, virtually mediated communication was described as *cold* and *impersonal*, representing the external context of interactions. That was perceived as a platform for misunderstandings between colleagues while providing few opportunities to resolve them. Participants often mentioned that handling conflicts and interpersonal issues was challenging in the remote working context, and many underlying issues remained unresolved. In the following excerpt, a manager explains that the remote-working context complicates the social atmosphere:

> *Resolving tensions [between people] is easier at coffee tables next to one another, as you can express your feelings. Now [in remote working], the atmosphere intensifies when we rely on email or Teams conversations - people overinterpret. (Female, 41, Service Manager)*

Some participants explained that the unresolved issues would hinder recovery after work or even disturb their sleep. Many admitted that because of the lack of sufficient contact with professional peers, they had begun to offload their work-related mental burden on their partners. Such rumination would extend the emotional loading caused by work into after-work time.

Participants also felt practical support at work had decreased and mentioned the expectation that individuals would more often resolve issues by themselves. Whereas at the office, they would have worked with other people or functions to resolve such issues (e.g., IT and connectivity ones) or referred matters to a more capable colleague, people working from home tried to manage the situation for as long as possible:

> *At the office, you would have better support for your work. Now you are responsible for this work, and you spend a lot more time trying to solve the issue on your own before you start calling for help. (Female, 26, Sales Manager)*

We now move on to strategies our participants described as fostering their psychological detachment and recovery from work.

Self-promoted psychological detachment to enhance recovery from remote work

We recognized four themes relating to deliberately formulated ways to counter the energy-consuming elements of remote work through self-promotion of detachment. The following interview excerpt describes how this required development of self-control and self-training:

> *In the beginning, it was difficult to cut off from work…Since I trained myself how to do it, it has been going well. (Male, 32, Customer Service Specialist)*

Theme 2.1: Cognitive controlling: We identified detachment strategies that involved conscious management of thought, which we labeled *cognitive controlling*. This theme includes different thought processes, such as assessment, decision-making and reasoning, intended to prevent work-related thoughts from disturbing the individual during leisure time. Our participants said they would proactively prevent themselves from thinking about work during leisure periods by resolutely avoiding work-related behaviors. In addition, they talked about reactively managing thoughts about work during non-working hours. The most frequent scenario was a conscious decision not to engage in work by looking at emails and other messages to allow a detachment from work, as the following excerpt shows:

> *Now the computer is here at home all the time, and it somehow invites me to work […] I'm a bit of a workaholic, so first, I had to work on myself, because this remote working is tougher and more intense. I have myself to blame for working at weekends – no one forced me to do it. Honestly, I had to control myself and decide not to work at weekends any more, so I get time to recover (Female, 40, Customer Service Manager).*

Some participants talked about self-permission, allowing themselves to detach by "*having done what was planned for the day*" (Female, 49, Line Manager), which meant they could also close down for the day "*with a clear conscience*" (Female, 49, Line Manager). This theme incorporated participants' accounts of allowing themselves to delay addressing certain issues. The tactic enabled them not to have to continuously think about work:

> *I try to prioritize the important tasks, so they don't continue to bother me in my downtime (Male, 50, Product Manager).*

In scenarios involving the control of intrusive thoughts, the participants described how they deliberately tried to "*reset*" (Male, 48, Design Engineer) their brains

when work-related thoughts entered their minds. To do so, one participant wrote down the intrusive thoughts:

> *I have a notebook in which I can write if I come to think of something… if all of a sudden, a thought comes into my mind … I can throw my work thoughts into there. (Female, 47, Group Manager)*

Theme 2.2 Physical disconnection from work: The participants also talked about strategies similar to those available to employees working in an office, which we named physical disconnection from work. The participants described physically leaving their workstation or workroom was helpful when they needed to mentally detach from work. Aside from changing rooms, some would deliberately go outside to pick up the post or visit the local store—anything that facilitated a disconnection from work. A participant explained,

> *I go out as soon as I finish work, just to get out of the house, almost like leaving work. If I stay around, it's easier to continue to think about work. (Female, 30, Order Handling Specialist)*

In addition, our participants reported that removing physical work cues and turning off work-related technology helped them forget about work. They would close the door to the home office or move the computer out of sight to block any intrusive correspondence and signal their brain it was time to leave work. This process is exemplified in the following excerpt:

> *I end the day by closing the computer and placing it out of sight. Sometimes I leave home just to get out of the environment; it's healthy to go somewhere else to refresh your mind. (Female, 43, Finance Director)*

Theme 2.3: Time-bound routines were identified when participants talked about induced detachment as a habit or routine. Interviewees described how they would decide when they ended work or schedule their working day to allow some time away from work. Such temporal signals were perceived as triggering detachment. As one of our participants explained, she would not need any other strategies but to remind herself:

> *It's now such-and-such o'clock, and it's simply time for leisure. (Female, 47, Design Engineer)*

Theme 2.4: Engaging in non-work activities: The remote workers said psychological detachment sometimes happens automatically without additional cognitive ef-

forts when they engage in various forms of non-work activity. The participants frequently discussed the benefits of activities requiring focus, like exercise, reading, housework, and computer gaming. Focusing on the activity would flush work from the mind:

Similarly, engaging in social relationships was a strategy to disengage from work. In the next excerpt, an employee explains an immediate transition to activities unrelated to work helped with switching off from work at the end of the work period:

> *When my workday ends, I go through the door straight away and do stuff outside of work. I must have activity directly after work because if I went and laid down on the couch, work stuff would certainly go around in my mind. (Male, 32, Customer Service Specialist)*

Discussion and conclusions

This qualitative study contributes to understanding the recovery processes (Meijman and Mulder, 1998; Zijlstra *et al.*, 2014) used by employees who primarily work at home, a working arrangement that has become common. We focused first on the specific elements that consume remote employees' energy. We found three themes and named them *extended working hours*, *an intensive working style*, and *decreased social support*. These themes encompass the issues our participants described as adding the need for effort to their work and thus resulting in a heightened need for post-work recovery. Second, we explored the strategies individuals apply to promote a state of recovery by engineering a psychological detachment from work, which is the most important recovery experience (e.g., Sonnentag and Fritz 2015). We identified four themes related to the strategies that helped individuals to detach from work and labeled them *cognitive controlling*, *physical disconnection from work*, *time-bound routines*, and *non-work activities*.

Theoretical implications

Remote work has been studied for decades. However, the large-scale movement toward remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic created a need to update the knowledge. To date, some studies have focused on the novel job demands created by remote work during the pandemic Carillo *et al.*, 2020; Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė *et al.*, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2021). Earlier studies had reported that remote employees perceived their workload increased during the pandemic (Carillo *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2021), and our findings support that. Our findings contribute to that knowledge by highlighting the importance of employees being aware of their increased workload and its potentially harmful effects. That awareness encourages people to learn and apply novel ways to respond to

their new situation. Therefore, future research should more often focus on the role of the employee's own agency when facing novel challenging situations at work.

Earlier literature concerning the specific demands of remote working and the time spent on it has established that it is increasing pandemic (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2021). A high-paced working style has become quite typical (Felstead and Henseke, 2017; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Maruyama and Tietze, 2012; Shirmohammadi *et al.*, 2022), Moreover, physical distance from the work community impedes access to social support in the work context (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022; Kossen and Berg, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2021; Sardeshmukh *et al.*, 2012). We found similar elements associated with remote working, which seemed to consume the energy of remote employees, thus increasing their need for recovery. We categorized those elements under three themes: *extended working hours*, *an intensive working style*, and *decreased social support*. The contribution of our study to previous knowledge lies particularly in identifying the internal and external elements of each of these themes. External elements involve the norms and work habits of the organization (e.g., scheduling meetings and changes in working culture). In contrast, internal factors involve behaviors individuals display in the remote-working context (e.g., working extended hours, skipping breaks, and a reluctance to seek help).

Moreover, internal reasons are those individuals can influence themselves, and external reasons are those over which they have little control. This finding contributes to the knowledge of remote work (Charalampous *et al.* 2022) by highlighting the need to consider both internal and external aspects. When combined, those elements are likely to contribute markedly to exhaustion. We also contribute to the understanding of E-R theory (Meijman and Mulder, 1998) by highlighting that the need for the effort spurred by work is not static and is subject to changes in working conditions. Here, the pandemic changed the way of working drastically, as did the elements of work that consume energy. Our study also contributes to the literature on recovery from work (Zijlstra *et al.*, 2014). We highlight the need to dig into the roots of the elements of different jobs that demand particular effort. In addition, recovery from the work needs to be understood as a process in which employees' own agency plays an essential role.

Furthermore, we found another study touching upon the theme of detachment from work in the context of the novel demands of remote work that stressed the importance of coping strategies related to these demands (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022). Previous literature on psychological detachment has recognized the existence and effectiveness of detachment strategies (Luta *et al.*, 2020; Sonnentag and

Niessen, 2020); nevertheless, that stream of research is just emerging and our study contributes in several ways.

The first strategy identified was cognitive control—comprising people's thoughts on controlling their activities (e.g., thought patterns and decision-making). Previous studies have shown the power of thought to affect detachment in laboratory settings (Sonnentag & Niessen, 2020). In addition, prior intervention studies have acknowledged the connection between cognitive techniques and detachment (Althammer *et al.*, 2021; Karabinski *et al.*, 2021; Smit, 2016). Our study adds new knowledge on cognitive paths to the detachment that remote-working employees find useful and learn to utilize. The finding highlights the importance of viewing such employees as agents in promoting the recovery process. We suggest the first step to successful recovery is cognitive; employees must become aware of the increased need for recovery and recognize the risks of disregarding it. We suggest that following that recognition, employees can begin resource replenishment (cf. energy resources in COR theory; Hobfoll, 2001, Zijlstra *et al.*, 2014) and select and apply suitable detachment strategies. In addition, suitable personal resources, such as skills and attitudes (Hobfoll, 2001), can help people manage new and demanding situations and protect the individual from the strain caused by heavy job demands (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009). We suggest that personal resources (Hobfoll, 2001) play an important role in what kind of strategies employees apply to cope with the energy-consuming elements of remote work and in what way. For instance, someone with strong mindfulness skills (Urrila, 2022) may be more likely to recognize the early signs of those elements of their work and decide which strategies would suit the situation.

The next two strategies are physical disconnection (disconnection from the physical workstation, for instance, a desk, workroom, devices, or even leaving the home) and time-bound routines (regular procedures and habits repeated or performed at specific times, usually at the end of the working day). Both share some aspects of border theories. Physical and temporal boundary setting has been connected with psychological detachment (Haun *et al.*, 2022; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2017; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). The physical disconnection strategy is especially relevant when the home is the main place of work. However, the resources available can affect how well remote employees can physically disconnect from their work; for instance, the process would be impacted by the size of the home (Hobfoll, 2001) and whether there is a dedicated workroom or working space.

Regarding time-bound routines, the surrounding environment may affect how committed an employee is to maintaining routines. If people need to pick up children from daycare or walk their dog at a certain time, that may support time-bound

routines. Overall, future studies should consider different background issues that may play a role in the recovery process, for instance, family status, having children or other care responsibilities and previous experience with remote work.

The last of the strategies, engagement in non-work activities, is well-represented in previous studies indicating that leisure-time activities facilitate detachment from work (Hahn *et al.*, 2012; Sonnentag and Lischetzke, 2018). This study offers a new slant on previous knowledge by noting that the activity must be sufficiently engaging to draw the individual's attention to it and away from work. Another essential observation was that some employees immediately did something unrelated to work at the end of the working day to effectively detach from work and maximize their recovery time. Accordingly, the optimal combination of different strategies, for instance, activation of time-bound routines and engagement in leisure-time activities, might be the most beneficial way to promote recovery from work through psychological detachment. We would benefit from a greater understanding of the effectiveness of different types and combinations of detachment strategies. Future research could also investigate different job contexts, one of which should be remote working.

Practical implications

The findings outlined above have some practical implications. First, we recommend organizations review their practices, culture, and routines to manage the external causes of energy-consuming elements of remote work. That might involve implementing policies on the timing and length of meetings or ensuring there are procedures for regular discussions about the organization of work and performance expectations. In addition, organizations should support individuals' detachment strategies. For instance, managers could reassure employees that there should be no guilt associated with working from home. Managers should help them resist the urge to overwork and instead to take breaks from work to safeguard their health and boost cognitive strategies.

Second, for remote employees themselves, we recommend a conscious and regular evaluation of their recovery status. That would likely involve evaluating what actions alleviate the energy-consuming elements of remote work and exploring the most apt detachment strategies. That policy could grant remote workers agency over their situation. For instance, people prone to becoming immersed in work and skipping breaks would benefit from having routines (e.g., scheduled breaks) and applying cognitive control (self-control). Employees who remain highly alert throughout the day and attend frequent meetings could similarly benefit from scheduled breaks but also engage in counterbalancing non-work activities (listening to music, reading, exercising, etc.) during breaks to give the brain a reprieve.

Limitations and further research

We acknowledge several limitations in the current study: The data derive only from Finnish corporate office workers. Comparisons between public and private sectors or nations would offer more insight into remote home-based working. The extraordinary COVID-19 circumstances likely affected how people perceived their work burden, and work practices were still reshaping at the time of our study. A longitudinal view might reduce the effects of temporary conditions. Individuals' perceptions captured in the interviews represent their views at that point in time, while a diary study could provide a detailed description of their daily recovery. We exclusively studied psychological detachment as a pathway to recovery, excluding other recovery experiences (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007) that might play an important role. Intervention studies to test the effectiveness of promotional strategies on detachment and recovery identified could be enlightening. The results of the interventions and the impact of sufficient detachment from work could be measured against organizational outcomes, like job performance and productivity.

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ARTICLE 4

I wouldn't be working this way if I had a family - differences in remote workers' needs for supervisor's family-supportiveness depending on the family status

Hilpi Kangas, Heini Pensar & Rebekah Rousi

Abstract

This study investigates how working remotely blurs the boundaries between work and nonwork domains, and how leaders can mitigate this blurring for diverse employees via family-supportive supervisor behaviours (FSSB). Working from home leads to an increasing intertwining of work and nonwork roles, with family statuses playing a significant role in shaping boundary challenges and support needs. Through semi-structured interviews with 89 employees working from home in various industries, the study reveals that remote workers experience spill-over effects in terms of time demands and emotions from work to nonwork domains. They also navigate simultaneous role expectations in fulfilling work responsibilities. The diversity of employees, e.g., respective family statuses, adds variety to the boundary challenges encountered. The results underscore that FSSB can benefit employees by reducing these challenges, when support is adjusted to the specific needs of individuals. This research expands the understanding of blurred boundaries, differentiates the experiences of parents and non-parents, and extends the concept of FSSB to encompass nonwork roles beyond the family. This study emphasizes the importance of employers tailoring their work-life programs to accommodate the diverse needs of employees and recognizing the pivotal role of supervisors in attuning their supportive behaviours to employees' boundary needs and preferences.

Keywords: Leadership, Family-Supportive Supervisor behaviour, FSSB, Remote Work, Work-nonwork boundaries

Introduction

Modern work life is in turmoil. This is due to multiple factors characterized by uncertainty and change. Recent and current global crises, confounded by exponential technological progress have placed strain on the wellbeing and work-life patterns of all individuals. The rapid shift from onsite work to remote or hybrid work particularly accelerated during the pandemic from early 2020 onwards. These changes have made workplaces less place-dependent with interaction intensively digitally mediated (Allen et al., 2021; Haun et al., 2022). Although the pandemic has eased, it seems that working from home and remote work in general are becoming permanent employment practices in modern work life (Vyas, 2022).

Working from home offers various benefits, including reduced co-worker interruptions, increased productivity and flexibility, and the elimination of work commutes, which all save time and enable employees to allocate more time resource for preferred activities (Mäkelä et al., 2023). Yet, working remotely presents challenges as it requires individuals to integrate their work and home roles within the same physical and temporal location, leading to a blurring of work-nonwork boundaries (Adisa et al., 2022; Fukumura et al., 2021). Consequently, this distortion of work-nonwork boundaries potentially creates confusion regarding priorities and expectations, with one domain encroaching upon the other (Fukumura et al., 2021; Lonska et al., 2021). Indeed, firm boundaries between work and home domains have been found essential for achieving a good work-life balance (Allen et al., 2021) and fostering psychological detachment (healthy break) from work (Haun et al., 2022). These factors not only contribute to employees' well-being but also have implications for their job performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Sonnentag, 2012). The existing research highlights the benefits of boundaries and the strategies individuals use to maintain them. Yet, there is need to further understand the specific effects (both positive and negative) of boundary blurring (Cho, 2020).

Traditionally, studies have regarded these nonwork responsibilities primarily as family and childcare-related responsibilities. This perspective is largely centred on the nuclear family and parenting roles (Kelliher et al., 2019). The narrow focus on child care responsibilities has long limited the definition of "life" and excluded non-family-related activities and diverse family structures (Keeney et al., 2013; Prakash, 2018). The traditional emphasis in work-life literature has been criticized for neglecting diversity, including individuals with non-traditional family structures (Beigi et al., 2019). However, it is important to recognize that non-parent employees, similar to their parenting counterparts, also face challenges in managing work and non-work responsibilities and interests (Boiarintseva et al., 2022).

Individuals have varying needs for managing work and non-work interface based on factors such as parental status, caregiving for extended family members, and other non-work responsibilities like volunteer work (Boiarintseva et al., 2022; Lonska et al., 2021). There has been a call to pay more attention to studying the conditions of employees without family commitments (Jayasingam et al., 2023). Regarding the blurring of boundaries between work and life roles, remote work challenges the maintenance of these boundaries for all employees, regardless of their parental status (Adisa et al., 2022; Allen et al., 2021). Therefore, further research should explore the impact of remote work on boundary management for employees of various family statuses (Cho, 2020).

Boundary maintenance has often been studied as an individual-controlled aspect, but it is influenced by various factors, including the availability of support, especially from supervisors (Koch & Binnewies, 2015). Supervisor support is considered crucial in achieving a balance between work and nonwork obligations (Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022). In the context of supervisory support research, the concept of family-supportive supervisor behaviour (FSSB) has been examined. FSSB involves emotional and instrumental support from supervisors, who act as role models and implement creative work-family policies (Hammer et al., 2009). Although FSSB initially focused on family support, recent discussions have emphasized the broader nonwork-domain support that supervisors can provide to employees' lives outside of work (Evanoff et al., 2020). It is important to consider context when providing supportive behaviours, recognizing the diversity within work groups and tailoring support accordingly (Crain & Stevens, 2018; Hammer et al., 2011). However, these aspects have been overlooked in previous studies, indicating a research gap that needs to be addressed (Crain & Stevens, 2018). Despite the importance of FSSB, research on FSSB in the remote work context is still in its infancy (Chambel et al., 2022). There is further need to explore the experiences of FSSB in remote work, particularly in contexts that extend beyond the traditional family structure, including the perspectives and support requirements of employees who do not have parenting responsibilities (Alexander et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2022).

The present study addresses the research needs by exploring the challenge of boundary blurring associated with remote work by answering the following research questions: *How does working remotely blur the work-nonwork boundaries of employees?* and, *What kind of supervisor's support can reduce the effect of blurring boundaries?* This study contributes to the vocational literature in three key ways. First, it sheds light on the mechanisms of boundary blurring in remote work, which have not been extensively explored before. Second, it broadens the understanding of the work-nonwork interface beyond the family, considering the

complexities of managing boundaries for individuals with diverse family statuses. Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of supervisor support in addressing the challenges of blurred boundaries and expands the concept of FSSB to include non-family situations. The next chapter presents relevant literature on remote work boundaries, variations based on family status, and the role of supervisor support.

Boundaries in remote work

Boundaries, or psychological borders, are often created and upheld between one's work and home roles (Kreiner et al., 2009). Boundary theory posits that setting boundaries enables individuals to separate and exert control over their different roles, safeguarding them against interference from one role to another (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Roles are typically separated in terms of both physical space and time (Ashforth et al., 2000), for instance work roles are tied to working times and working location which form boundaries to the role. Role transitions are influenced by the flexibility and permeability of these boundaries. Flexible boundaries allow smooth role transitions, while rigidity makes these transitions more challenging. Permeable boundaries allow roles to intrude with one another, e.g. individuals may be physically present in one role while mentally or behaviourally engaged in another (Leroy et al., 2021). Thus, impermeable boundaries protect intrusions from one role to another. Highly flexible and permeable boundaries contribute to the integration of work and home roles, allowing for seamless interactions and transitions between these domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Voydanoff, 2005). However, highly integrated roles hinder achieving psychological decoupling, causing blurred boundaries and spill-over effects from one role to another, for instance stress in one role transmits to and impacts the other role (Grzywacz, 2000). When the boundaries become blurred, individuals may experience interruptions from one role to another without warning, causing one role to disturb the other. This can lead to confusion regarding which role is more salient or prominent at a given time. Such boundary blurring involves behavioural and psychological implications, for instance multitasking or thinking about work in one's leisure time (Voydanoff, 2005). Boundary theory posits that the choice between role integration and segmentation depends on individual preferences. Yet, boundaries may be challenged in different contexts, which could enforce role integration, leading to a heightened experience of role violation or confusion (Ashforth et al., 2000). For instance, in a situation where employees are working from home, they may have no choice but to integrate their work and home roles during the workday, as they lack control over arising situations (Allen et al., 2015; Cho, 2020; Schieman et al., 2021).

The effects of remote work on work-nonwork boundaries

Remote work from home typically introduces a higher frequency of transitions between work and non-work domains, encompassing deliberate and unintended shifts (Delanoeije et al., 2019). The shift of work to the home environment eliminates the *physical boundary* between the traditional work location and the home location. Consequently, the concept of work hours becomes less defined, making it challenging to establish clear *temporal boundaries* as usually associated with office hours (Adisa et al., 2022). Additionally, working from home requires the use of different work tools and devices, which can result in extended work hours and the blurring of temporal boundaries (Seeber & Erhardt, 2023). Remote work also risks introducing an always-on culture, where the use of work technology at home can create perceived expectations for employees to be constantly available, further eroding regular work hours (Fukumura et al., 2021). Conversely, employees may feel pressure to attend to household matters during designated work hours, leading to multitasking and increased micro-transitions between roles (Adisa et al., 2022; Cho, 2020).

This erosion of physical and temporal boundaries due to remote work highlights the importance of establishing *psychological boundaries* between personal space and privacy. The presence or absence of physical boundaries affects the flexibility and permeability of mental boundaries, which can result in unwanted spill-over or violations between different domains (Beauregard et al., 2019; Sinclair et al., 2020). However, remote work may also hinder the establishment of psychological boundaries. This is due to the fact that working from home challenges people's psychological detachment from work, as the home environment has turned into the workplace, and may keep reminding employees about work during nonwork hours (Charalampous et al., 2022).

It is evident that remote work creates new conditions for work-nonwork boundaries. Publications based on boundary theories (Allen et al., 2021; Kreiner et al., 2009) have suggested that individuals employ various tactics to maintain boundaries. The delineation between work and other aspects of life is typically examined as an individual domain. However, maintaining boundaries is influenced by factors beyond the individual, such as the home environment and supervisor (for review, see Allen et al., 2014). These perspectives have received limited attention in research thus far. This gives rise to the necessity for more studies in relation to remote working, regarding which researchers have already produced a research agenda (Cho, 2020). Both previous and recent research findings have shown that remote work increases people's tendency to overwork (Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė et

al., 2022). While previously, the reasons may have been a sense of guilt or a conscious effort to reciprocate the opportunity for remote work (Hilbrecht et al., 2008), studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that the same phenomenon occurs when remote work is involuntary (Taskin et al., 2023). In such cases, individuals do not feel burdened to prove that they are truly working or to demonstrate their productivity. Therefore, it is important to investigate the mechanisms that cause individuals to experience work encroachment into their leisure time in remote work settings.

Boundaries of parents and non-parents

Role expectations influence individuals' ability to maintain role boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000). In the context of remote work, where work and non-work roles become intertwined, the expectations surrounding non-work roles may become particularly prominent. Parents who are working from home and have children in need of care may encounter challenges in separating their work role from responsibilities as caregivers within the home environment (Allen et al., 2015). It is likely that in the remote work context, parents and non-parents experience distinct boundary challenges. A report on remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chung et al., 2020) indicates that while both parents and non-parents identified the blurring of boundaries as the primary challenge of remote work, their work-life demands varied. Parents specifically faced additional challenges such as increased housework, childcare responsibilities, and distractions at home. In contrast, non-parents reported a negative impact on their relationships with colleagues as a prominent issue.

There is a scarcity of studies specifically examining the unique boundary challenges faced by employees with parenting responsibilities compared to those without. As a result, limited knowledge exists on how to effectively support these groups in addressing their specific challenges, especially in the remote work context, where differences may be even more pronounced than in the more traditional work setting. However, research conducted in other work contexts slightly different to the one in the current study (in terms of industry and type of work, and non-remote context) suggests that there may indeed be some differences between the groups. A few studies have revealed variations in boundary challenges between parents and non-parents in contexts that also differ slightly from typical office work scenarios. Santos (2015) studied academics, a group in which the boundaries between home and other aspects of life can differ from typical office-based employment. The study observed that parents of young children possessed a greater capacity to establish thicker boundaries between work and non-work domains. In contrast, non-parents tended to have more permeable boundaries, integrating

their work and home activities. In other words, in the case of non-parents, work would serve as a way of spending time - substituting activities such as day-care and hobbies that would otherwise be in the lives of parenting workers. Ultimately, work had a tendency of taking on the role of surrogate child. Another study conducted in a different context provides similar indications (Lawson et al., 2013). This study examined hotel employees, who may otherwise have specific work schedules, different to that of typical office workers. The research demonstrated that non-parenting employees experienced higher negative spill-over from work to home. They also tended to work longer hours and have more permeable boundaries compared to their colleagues with children. In this case, causes may have been due to the lack of reasons to refuse extra work such as overtime, and substituting for co-workers.

Furthermore, in a study focusing on high-profile international professionals in service consultancy companies with demanding work roles (Niemistö et al., 2020). It was found that parenting employees were more aware of work-nonwork boundaries than their childless counterparts. It was observed that, within this specific context, parents encountered nonwork constraints in establishing boundaries. However, similar to their non-parent counterparts, they exhibited a willingness to push these boundaries to showcase their equal capability and challenge the perception that the parent role hindered their abilities. In another study that examined parents and non-parents in a boundaryless work setting characterized by flexible schedules, high workloads, and demanding roles, it was discovered that the lack of boundaries resulted in longer working hours for both groups, irrespective of whether they had non-work parenting responsibilities or not (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). It seems that the demands of work in these settings, causing pressure to perform, are the underlying causes for boundary bending and subsequent overwork. These studies further support the notion that the presence of parenting responsibilities can impact the awareness and management of work-nonwork boundaries. In some scenarios such as boundaryless work (i.e., business ownership) even awareness does not prevent the permeation of boundaries for either group. Moreover, studies reveal little about the types of blurring being experienced by the different groups, both in terms of influential factors, as well as in terms of how the domains encroach on one another.

Based on previous research (Haar, 2013; Reimann et al., 2022) work-life issues appear to be a struggle and a concern for both parents and non-parents. However, it has been observed that different circumstances can present distinct challenges within these groups. Examining studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, Schieman (2021) demonstrated that remote working parents experienced an increased work-life conflict. Whereas, non-parents or individuals without chil-

dren living at home reported a decreased sense of conflict. Another view is provided by Reimann and colleagues (Reimann et al., 2022), who showed that conflicts in managing the work-life interface, particularly work-family conflict, increased equally for both parent and non-parent employees. This highlights the potential significance of organizational support in effectively managing the work-life interface. This perspective will be further examined in the subsequent section.

Mitigation of boundary challenges through Family-Supportive supervisor behaviours

The remote work model has undoubtedly altered and tested people's ability to manage their work-nonwork boundaries. Traditionally, the management of one's boundaries has been seen as the individual's own responsibility (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Reissner et al., 2021; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). Yet, it is known that support can help with this form of management (Koch & Binnewies, 2015). Moreover, it may be assumed that support needs to be adjusted to these altered circumstances. Employers can offer flexibility as a form of support to help employees address the heightened challenges of working from home.

Organizational support has proven paramount through the positive impact it generates in relation to work time and task flexibility, creating beneficial outcomes for both family-life and the organization as a whole. In this regard, support from a supervisor was particularly highlighted as the strongest form of aid (Ferguson et al., 2015). Besides formal work-related support, an important element in managing the work-nonwork balance is through informal support, focusing on social relationships, and social support. This especially applies in relation to the social support of the supervisor (Marescaux et al., 2020; Sargent et al., 2022).

Supervisors, and the support they are able to offer are an important factor that can lower the experienced work-nonwork conflict as well as increase overall employee wellbeing (Kossek et al., 2011). A meta-analysis conducted by Kossek and associates (2011) showed that direct support from supervisors, such as family supportive behaviours, can be more effective than general forms of social support in reducing work-family conflict. Research is rich on how individuals can enhance their own boundary integrity. To date however, there is limited knowledge on the support related to family supportive supervisor behaviour, especially in the context of remote work where boundaries are strained. The literature on supervisor support, however, is consistent about the importance of that type of support. It is suggested that this support is effectively demonstrated through Family-Supportive Supervisor Behaviours (FSSB), which refer to behaviours exhibited by supervisors that support families, encompassing emotional support, instrumental support, role model behaviours, and creative work-family management (Hammer et al., 2009).

FSSB is a multidimensional phenomenon where supervisors actively integrate work and non-work domains through proactive and reactive actions, serving as a role model (Straub, 2012). FSSB is a context-specific form of support enacted by supervisors, representing an extra role accompanied by proactive behaviour patterns (Crain & Stevens, 2018).

It has been shown that FSSB provides important resources (Authors, forthcoming) that aid workers in managing the professional and family domains, especially in situations where remote work is practiced intensively (Chambel et al., 2022). When employees work remotely, their supervisors can demonstrate supportive behaviour, such as displaying empathy and understanding when employees face family demands while working (emotional support). They can also demonstrate this by being open to the adjustment of meeting times to accommodate employee family needs (instrumental support). Supervisors may suggest creative ways to balance work and nonwork responsibilities (creative support). They may also avoid contacting employees outside their work schedule (role modelling) (Kossek & Distelberg, 2009). Additionally, FSSB has been proven as an important means for increasing remote workers' control of their own boundaries (Carvalho et al., 2022). The remote work context demands much stronger non-work active communication by supervisors. It additionally requires higher levels of flexibility compared to traditional conceptualizations of FSSB (Thomas et al., 2022).

An important viewpoint on FSSB is the way that the support is enacted and perceived (Clark et al., 2017; French et al., 2018). It has been said that the rate to which the leader and employee agree on the level of FSSB has an influence on, e.g., the intrinsic motivation of the subordinate (Marescaux et al., 2020). Leaders can help the employees deal with family-related obligations by, for example, letting them take care of sick children. They may also support the possibility to combine issues from work-nonwork domains by offering flexible work arrangements such as the opportunity to engage in remote work (Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Moreover, the actions and role model behaviour of the leader has an influence on the work-nonwork balance of the employee. Within the organizational context, the leader often acts as an agent for instilling procedures and practices. This is also important regarding formal and informal work-nonwork supportive practices (Fiksenbaum, 2014). Negative work-nonwork experiences perceived by the supervisors have been seen to trickle down to their subordinates (Pan et al., 2021). Moreover, the supervisor can also be the cause of boundary challenges, such as intrusions and violations in out-of-work hours (McCartney et al., 2023).

Within the context of work-nonwork domain research, supervisor support is positively associated with employee work-family balance (Hammer et al., 2009). This

holds especially for instrumental support, which involves providing resources or assistance, has been found to contribute to boundary flexibility (Ferguson et al., 2015). This suggests that supervisors who provide their employees with flexible work arrangements or support for childcare can enable them to experience a greater sense of control over their work-family boundaries. Studies examining remote work and FSSB have highlighted the crucial role of FSSB in facilitating the work-nonwork boundary among remote workers (Carvalho et al., 2022). Carvalho and colleagues' (2022) study found that FSSB is pivotal for remote workers to manage their boundaries effectively. This is essential for overall wellbeing. Remote workers who reported high levels of FSSB experienced lower levels of work-family conflict, which was positively associated with overall wellbeing.

Method

The present study aims to advance knowledge on employees' work-nonwork management boundary challenges and support needs in the context of remote work. The purpose is to widen this understanding through individuals' subjective work-life experiences, utilizing a large and diverse sample of remote workers. This sample includes individuals from various professions, organizations, and personal and family circumstances. To achieve these aims, a qualitative research design was employed within the study.

Participants

The sample includes 89 remote workers from six large corporations with over 1000 staff members in Finland spanning various industries (process and information technology, business services, telecommunications, and insurance). The corporations designated a single point of contact to recruit supervisors and teams for the study. Random purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) was employed to recruit participants. In order to achieve this, personal yet random calls for participation were sent to members of assigned teams and supervisors. Together 31 supervisors and one to four employees from their teams participated in the study. The participants were aged 23-60, with a mean age of 41.64. The sample included various professions such as those in product development, sales, customer service, training, accounting, and HR services. These professions were engaged in regular office-hour work from 8 am to 4 pm. A slight majority (62.9%) identified as female. Most participants (78%) shared a household with a spouse, while a fifth (20%) lived alone without a spouse or children. Nearly half of the participants (48.3%) had underaged children residing in their households, comprising 17 fathers and 26 mothers. All participants were working remotely from home at the request of their employers to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Finnish Government recommendations). A majority (70.7%) had prior experience with remote working, although

only a small percentage (5.6%) had primarily worked remotely before the pandemic, and a significant portion (38.7%) had engaged in part-time remote work, while nearly one-fifth (17.9%) had no prior remote working experience prior to the pandemic. At the time of the interviews upper secondary schools in Finland had switched to distance learning, and children at schools and daycare centers were ordered to be quarantined in cases of exposure to infected individuals. In Finland, school days in primary and secondary schools are typically short (Finnish National Agency for Education), and therefore it is likely that many of the participants with parenting responsibilities had children at home for at least part of their working hours.

Data collection

Participants were informed that the study would be conducted anonymously, and no data that could identify them would be stored with the research data and that participants have the right to request the withdrawal of their own data from the study at any time. Participation in the study was voluntary and each participant booked their own interview via online booking application. Thereafter, an invitation and link to the interview was sent to the registered participant. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted by six researchers (including two of the authors in this paper) between October and December 2020. The format covered pre-determined themes while also allowing participants to raise relevant topics (Mason, 2002). Participants were asked about their remote work environment and experiences transitioning from office-based work to remote work locations. Team members shared insights about how supervisors managed and supported employees, and supervisors described their perspectives on how they engaged in supporting employees remotely. They also described a typical remote workday and identified factors that supported or challenged work-life management in the remote context. Interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes and were conducted by the research team, recorded (with the participant's permission), and later transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The authors translated the interview quotations into English.

Data analysis

The collected data was analysed by adopting principles for a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), through systematic categorizing of the interview transcripts, and further complemented with a relational analysis (Robinson, 2011). Thus, the analysis was conducted in two main phases: the segmentation phase, where themes and sub-themes were identified, and the relational recombination phase, where inferring relations were recognized.

In the *segmentation* phase, the data was visited in light of the two research questions. Firstly, *RQ1: How does working remotely blur the work-nonwork boundaries of employees?* Thematic analysis techniques were utilized to inductively generate new themes for boundary crossings (Ashforth et al., 2000), focusing on specific challenges that were unique for the remote context. Based on the findings (and as illustrated in figure 1), it was determined that blurred boundaries manifest in two directions: (1) work-to-home interference; and (2) home-to-work interference. These primary themes further break down into three secondary themes: (1.1) temporal spill-over, (1.2) emotional spill-over, and (2.1) simultaneous role expectations, each of which encompasses sub-themes. This review highlighted the evident variation in boundary needs based on an individual's non-work obligations, particularly with regards to whether they have parenting responsibilities or not. Thus, separate categories for parents and non-parents were established for examining their boundary challenges. Secondly, with *RQ5: What kind of supervisor's support can reduce the effect of blurring boundaries*? the authors deductively identified diverse forms of FSSB (Hammer et al., 2009), based on the four pre-determined dimensions of the concept (instrumental, emotional support, creative work-family management, and role modelling). Team member and supervisors' perspectives were analysed separately, and later matched in teams. This analysis contributed to understanding of the different forms of support in general, and to see if there were differences in perceptions of team members and their supervisor. As a result of the segmentation phase produced, there were themes of boundary challenges and coded content FSSB dimension.

In the phase of *relational recombination*, the boundary crossings and FSSB dimensions were compared and reciprocal connections identified (Robinson, 2011). At this stage, the analysis was conducted as a collaborative exercise among the authors, where the content of the codes was reviewed and linkages between the identified sub-themes of challenges and a corresponding FSSB support (if there were any) were drawn. Finally, a report of the findings was produced, which we present in the following chapter.

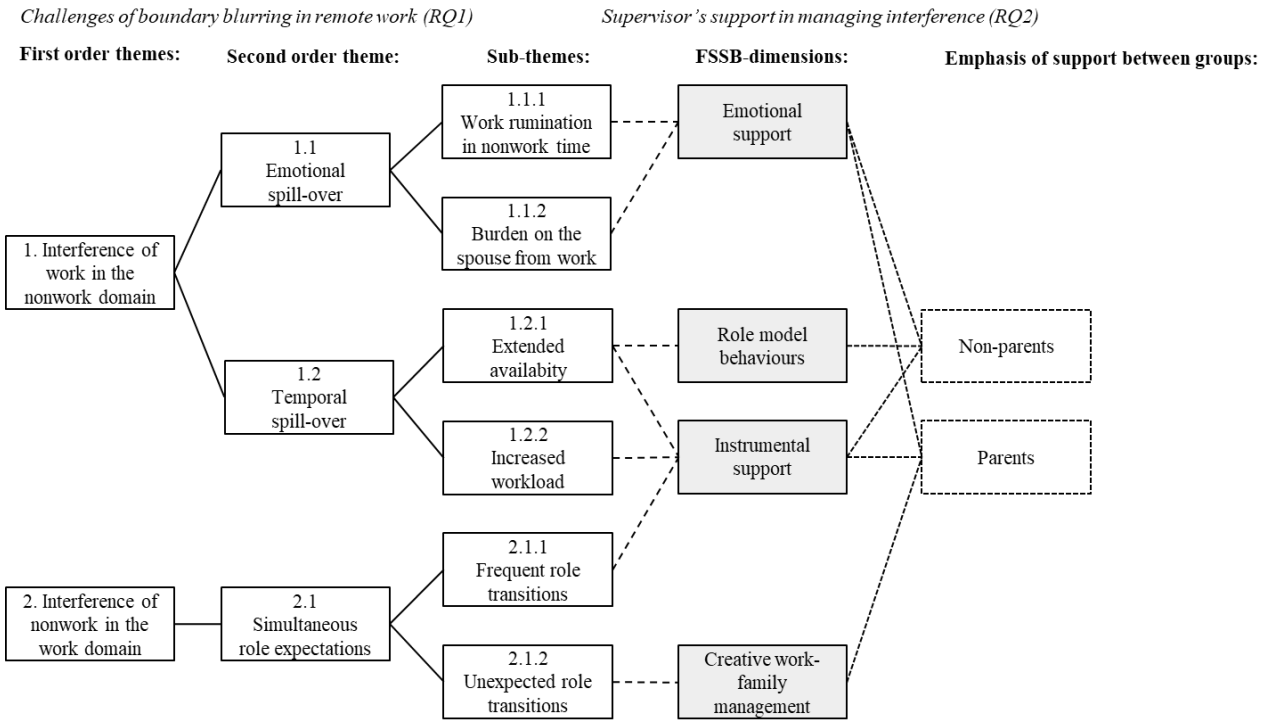

Figure 1. Relations between themes for boundary challenges and the FSSB-dimensions

Findings

The study reveals that remote work blurs boundaries in two directions: 1) work interfering with nonwork roles through emotional and temporal spill-overs, mitigated by the supervisor's help in safeguarding the boundary; and 2) nonwork interfering with work roles through simultaneous role expectations, mitigated by supervisor's help to maintain boundary flexibility. Parent employees require flexible boundaries to attend to family responsibilities, while non-parents need safeguards to maintain boundaries. These findings are described into more detail in the following sections.

Interference of work in the nonwork domain

This first theme, *(1) interference of work in the nonwork domain* highlights individual struggles with work spilling over into their nonwork domain. Its sub-theme *(1.1) emotional spill-over* refer to the carryover of emotions such as stress, worries, and tiredness from work to non-work hours, often associated with work-related tasks or interpersonal dynamics. The sub-theme *(1.2) temporal spill-over* involve the continuation of work engagement into non-work hours, impeding the designated time for non-work activities and potentially reducing one's investment in non-work pursuits.

Emotional spill-over

When working remotely, there were various situations in which issues that occurred during the workday were bothering people during nonwork time. This caused inability to transfer from work to non-work roles. Encountered issues during the workday would emotionally trouble employees even after the workday. Remote working eliminated the opportunities for spontaneous dialogues that typically occurred in office settings, such as conversations in corridors, at desks, and in the office canteen. As a result, employees were unable to release their emotional burdens through sharing experiences and engaging in supportive discussions with colleagues. Interviewees with reduced access to such support expressed their heightened need for *(1.1.1) rumination in nonwork time* about work-related issues.

"There are situations where there is too much work. Some unpleasant things at work that weigh on your mind, they tend to come along even into the weekend. Then, on Monday morning it feels like you haven't fully recovered and those things have been on your mind, so then you haven't been able to find that balance." (Female, 53, lives alone)

Some employees who had a spouse, admitted that they had begun to increasingly seek social support from family. They mentioned they had begun to discuss (and ruminate) work issues with their spouses, more than earlier. Although spouses might offer a channel for social interaction and support, the interviewees felt that unloading work-related worries onto loved ones meant that work spilled over to their non-work life. This placed *(1.1.2) burden on the spouse*, which served as substitute for the missed office interactions.

"Compared to office hours, I tend to discuss work-related matters with my spouse a lot more. Perhaps it's a way for me to process the things that are on my mind about work. I don't know if it bothers my wife that I unload things to her." (Male, 33, lives with spouse and children)

"When working remotely, you might not be able to let go of the bothering thoughts and they stay with you. At the office, when you meet the next person, the frustration or other issues may leave your mind because your thoughts move on to the next thing. But at home, this may not happen as quickly, and your spouse may get an outburst." (Female, 43, lives with spouse and children)

It is important to note that employees who lived in single person households, without the possibility to talk things out with partners were most likely to express a specific need to engage in informal dialogue with their supervisor to deal with difficult issues, which also extended to matters related to their personal life. The role of such emotional support seemed to serve as a protective mechanism towards employees' nonwork time by helping the employee sufficiently manage negative encounters at work. This enabled them to transfer to their nonwork role after the workday.

Remote work, with its reliance on digital correspondence, seemed to create a potential mechanism for emotionally burdensome events due to increased misinterpretations and conflicts, with limited opportunities for resolution or addressing these issues. With reduced opportunities to offload difficult experiences (e.g., in the custom of informal between-peer interaction), issues would persist in bothering participants' minds. The stress caused by unresolved conflict influenced the likelihood for spill-over into one's private life.

"I have experienced negative things more strongly in remote work than in the workplace where I have had close relationships with colleagues. The feeling of failure comes easier, and it tends to linger longer as well. When you're in proximity with colleagues, it's easier to get immediate support when something negative happens. But with remote work, you don't want to interrupt your colleagues' work by sharing your negative experience, and it can be more challenging to get the support

you need. I usually take it up with my supervisor and tell her about it." (Female, 49, lives with a spouse)

"It's the most mentally challenging thing when we work alone [remotely] and something happens, which makes one angry. Earlier today, there was sort of a "situation" with my colleagues where my supervisor was also present. This situation wasn't direct criticism, but it started bothering me. I immediately sent my boss a message on Teams asking for his perspective on what was said because I wanted to know where the problem was and where I stood." (Male, 53, lives with a spouse)

It became a clear focal point that the role of supervisor support when managing boundaries blurred because of mental spill-over. The leader's willingness to offer emotional support was essential. The leader offered the possibility to handle work-related issues during the workday and helped subordinates maintain the issues within that role. One obvious need was to emotionally unload work-related worries and gain support to resolve matters.

"My supervisor is the kind of person you can talk to about anything. If some work stuff is bothering you, you can vent it to her and tell her, 'this really bugs me [...] In remote working, you can rant freely since no one else hears you. Every now and then we talk about more personal stuff. Sometimes we might take the phone with us for a 15-minute walk and deliberately not talk about work. It's a possibility for unwinding and a way to reset your mind." (Female, 31, lives alone)

The need for dialogue and support extended to encouragement and help when encountering difficulties or setbacks, which seemed an important hinder for emotional spill-overs.

"I appreciate it that we go through negative things together [with my supervisor]. If something has gone wrong, we consider why and how it can be done differently when going forward. We also discuss if it's worth being worried about personally." (Female, 29, lives with a spouse)

The perception of the supervisors was also that their role had changed during the period of intensive remote working. The nature of their work and what they felt was expected of them leaned more towards the soft values and towards focusing on the nonwork domain of their employees more intensively.

From a supervisor interview: "Sometimes it feels like I'm a psychologist. We discuss life challenges, and employees need me for conversation and support, empathy, and understanding. If there are issues with results not progressing, I provide help, support, and understanding." (Female, 47, lives with spouse and children)

Thus, during the pandemic there has been a tendency for supervisors to take on more responsibility for employees during nonwork hours, and regarding personal issues. Ironically, this shift in the interpersonal role of supervisors has often been seen as a necessity to aid employees in establishing work-nonwork boundaries. In times of remote work, employees have faced challenging situations, whether work-related, communication-related (digital technology aiding fuel to the fire), or regarding team dynamics and chemistry. In order to ease the effects of mental spill-over, supervisors have been seen as a crucial factor in relieving employees of anxiety and mediating tensions to enable work recovery.

Temporal spill-over

Experiences of temporal spill-over were observed, and they manifested as (1.2.1) extended availability and (1.2.2) increased workloads. The right to disconnect from work, whether via phone, email, or messaging, seemed to disappear. Rather, there was a sense among the participants that they were to be forever reachable. There seemed to be a heightened tendency for such spill-overs among the non-parents, who did not have compelling nonwork obligations (family chores) to interrupt work. It was observed that specifically the interviewees who lived in single-person households expressed the shift to remote working as, "work taking over all life", as work was now "literally carried home". These participants feared that they would not be able to separate work from home, particularly since now that the home reminded them of work-related matters.

"The difference [now in remote working] is that my computer is basically always on. I never used to keep my computer on standby and I would reply [to e-mails] in the morning. But now that the computer is always available, it's so easy to quickly respond to something. I keep checking my phone to see if there are any urgent messages and I work a little bit in the evenings." (Male, 50, lives with a spouse)

"Letting go of work has been a significant challenge for me. The hardest part is leaving work and work-related thoughts behind at the end of the day. Because technically, when your free-time starts, you're still in the same place, so it's challenging to detach your thoughts from work." (Male, 32, lives alone)

It seems that remote working changes the way work and being at work is comprehended. The interviewees perceived tasks related work spilling over to nonwork time, which made the detachment less easy. One mechanism causing temporal spill-over might be the changed perception of employees about working hours. Occasionally this meant taking longer recovery breaks from work. It also meant working late hours. It seems that establishing and maintaining a structured work routine was sometimes hard.

“I notice that my work tends to stretch out. Now that you're at home, it's easy to think 'I'll just do this one more thing' and then the day stretches and drags on.” (Female, 28, lives alone)

Therefore, it seems that in addition to mental aspects of tasks piling up after the workday, the temporal boundaries were harder to maintain. Employees living with children experienced children as helping to set boundaries between work and nonwork domains. The employees who did not have children were easily stretching that boundary. Many interviewees expressed their concern of increased workload, and blurred work times that entailed working around the clock.

“My workload has increased significantly [...], the boundary between free-time and work has been very blurry. I worked, worked - into the evening, so it was difficult to disconnect from that situation. There was always so much work to do and at some point, you just have to close the laptop and start doing other things.” (Male, 53, lives with a spouse)

However, many of the interviewees had realized that the way they were working was not sustainable in terms of their own wellbeing. They had started to structure their workdays and plan, for example, to take breaks. However, this seemed to be difficult and to even cause ethical pondering and feelings of guilt regarding the taking of necessary breaks. It seems that participants who lived without children or a spouse were struggling to manage their work schedules.

“It was a big change overall to work from home. At first, I worked longer days because it took some getting used to working on a laptop at home. It took several months to get used to the idea of closing the laptop and having free-time after work.” (Female, 30, lives alone)

“I don't have children or any childcare-related issues, all I have to do is manage my own time and keep my own wellbeing at the forefront. This is something I've been thinking about a lot lately: what would happen if I took those breaks? The legal ten-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon [which I am entitled to take]? What would it do to my salary, would it be okay?” (Female, 48, lives alone)

Interestingly, the justification for working "the extra mile" in addition to the extra hours seems to be perceived as more acceptable in the participants' minds than simply doing the workday. It seems that although the border between the workday and leisure time is blurred, the expectations towards employees and how they should work is not completely clear. Some interviewees expressed the pressure to prove they were working intensively.

"It was difficult to separate work time from my own time, and it was easy to spend a couple of extra hours at the end of the day working on just one more thing [...] nowadays, well, I cheat a bit. I do open my computer at 6:30 in the morning, but I don't actually do any work." (Male, 57, lives with a spouse)

Again, family obligations potentially could serve as a buffer against temporal slippage in remote work, while individuals without them may be more susceptible to such slippage.

"Since remote working started, I have found myself working unnecessarily long days and on weekends because my workplace is nearby. I have found myself getting tired and stressed, but I've been able to discuss this with my supervisor. In my case, maintaining a work-life balance should by be easy because I don't have to share my time with anyone at home, but then again, I wouldn't be working this way if I had a family." (Female, 57, lives alone)

Interviewees expressed their need for support from the supervisor to prioritize work tasks and help reduce the workload, while creating a work routine that includes breaks and boundaries. It seems that the supportive behaviours that the employees needed from the supervisor were especially related to role model behaviours and instrumental support (Authors, forthcoming).

Within a context in which the temporal aspect of work blurred the boundaries of non-parenting employees, it was important that the supervisor expressed role modelling behaviours for sufficient boundary principles. Interestingly, this seemed to be challenging for supervisors, although many of them recognized this need. Although the career position or role salience was not the specific focus of this study it was yet observed - ironically but not surprisingly - that supervisors were struggling to maintain firm boundaries between work and nonwork domains. They recognized the conflict as they saw themselves as important role models in mitigating employees' temporal spill-overs.

From a supervisor interview: "Leading by example is a way for me to demonstrate my expectations to my team. If I demand certain things from my team, I can't just do as I please. I always strive to do things myself that I expect my team

to do. I must lead my team by example [...] I realize that this is not just a couple of weeks of remote work, but rather a long-term situation. The main reason for changing my own behaviour was to set an example for my team." (Female, 40, lives with spouse and children)

However, some supervisors felt that being in a leading position required temporal stretching. While they recognized that they are setting an example, it proved rather hard for them to follow their own guidelines.

From a supervisor interview: "I know what I'm talking about, but I don't always follow my own advice. I do tell my employees they should take breaks, decline meetings and leave space or reservations in the calendar to complete their tasks in the work days. I keep jumping from one meeting to another, skipping the breaks. Then I end up doing things in the evenings." (Female, 43, lives with spouse and children)

From a supervisor interview: "I experience my supervisor job as a lifestyle. I'm not a supervisor only from 8 to 4, but rather all the time. I want to be there for my people, no matter the time. I don't feel stressed if someone sends me a message in the evening asking if they can call and talk. They may always call me [...] Many people say that even a supervisor needs to have time to put the phone down and disconnect from work. This lifestyle may not be suitable for everyone [...] I love this work and I do it my way." (Female, 47, lives with spouse and children)

In addition to the importance of supervisors as role models, it seems that the supervisor has an important role in helping employees maintain clear boundaries between work and nonwork domains by providing instrumental support.

"The challenge is to make sure that work doesn't take up too much space [...] My supervisor has been guiding me in this direction from the beginning, particularly with regards to scheduling and organizing. [...] My supervisor has played a really important role in helping me learn how to do this [...]. She has helped by emphasizing the importance of taking breaks and doing small things to refresh." (Female, 26, lives alone)

Some interviewees highlighted the importance of the courage to draw the line for working to prioritize their nonwork such as intentionally delaying task completion until the next day, as a means of protecting their nonwork roles. Here, supervisors seemed to play a key role in explicitly communicating and verbalizing that such prioritizations and decisions are acceptable. Therefore, verbal investment in the remote context was deemed essential in acknowledging and normalizing the idea of temporal boundary.

"I've noticed that remote work can lead to work taking over, and I think my manager has also paid more attention to this. My supervisor strongly encourages that everyone can work a normal workday [and not more] without feeling guilty. She always remembers to follow up and asks: 'Have you accumulated too many extra hours, have you remembered to take time off?'" (Female, 53, lives alone)

Temporal spill-overs were noted to be the result of too many tasks versus not enough time during the day to complete the tasks. This often occurred due to meetings, for example. This additionally places challenges on individuals who serve as supervisors, in that their roles in supporting employees entails the accrual of more responsibilities, such as interacting in nonwork hours, while attempting to demonstrate healthy boundary management.

Interference of nonwork in the work domain

The second theme (2) interference of nonwork in the work domain manifests in challenges to switch between the two roles at times where such role transitions would otherwise be unusual, i.e. during working hours. This led to a constant negotiation of simultaneous role expectations occurring in both domains simultaneously.

Simultaneous role expectations during working hours

Due to remote work being conducted in the home environment, it was evident that the nature of the work rendered work and non-work roles inseparable. This was particularly noticeable among parenting employees, who faced expectations from their children who were present regardless of whether they were working or not. The situation had been especially demanding in some phases of the extraordinary pandemic situation when schools and daycare centers had been temporarily closed. Those times had obligated parents to help the children with schoolwork and cook meals during the workday. However, some of the juggling had continued after the lock-down, as children at school age would still arrive home at times when parents were expected to work. Despite what might be expected, most parents felt the home-working arrangement was an advantage for maintaining better parenting roles - feeling present and involved as a family member. There was still pressure however, to engage in family matters during working hours. Parents needed to frequently shift attention from work-related tasks to family-related tasks, which increased their cognitive load and resulted in greater temporal spill-over as they had to catch up on lost work time during the night.

Thus, the simultaneous role expectations manifested in (2.1.1) frequent boundary transitions. As mentioned, many parents felt that working from home was a positive development from the parenting perspective, since it increased family proximity and helped them manage daily chores in a more effective manner. Quick micro-transitions between work and family roles during the day (e.g., cooking lunch, helping children with homework) gave needed breaks from work and increased energy levels.

"In the morning, there is no rush to put on makeup and leave quickly. Time is saved and it goes to the children. At the breakfast table, you can spend more time with the children. You can be more present for the children, they can come and say hi or they know that mom is still at home" (Female, 43, lives with children)

"When there's a moment without meetings, I might work in the living room, chat with my spouse, and sometimes kiss my child, and it all comes together, combining family and work. [...] Being able to be present with my family during the workday is a motivator for me." (Male, 31, lives with spouse and children)

It was observed that these positive experiences occurred when parents felt they had sufficient flexibility for managing the micro-transitions between their work and family responsibilities during office hours. In these situations, parents perceived supervisor support, which included permission, trust, and agreed-upon practices, as enabling them to shape their routines around micro-transitions.

"[Working from home] does allow me to be here at home. I can make lunch for my child who comes home from school. I can follow his life more closely, because he is a teenager and I can control things better when I am at home." (Female, 45, lives with spouse and children)

"It's great that I can work remotely and [...] my supervisors trust that I can get the job done even though I'm not physically in the office. Whenever there's some spare time, I can empty the dishwasher or hang up the laundry." (Male, 38, lives with spouse and children)

"My supervisor understands the challenges of balancing work and family. I don't report to her every day about taking my child to preschool at a certain time and being back at a certain time, but they trust that I will handle the tasks regardless of how many interruptions I may face." (Female, 40, lives with spouse and children)

As employees faced challenges with simultaneous role expectations, the support from leaders was crucial. This support included verbalizing flexibility, trust, and

autonomy, allowing employees to have control over their work arrangement. Supervisors themselves also emphasized the importance of knowing their employees, in order to be able to offer the type instrumental support they needed.

From a supervisor interview: "We follow up work based on the progress and results. My team members will tell if they face a challenge and let me know how it impacts the schedules or if they cannot be overcome. My monitoring is based on trust to a large extent, but as a supervisor, I also need to track the progress and lead the team. [...] However [in remote work] I need to give them more leeway, allowing people to work in their own way. If something comes up and they can't work in the morning, maybe they'll do the work in the evening. I need to give even more freedom and trust to my team members." (Male, 48, lives with spouse and children)

From a supervisor interview: "We've made various arrangements for team members who have young children, such as providing them with more time off and flexible work hours. [...] I hope that these types of actions demonstrate my concern for their wellbeing and help them maintain reasonable stress levels. I know my team well and each individual well enough that even if they write something in a chat, I can tell a lot from that [...] I combine their workloads, projects, ticket volumes, and schedules to ensure they don't get overwhelmed." (Female, 40, lives with spouse and children)

Frequent and routine role transitions could be managed through instrumental support. However, simultaneous role expectations sometimes arose unexpectedly. This management of unexpected nonwork demands is known as (2.1.2) unexpected and acute role transitions (ad-hoc), which employees cannot predict or prevent. In these situations, the interviewees felt that they were conflicted between two roles and unable to integrate the roles at those moments. These situations differed from planned routines because employees had no control over them. While planned role transitions generated positive experiences, sudden role demands led to guilt and stress about failing in both domains. A need to be able to attend these matters without being worried about work consequences emerged among parents.

"I usually have to take a break when my boys come home from school. Otherwise, they come to my door and make a lot of noise and hassle." (Female, 45, lives with spouse and children)

"My son just came by [my workplace] to talk to me, but it doesn't bother me in any way since this [the interview]is more of an informal discussion or conversation.

But if I now had to train [my customers] or explain something to them and someone [from home] started chatting in the middle, then my brain just wouldn't work properly." (Male, 45, lives with spouse and children)

"If I need to take care of my children during the day or use some time for them, no one says anything negative [...]. No-one monitors when I'm at the computer. It's enough that I do my own work." (Male, 31, lives with spouse and children)

In the remote working context where teamwork was scattered, many participants explained they were increasingly reliant on supervisor help. In particular, participants mentioned that their supervisor's ability to create a safe atmosphere in the team was important. This meant that sudden absences or changes in work shifts and responsibilities would be solved together. These can be seen as creative work-family management solutions.

From a supervisor interview: "We have been searching for a model on how to make this remote work for everyone, as it has been new for everyone. One needs to be able to make quick changes and be a bit more creative in different situations, perhaps in a different way than if we were always face-to-face." (Female, 40, lives with spouse and children)

From a supervisor interview: "Some people in [our organization] who are working at home have agreed with other people living in the same household to have their own [uninterrupted] time. [Similarly], they inform the rest of the team [at work] that at this specific time, they will need to keep an eye on their children or something else [at home]. We all know not to schedule any important discussions during that time." (Male, 39, lives with a spouse)

"We are such a close-knit work community [...]. I don't think we could do this [remote work] without such a great group of people. What happens if someone falls or fails? With this support network, it's really comforting to know that if someone stumbles, others will be there to catch them. If I were to raise any concerns or issues to my supervisor, I know she would act to address them. It's really comforting to have that kind of knowledge and support." (Female, 36, lives with spouse and children)

Discussion

The objective of the study was to examine the types of boundary challenges faced by employees with different parental statuses when working remotely. Additionally, the authors explored how leaders can provide support for employees to mitigate boundary challenges through demonstration of family supportive behaviours. The study collected experiences of boundary challenges and support from full-time remote workers during the COVID-19 pandemic via interviews with employees and their supervisors. The findings suggest that remote workers face emotional and temporal demand spill-over from their work roles to non-work roles. This is coupled by simultaneous role demands within times employees are expected to work. The study further suggests that boundary challenges manifest slightly differently for parents and non-parents, but both groups benefit from supervisor's family supportive behaviours. The knowledge produced in this study makes several theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretical contributions

The first contribution of this study is by advancing the understanding of the mechanisms that lead to boundary blurring in remote work. While previous research has acknowledged the occurrence of temporal and physical blurring in the homeworking situation (Adisa et al., 2022), this study suggests that in addition to temporal blurring, emotional factors and contextual role expectations also contribute to boundary blurring. In the remote work context, there seems to be an elevated tendency for emotional spill-overs, where stress, negative emotions, and pressures from work are transferred to the nonwork domain (Grzywacz, 2000). This phenomenon is likely to be exacerbated by reduced access to social support (Charalampous et al., 2022; Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2023; Wang et al., 2021) compared to traditional office setting where peers work closely with one another. Negative work events potentially expose individuals to the continuation and carryover of stress into leisure time if these events are not sufficiently addressed with support being provided. The findings regarding the simultaneous juggling of role expectations and work responsibilities are partially consistent with suggestions by previous literature (Allen et al., 2015). However, they differ in that the interference between work and non-work domains may not always be viewed as negative. This is particularly if employees perceive sufficient support in managing both roles concurrently and if the work-nonwork boundary is perceived as flexible. This perception could be attributed to the maintenance of control in boundary management (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012), where regular and ad-hoc expectations do not induce stress. Therefore, it is likely that adequately supported flexibility contributes to a positive experience of family bonding (Chu et al., 2021).

As the second contribution, the present study broadens discourse on the work-nonwork interface beyond the conservative view of the family (limited to parents and children) and challenges the dominant narrow focus on work and family reconciliation (Kelliher et al., 2019). In the present study, the complexities of managing work-nonwork boundaries for employees in varying parental statuses are accounted for via a more inclusive approach. The approach, highlights the nuances between the challenges of parents and non-parents. Surprisingly, the findings indicate that non-parents generally experience more negative boundary blurring, while parents view the opportunity to be with family as a positive experience. This contrasts with previous research (Reimann et al., 2022; Schieman et al., 2021). Solo-living employees, in particular, seem to face heightened isolation and thus a lack of emotional support in remote work. In contrast, employees living with spouses describe increased use of spouse support (and even bother to spouse) in the home-working situation. Although in both situations, there appears to be a greater tendency for increased emotional workload and spill-over from work to home than previously when work was not performed at home in the presence of a spouse or in isolation. Especially in these situations the support provided by the supervisor was essential. Previous research has suggested that family may be serving as a protective factor for parents in creating thicker boundaries and preventing temporal spill-over (Lawson et al., 2013; Santos, 2015). The findings of this study were consistent with this notion, suggesting that non-parents have a greater need for boundary protection. Logically, it can be expected that other non-work factors, such as hobbies and leisure obligations, and tactics practiced by individuals can also serve as effective boundary controls (Allen et al., 2021). However, in the extraordinary pandemic situation examined in this study, these factors were eliminated. This, likely highlights the differences between groups and the effects of isolation.

Additionally, it is important to note that there are context and role dependencies in experienced boundary challenges. Thus, straightforward assumptions about differences in flexibility between parents and non-parents should be approached with caution. Other factors should be accounted for, such as role salience (Niemistö et al., 2020; Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). Interestingly, this study indicates that supervisors exhibited a greater inclination to maintain more permeable boundaries compared to their employees. The supervisors attributed this to the high integration of their roles, which facilitated their ability to fulfil their supervisory responsibilities. This kind of behaviour of supervisors could have an impact on employee boundary blurring (Pan et al., 2021). The findings of this study provided indications that in addition to self-induced temporal spill-over, some remote workers experienced pressure from the organization to engage in boundary blurring. When considering the perspectives of parents and non-parents, there is a risk that this

pressure may affect non-parents more, as they may not have compelling reasons (such as family obligations) to resist these expectations. Future research should further investigate the impact of supervisor boundary preferences and role modelling on the soundness of employees' boundaries.

Although comparison in boundary challenges between genders was not the focus of this study, the research data was rich in terms of representing remote workers with varying parental statuses. In this data consisting of Finnish employees, gender differences did not come across as striking. Maintaining boundaries between work and other aspects of life was a concern for all participants despite being mothers, fathers, or non-parents. Fathers and mothers faced similar challenges in managing family responsibilities alongside work roles, during remote working days. They had a need for continuous and sudden role transitions, and for flexibility that was present in both genders. However, it should be noted that the Finnish family context is characterized by gender equality in the division of housework and caring for children, and fathers typically take on a larger role in household responsibilities compared to other countries (Eurostat, 2021).

As a third contribution, the present study emphasizes the significance of work-life support in facilitating successful boundary challenges, rather than solely viewing them as a product of an individual's ability to manage boundaries. Boundary maintenance however, is often regarded as an individual's own initiative (Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). The results of the study fortify the notion that when working remotely, the individual needs external support to maintain and manage boundaries. Previous research has not addressed FSSB as a preventive measure for boundary blurring. This study proposes that instrumental support is pivotal in strengthening temporal boundaries, for example, by preventing workload increases or expectations of stretching working hours. Furthermore, the role modelling behaviour of supervisors is emphasized, as they align their own boundary practices with the perspective of employees. It is likely that supervisors who exhibit segmentation behaviour and prevent their own boundary permeability can contribute to employees perceiving work-life friendly behaviours and minimize the potential for boundary permeability among employees (Koch & Binnewies, 2015).

Moreover, the results indicate that the support needed varies between employees with different family statuses. Instrumental and creative work-family management support is particularly beneficial for parents in remote work situations, as they must establish routines to manage overlapping roles without experiencing stress or pressure. One key finding in this study is the importance of emotional support in preventing emotional spill-overs, especially for those living alone or with a spouse. This specifically means that efforts are made to mitigate emotionally

demanding factors in work to prevent them from lingering during role transitions. Importantly, it was found that the FSSB framework that traditionally focused on the work-family interface, should be extended to include other non-work roles beyond the traditional family and rather than family supportive it is seen as work-life friendly behaviours or nonwork supportiveness. The importance of considering the impact of work on various life domains and the need for tailored supportive strategies was highlighted. To conclude, within the context of remote work, emotional and role modelling behaviours of supervisors were particularly important for individuals living alone or with a spouse, while employees with parenting responsibilities benefited from instrumental support and creative family practices. The accessibility of supervisors and their verbal investment in providing support were emphasized in the context of remote work. This research highlights the significance of verbal investment and low-barrier supervisor availability within supervisor support, complementing previous studies on the dimensions of FSSB in remote work settings (Thomas et al., 2022).

Limitations and future research

Despite the unusually extensive qualitative data, the biggest limitation of this study is that it was conducted in a narrow context, with only Finnish corporate employees participating in the study. Their job duties were typically office-based white-collar work. They did not have job-specific tasks, although some had time-bound tasks (such as customer service). No shift workers were represented in the study. Therefore, this study provides just one view of the boundary challenges faced by remote workers. It is likely that research conducted in other professions or in other countries would produce different results. More contribution is needed to study the support that may mitigate the challenges of blurring boundaries in remote work. Another major limitation is the COVID-19 context. This study was conducted during a time of crisis, when there was an exceptional situation, such as restrictions on gatherings and disruptions to hobbies. This may have distorted our results, such as how much opportunity both parents have to participate in household chores. During the pandemic, work commutes were temporarily suspended, which may have improved parents' ability to share household chores equally. On the other hand, the opportunities for social encounters for single individuals have been limited to outside work, which is why, for example, the need for emotional support may have been overemphasized. Overall, COVID-19 may have caused concern for loved ones, making the need for emotional support significant.

Further research should be conducted on hybrid work, where remote work is not so intensive or imposed. However, we have reason to believe that the same issues raised by our study will also arise in general regarding flexible work and work that

separates people in different locations. We also encourage scholars to conduct longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of FSSB on work-nonwork boundary maintenance and employee wellbeing. Our recommendation for future research is to further investigate the forms of verbal investment and how they affect perceived support. Additionally, the analysis of the data resulted a hypothesized model on relations between perceived boundary challenges and the FSSB-dimensions in remote work. This model should be tested in future studies to acquire in depth knowledge of the phenomenon, and for example, to test the connections between different variables.

Practical recommendations

This study emphasizes that safeguarding work and non-work boundaries is a concern for all employees, regardless of family status and gender. These groups appear to have different needs for supporting boundaries. Therefore, employers' work-life programs should take into account that different employees have different needs, and not all work-life policies and benefits will benefit all employees. Employers should also recognize the pivotal role of supervisors in providing support. They are the individuals who know and understand their employees best. Sometimes the values and preferences of the supervisor and employee do not match. Thus, it is essential for the supervisor to be aware of their own behaviours that may hinder the employee's ability to maintain their desired boundaries. It is crucial that there is dialogue between the employee and supervisor regarding the employee's wishes and preferences. This will enable the supervisor to adjust their behaviour to support the employee's wellbeing. We recommend that organizations encourage supervisors to find creative and individualized solutions for their employees. However, the responsibility for this dialogue should not fall solely on the supervisor, as the employee also plays a role. We recommend that supervisors establish and communicate regular times during which they are available to their employees, creating an easily accessible channel that encourages communication and enables employees to voice their needs. However, considering role modelling and safeguarding boundaries, supervisors should set limits and strive to handle work-related matters during designated times. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of supervisors' accessibility within work hours. Additionally, supervisors should make verbal investments to facilitate dialogues about the employee's needs and the support they require.

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Chat GPT in order to improve the language and clarity of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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