



WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: REVIEWING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Info Article Received : 08 Juli 2025 Revised : 02 Agustus 2025 Accepted : 14 September 2025 Publication : 30 September 2025	Abstract: <i>This systematic literature review integrates global evidence on how work-life balance (WLB) affects employee performance (EP). This synthesizes peer-reviewed articles and policy and organizational reports to surface patterns, contradictions, and gaps. Overall, WLB enhances productivity, engagement, and organizational citizenship via resource conservation, motivation, and supportive leadership-culture alignment, whereas chronic imbalance heightens stress, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover. Effects vary by context: technology enables flexibility yet risks boundary erosion; gendered caregiving loads and institutional scaffolding shape access and impact; and cultural norms around presenteeism condition uptake. High-impact practices combine flexible work, fair workloads, family-supportive supervision, childcare support, and right-to-disconnect norms.</i>
Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Employee Performance, Flexible Work Practice. Kata Kunci: Keseimbangan Kehidupan Kerja, Kinerja Karyawan, Praktik Kerja Fleksibel.	Abstrak: Tinjauan literatur sistematis ini mengintegrasikan bukti global tentang bagaimana keseimbangan kehidupan kerja memengaruhi kinerja karyawan. Studi ini mensintesis artikel terindeks, dokumen kebijakan, dan laporan organisasi untuk mengungkap pola, kontradiksi, dan kesenjangan. Secara keseluruhan, WLB meningkatkan produktivitas, keterlibatan, dan perilaku anggota organisasi melalui konservasi sumber daya, motivasi, serta keselarasan kepemimpinan-budaya yang suportif; sebaliknya, ketidakseimbangan kronis meningkatkan stres, kelelahan kronis, absensi, dan keluarnya karyawan. Dampaknya bervariasi menurut konteks: teknologi memungkinkan fleksibilitas tetapi berisiko mengaburkan batas kerja; beban pengasuhan berbasis gender dan dukungan institusional berperan dalam membentuk akses dan pengaruhnya; sementara norma budaya tentang kehadiran fisik di tempat kerja memengaruhi penerapannya. Praktik dengan dampak tinggi umumnya menggabungkan kerja fleksibel, beban kerja yang adil, supervisi yang mendukung keluarga, fasilitas penitipan anak, serta norma "hak untuk terputus" (right-to-disconnect).
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INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and competitive global economy, organizations are increasingly challenged to maintain high levels of productivity while simultaneously ensuring the well-being of their employees. As the boundaries between work and personal life continue to blur, the concept of work-life balance (WLB) has gained prominence both in academic research and managerial practice. Work-life balance refers broadly to an individual's ability to manage responsibilities across professional, family, social, and personal domains in a manner that reduces conflict and promotes overall satisfaction (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Over the past decades, globalization, technological advances, shifting workforce demographics, and new organizational structures have heightened recognition of the need to balance work and life.

One of the most widely examined outcomes associated with work-life balance is employee performance (EP). Employee performance, encompassing both task-related efficiency and discretionary behaviors such as organizational citizenship, is a critical determinant of organizational success (Campbell, 1990). The relationship between work-life balance and employee performance is complex and influenced by a wide array of factors, including cultural norms, organizational policies, leadership styles, and individual coping strategies. As organizations seek sustainable models for competitiveness, understanding how work-life balance impacts employee performance across different global contexts is vital.

The concept of WLB emerged in the 1980s as part of a broader societal recognition of the challenges employees face when juggling increasing work demands with family responsibilities. Earlier research primarily focused on work-family conflict (WFC), defined as role incompatibility between the demands of work and family life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Over time, however, scholars expanded the concept to encompass other life domains, including leisure, education, community engagement, and personal development (Guest, 2002). Recent studies, for example, highlight how younger generations struggle with high unemployment or precarious work arrangements, which further complicate their ability to balance work and life (Wulandari et al., 2025).

Contemporary definitions of work-life balance emphasize not only the absence of conflict but also the presence of positive enrichment, where experiences in one role enhance performance and satisfaction in another (Carlson et al., 2006). This dual perspective reflects the recognition that balance is not merely about minimizing conflict but also about creating synergies that improve overall quality of life. Consequently,

modern organizations are expected to support work-life integration through flexible working arrangements, supportive leadership, wellness programs, and inclusive cultures that acknowledge employees' diverse needs. This resonates with findings in diverse fields, such as sports and health, which show that balance across multiple life domains—including physical and mental health—directly influences resilience and performance (Matilda et al., 2025)

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that poor work-life balance leads to negative consequences such as stress, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover, all of which undermine employee performance (Frone, 2003). On the other hand, employees who perceive higher levels of balance often report higher job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). The link between WLB and EP, however, is not uniform; it is shaped by contextual factors such as cultural values, industry dynamics, and organizational strategies. For example, in the Indonesian context, free trade agreements such as the Indonesia–Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IK-CEPA) have been shown to create both challenges and opportunities for labor markets, influencing not only employment but also the broader conditions that affect how workers experience balance (Maulidita & Darmanto, 2024).

The globalization of labor markets and the rise of multinational corporations have underscored the importance of examining work-life balance through a cross-cultural lens. Work-life balance is not a universal construct; rather, it is interpreted and practiced differently across societies depending on cultural, economic, and institutional contexts. In developed economies, particularly in North America and Western Europe, work-life balance debates are often centered on flexible work arrangements, gender equality, and corporate responsibility. European Union countries, for instance, have legislated working time directives and parental leave policies that institutionalize WLB (Lewis et al., 2007). In the United States, while federal policies are less comprehensive, organizations increasingly adopt flexible scheduling, telecommuting, and wellness initiatives to attract and retain talent.

In contrast, many Asian economies are characterized by long working hours, collectivist cultures, and hierarchical corporate systems. For example, Japan's phenomenon of *karoshi* (death by overwork) illustrates the extreme consequences of poor work-life balance (Kanai, 2009). Similarly, in South Korea and China, rapid industrialization and competitive labor markets have created pressures that often prioritize work over family life. However, younger generations and women professionals

are increasingly advocating for reforms, leading to gradual cultural shifts. Research from these contexts highlights the tension between traditional cultural norms and emerging expectations of balance. Studies on employment opportunities for vocational students, for instance, show how institutional support for career pathways can ease family and work-life pressures for young workers (Darmanto et al., 2025).

In developing economies such as those in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, work-life balance is heavily shaped by economic instability, pervasive informal labor markets, and limited institutional support. Working-time regulation is weaker and informal work is widespread, which complicates efforts to establish consistent WLB policies. For example, the ILO report notes that in many developing countries, long or unpredictable working hours and informal employment blur the boundary between work and nonwork (Messenger et al., 2022). In Southeast Asia, cultural norms and infrastructural constraints further challenge attempts to institutionalize flexible work (Le et al., 2020). In Latin America and parts of Africa, employees often face multiple pressures, such as extended family responsibilities, job insecurity, and limited access to formal support or benefits (Green, 2018). In these contexts, community networks, informal arrangements, and mutual aid often become critical pathways to achieving WLB in practice.

The importance of work-life balance has been further amplified by changing workforce demographics and societal trends. With the increasing participation of women in the labor force, dual-earner households have become the norm rather than the exception, creating new challenges for balancing work and family roles (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Millennials and Generation Z employees, who prioritize flexibility and meaningful work, have also reshaped organizational expectations regarding balance and performance. Furthermore, the rise of digital technologies and remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has created new opportunities and challenges for managing work-life boundaries. While remote work offers flexibility, it also risks intensifying work encroachment into personal life, leading to “always-on” cultures (Allen et al., 2015).

Although research on work-life balance (WLB) and employee performance is extensive, key gaps remain. Most studies focus on Western contexts, limiting global applicability. Many establish correlations but rarely examine mediators such as cultural values, industry factors, or leadership. Moreover, recent disruptions like COVID-19 and

digitalization demand fresh insights. A global review is thus needed to synthesize diverse findings, highlight contextual differences, and guide theory and practice.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design in the form of a systematic literature review to examine global perspectives on the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and employee performance (EP). Unlike empirical studies that generate new primary data, this research focuses on synthesizing insights from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and organizational reports. The purpose of this approach is to provide an integrated understanding of how WLB influences EP across diverse cultural and organizational contexts, while also identifying recurring patterns, contradictions, and gaps that can inform future research agendas.

A systematic review methodology was chosen because it allows for broad coverage of existing knowledge and ensures transparency and rigor in the process of article selection, evaluation, and synthesis. This method also reduces potential bias by following predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, thereby enhancing the reliability of findings. The search process involved the use of major academic databases in Google Scholar. Search terms combined multiple variations of key concepts, including: “work-life balance” OR “work-family balance” OR “work-life integration”, “employee performance” OR “productivity” OR “organizational performance”, and “global” OR “cross-cultural” OR “international” OR “comparative”. Relevant articles published in English from the 1990s to 2024 were considered, reflecting the period when WLB became an established area of study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Global Overview of Work-Life Balance and Employee Performance

Global literature consistently shows that work-life balance (WLB) is positively associated with employee performance (EP), though the magnitude and form of this relationship vary across cultural, institutional, and organizational settings (Allen et al., 2000; McNall et al., 2009; Spector et al., 2007). WLB generally refers to the equilibrium individuals seek between professional responsibilities and personal life domains—such as family, leisure, and self-care (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Kossek et al., 2014). Employee performance, in turn, is commonly operationalized through indicators

including task productivity and efficiency, innovation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) (Campbell, 1990; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Overall, these insights highlight the necessity of examining the WLB–EP relationship across diverse global contexts in order to capture not only universal trends but also the culturally and institutionally specific dynamics that shape employee outcomes.

Scholars such as Powell and Greenhaus (2010) argue that work–life balance (WLB) is both a resource and an outcome. When employees perceive balance, they experience reduced stress, higher engagement, and greater loyalty, which translate into improved performance. Conversely, poor WLB can lead to burnout, absenteeism, turnover, and deteriorating productivity (Fisher et al., 2009). From a conservation of resources lens, balance preserves personal resources (time, energy, attention), buffering strain and enabling resource gain spirals (Hobfoll, 1989). Within the job demands–resources framework, WLB functions as a key resource that mitigates demands and fuels motivation, boosting task performance and discretionary effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Boundary theory further suggests that fit between employees’ segmentation–integration preferences and work arrangements shapes whether cross-domain spillover becomes enriching or depleting (Ashforth et al., 2000). When organizations signal support—through fair workloads, flexible scheduling, and family-supportive supervision—employees reciprocate with commitment and citizenship behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In contrast, chronic imbalance erodes resources and heightens exhaustion, particularly in remote or hybrid settings that blur boundaries, amplifying risks to well-being and output (Kossek et al., 2014).

Globally, empirical studies suggest that organizations with robust WLB policies—such as flexible working hours, telecommuting options, parental leave, and wellness programs—tend to report higher levels of performance outcomes (Bloom et al., 2015). However, differences in socio-cultural norms, labor market institutions, and organizational cultures mean that the effects of WLB policies are not universal. For instance, flexible work may be empowering in the U.S. but viewed with suspicion in cultures where presenteeism (physical presence at work) remains a dominant norm, such as in Japan (Ishimaru & Fujino, 2021). Similarly, in many developing economies, the lack of institutional support and informal labor practices limits the effectiveness of such policies, despite employees’ demand for balance (Aryee et al., 2005). Thus, the findings demonstrate a dual pattern: (1) WLB is universally beneficial to employee well-being

and performance, but (2) the pathways through which it impacts performance are mediated by cultural and institutional contexts.

The Role of Technology in WLB

Technology plays a dual role in shaping work–life balance (WLB) and employee performance (EP). On the one hand, digital tools enable remote work, flexible scheduling, and greater autonomy, which can enhance both balance and efficiency by allowing employees to manage work and personal responsibilities more seamlessly (Allen et al., 2015). On the other hand, constant connectivity facilitated by smartphones, email, and instant messaging often blurs the boundaries between professional and personal domains, creating “work–life spillover” and elevating risks of stress, role overload, and burnout (Mazmanian et al., 2013).

Globally, research indicates that the impact of technology depends heavily on how it is managed. For example, organizational and national-level interventions, such as France’s “right to disconnect” law, demonstrate that structured boundaries on after-hours digital communication can foster employee well-being, reduce burnout, and promote sustainable productivity (Mazmanian et al., 2013). In contrast, unmanaged digital demands may initially boost responsiveness and efficiency but often result in long-term declines in performance and satisfaction due to cognitive fatigue and work intensification (Derks et al., 2014). This duality highlights the need for balanced digital strategies that leverage the benefits of connectivity while mitigating its risks, ensuring that technology acts as an enabler of work–life enrichment rather than a source of persistent strain.

The influence of technology on WLB and EP also varies across cultural and economic contexts. In developed economies, such as Western Europe and North America, digitalization has been accompanied by policies and organizational norms that emphasize flexibility, employee autonomy, and protections against digital overreach (Eurofound, 2020). Conversely, in many Asian economies, where long working hours and presenteeism are deeply embedded in organizational culture, technology often reinforces work centrality by extending availability expectations beyond traditional hours (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). In developing countries, digital tools can expand employment opportunities and access to global markets, but limited regulatory frameworks and weaker organizational support often leave employees vulnerable to work intensification and boundary erosion. These disparities demonstrate that while technology is a global driver of change, its consequences for balance and performance are shaped by local cultural values, institutional frameworks, and socioeconomic conditions.

Gender and Work-Life Balance

Gender remains a central axis in work–life balance (WLB) debates, as women continue to disproportionately shoulder caregiving and domestic responsibilities, making them particularly vulnerable to work–life conflict (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Research consistently demonstrates that family-friendly policies—such as paid parental leave, subsidized childcare, and flexible scheduling—can significantly improve women’s employee performance, retention, and representation in leadership roles (Kossek et al., 2011). These policies not only reduce turnover but also enhance organizational effectiveness by enabling female employees to contribute more fully in professional domains while maintaining personal and family commitments.

Despite these advances, global disparities remain striking. In many Asian, Middle Eastern, and African contexts, patriarchal norms and limited childcare infrastructure constrain women’s career progression even in the presence of formal WLB reforms (Lewis et al., 2007). Cultural expectations often reinforce women’s role as primary caregivers, limiting their ability to benefit from workplace flexibility or equal participation in leadership pathways. Moreover, the lack of affordable childcare and insufficient policy enforcement frequently results in women opting out of full-time employment or facing significant barriers to advancement.

By contrast, Scandinavian countries provide compelling examples of how gender-equal WLB policies can foster inclusivity and high organizational performance. Generous parental leave schemes, state-supported childcare, and strong gender equality norms in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have created contexts where both men and women are encouraged to share caregiving responsibilities (Brandth & Kvande, 2016). These policies not only promote women’s career continuity and leadership representation but also contribute to higher levels of employee satisfaction and national labor market competitiveness. Such evidence underscores that gender-sensitive WLB policies, when embedded in supportive cultural and institutional frameworks, can transform workplaces into more equitable and productive environments.

Leadership and Organizational Culture

Leadership style plays a critical role in mediating the relationship between work–life balance (WLB) and employee performance (EP). Transformational leaders, who emphasize vision, support, and individualized consideration, are more likely to foster environments that value flexibility and employee well-being. Such leaders encourage trust, engagement, and innovation, all of which positively influence performance

outcomes (Kelloway et al., 2012). By contrast, transactional or authoritarian leadership styles—often found in hierarchical or collectivist cultures—tend to reinforce presenteeism and rigid work norms, thereby undermining WLB initiatives and reducing their effectiveness (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Beyond leadership style, organizational culture significantly shapes how WLB policies are implemented and perceived. Research shows that policies such as flexible scheduling, telecommuting, or parental leave yield the strongest performance outcomes when embedded within a supportive and inclusive organizational culture (Thompson et al., 1999). In cultures where long working hours are normalized, however, employees may feel discouraged from using such benefits due to concerns about being labeled uncommitted or unproductive.

The interplay between leadership and culture further determines whether WLB initiatives achieve their intended impact. Leaders who actively model balance by respecting personal time and openly supporting the use of family-friendly policies help dismantle stigma and legitimize work–life integration (Kossek et al., 2011). Conversely, when leadership signals conflict with policy intentions—such as praising employees who work excessive overtime—organizational culture remains misaligned, and employees may avoid engaging with WLB initiatives. These dynamics suggest that sustainable improvements in employee performance depend not only on the existence of WLB policies but also on leadership behaviors and cultural norms that encourage their effective utilization.

Cultural Norms and Institutional Frameworks

Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1984) provide a useful framework for understanding why work–life balance (WLB) policies yield different performance outcomes across regions. In individualist societies, such as the United States, Canada, or Australia, autonomy and personal fulfillment are prioritized, which makes WLB policies like flexible scheduling or telecommuting directly relevant to performance outcomes. Employees in these contexts often view balance as a personal right and link it to their productivity, motivation, and engagement (Spector et al., 2007). Conversely, in collectivist cultures such as Japan, China, or South Korea, group harmony, loyalty, and conformity are emphasized, and long working hours may symbolize dedication and organizational commitment. As a result, employees may hesitate to fully utilize WLB initiatives, fearing they could be perceived as less committed or even disloyal.

Institutional frameworks further shape these cultural dynamics by determining how WLB is enacted at the national level. In the United States, the absence of comprehensive federal legislation on parental leave or maximum working hours means that WLB outcomes depend heavily on organizational initiatives, resulting in uneven access and unequal impacts on performance across industries and firms (Kelly et al., 2011). In contrast, European countries often institutionalize WLB rights through social welfare and labor laws, such as the EU Working Time Directive, which regulates weekly working hours and mandates rest periods. These systemic supports create more consistent outcomes, as employees across socioeconomic strata can rely on standardized protections (Lewis et al., 2007).

Moreover, comparative research shows that institutionalized WLB rights not only protect employees' well-being but also enhance organizational performance by reducing absenteeism, turnover, and burnout. Scandinavian countries, for example, combine strong cultural values of gender equality with robust social policies, including extensive parental leave and subsidized childcare. These frameworks not only normalize work–life integration but also promote women's labor force participation and leadership representation, leading to broader performance gains at both individual and organizational levels (Korpi et al., 2013). Taken together, cultural norms and institutional frameworks jointly shape how WLB initiatives are perceived, accessed, and translated into performance, underscoring the need to contextualize WLB–performance research across regions.

Human Resource Practices

Work–life balance (WLB) has become a central pillar of modern human resource (HR) strategies, with organizations increasingly recognizing its significance for talent attraction, retention, and long-term competitiveness. Research indicates that younger generations—particularly Millennials and Generation Z—place a high priority on balance when evaluating potential employers. Organizations that fail to accommodate these expectations risk losing high-potential talent, with direct consequences for employee performance and organizational sustainability (Ng et al., 2010). As labor markets grow more competitive globally, WLB has thus emerged not only as a well-being initiative but also as a strategic imperative for maintaining an engaged and productive workforce.

Globally, HR practices that embed WLB into broader organizational systems—such as performance appraisals, leadership development, and employee engagement

initiatives—tend to report stronger outcomes. These integrated approaches link balance directly to performance indicators by fostering commitment, reducing absenteeism, and enhancing innovation. Yet challenges remain in measuring the precise impact of WLB on performance, since improvements in employee well-being often manifest indirectly. For example, reductions in turnover intention, increased creativity, and higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) may not immediately appear in standard productivity metrics but are critical drivers of long-term performance (Allen et al., 2013).

Universally, evidence suggests that WLB supports improved well-being, reduced stress, and enhanced employee performance (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). However, WLB cannot be approached as a one-size-fits-all solution. Its outcomes are mediated by cultural, institutional, and economic contexts, which shape how policies are implemented and experienced across regions. A critical insight concerns the paradox of flexibility: while flexible arrangements generally enhance work–life integration and performance, they can also intensify demands by creating expectations of constant availability through digital connectivity. Thus, the performance benefits of WLB depend not only on formal policies but also on the effectiveness of boundary management strategies and organizational cultures that respect employees' need for disconnection (Kossek et al, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that work–life balance (WLB) is not a peripheral benefit but a core driver of employee performance (EP). Across diverse contexts, employees who experience balance report greater engagement, satisfaction, and discretionary effort, while chronic imbalance fuels strain, absenteeism, burnout, and turnover—undercutting individual and organizational outcomes. The evidence base has evolved beyond a narrow focus on work–family conflict to a broader lens that includes enrichment and integration across multiple life domains, reflecting contemporary realities of digital work, dual-earner households, and fluid career paths.

Mechanistically, WLB enhances EP by preserving personal resources (time, energy, attention) and aligning role demands with capacities; it also catalyzes positive spillovers when experiences in one domain improve functioning in another. Yet the strength and direction of WLB–EP links are contingent on context. Leadership style, organizational culture, and HR systems shape whether policies translate into real benefits or remain underused due to stigma. Cultural norms (e.g., individualism–collectivism, power

distance) and institutional frameworks (e.g., leave entitlements, working-time regulations) further condition access, utilization, and performance effects. Technology, likewise, is double-edged—expanding flexibility while risking boundary erosion—so outcomes hinge on norms that legitimize disconnection as well as connection.

For practice, the implication is clear: WLB must be embedded, not appended. High-impact organizations align flexible work with fair workloads, supportive supervision, and performance systems that reward outcomes rather than presenteeism. Gender-sensitive policies (parental leave, childcare supports) and inclusive cultures expand participation and leadership pipelines, improving both equity and performance. In digitally intensive settings, intentional boundary management (e.g., right-to-disconnect norms, communication charters) safeguards well-being and sustains productivity. Cross-nationally, policy scaffolding matters: where legislation is strong, benefits are more evenly realized; where it is weak, organizational initiatives and community supports play outsized roles.

Finally, important gaps remain. The literature skews Western and correlational, with fewer rigorous tests of causal mechanisms, moderators, and long-run outcomes across sectors and economic strata. Future research should employ multi-country designs, mixed methods, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental approaches to unpack how leadership, culture, and technology jointly shape WLB–EP dynamics. Closer attention to emerging worker groups (gig, hybrid, early-career, and caregiving employees) and to sectoral differences in low- and middle-income countries will improve external validity. Addressing these gaps will sharpen theory and provide managers and policymakers with actionable, context-sensitive levers to achieve sustainable performance through genuine work–life balance.

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