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“The effects and changes the COVID-19 pandemic brought in the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees during the crisis and the results of those afterwards”

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Patras, Greece, June 2024

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“The effects and changes the COVID-19 pandemic brought in the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees during the crisis and the results of those afterwards”

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered work environments globally, prompting significant changes in work-life balance and employee wellbeing. The aim of this thesis was to investigate the effects and changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about in the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees during the crisis and the results of those changes afterwards. The literature review proved that the pandemic accelerated the adoption of flexible work plans, leading to a shift towards hybrid work models. While offering flexibility, working from home create difficulties in managing work-life boundaries. The shift to hybrid work has implications for employee wellbeing, with factors such as organizational support and digital infrastructure playing crucial roles in shaping employee experiences and outcomes. At the same time, longitudinal studies indicate that ongoing evaluation and refinement of remote work policies are essential for sustaining positive outcomes in organizations, emphasizing the need for adaptable strategies. Moving forward, organizations and policymakers must continue to adjust and innovate to meet the evolving needs of employees while ensuring sustainable work-life balance and promoting overall wellbeing. By embracing flexibility, leveraging technological advancements, and prioritizing employee support, organizations can cultivate a workforce capable of maintaining viable work-life balance while thriving in dynamic environments.

**Key words:** work-life balance, wellbeing, employee, COVID-19

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## Introduction

One of the biggest global health emergencies in recent memory, the COVID-19 pandemic, was brought on by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and has severely affected nearly every aspect of everyday life. Since the global pandemic began in late 2019, it has caused unparalleled shifts in the social, economic, and cultural spheres on a global scale. Subsequent effects on economies and work environments emerged as countries struggled with the immediate health threats. Millions of workers switched to remote work and numerous businesses closed as a result of lockdowns and other public health measures implemented by governments to stop the virus's spread.

The abrupt switch to home offices represented a significant cultural shift in addition to a practical one. This change has elevated the conversation about employee wellbeing and work-life balance. The conventional understanding of work-life balance is that it is the state in which people are able to effectively balance their personal and recreational obligations with their professional obligations. But these lines have been blurred by the pandemic, so it is now very significant to reevaluate what work-life balance means in the post-COVID era.

This thesis aims to investigate the effects and changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about in the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees during the crisis as well as the results of those changes afterwards. The study is designed to provide a comprehensive literature review that encapsulates the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on work-life dynamics and employee health. By exploring a wide range of academic and professional literature, this research seeks to offer insights into how employees cope with the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 crisis and the long-term implications of these adaptations.

The central research questions guiding this thesis are:

- In what ways the COVID-19 pandemic affected the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees in the duration of the pandemic?

- What are the extended effects and changes in work-life balance and employee wellbeing post-pandemic?

The objectives of this thesis are as follows:

- Examine the effects the remote work has to the employees' ability to balance their professional and personal lives.
- Analyze changes in working hours, workload, and how the work and personal life intertwine during the pandemic.
- Study the gender-specific challenges and family role considerations that have emerged as a result of these changes.
- Assess the organizational support and policies implemented to facilitate remote work and support employees' work-life balance during this specific time period.
- Explore the transition back to office or hybrid work models and the way it affects employees' work-life balance and wellbeing.
- Identify long-term changes in work culture and employee expectations and preferences that have emerged from the pandemic experience.
- Evaluate the sustainability of the adaptations made during the pandemic in post-pandemic work environments.

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, each addressing different aspects of the research questions and objectives. Following this introduction, the first chapter delves into existing studies and theoretical frameworks related to work-life balance and employee wellbeing. The methodology chapter outlines the research design, including the selection criteria for literature, sources, and data analysis approaches. Subsequent chapters focus on the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Third chapter examines the way the shift to remote work and other changes have affected work-life balance, while fourth chapter explores the effects on employee wellbeing, covering

psychological, physical, and social dimensions. Chapter five discusses the various adaptations and coping mechanisms employed by organizations and individuals. The sixth chapter looks at the post-pandemic scenario, analyzing how the experiences and changes during the pandemic have influenced work-life balance and wellbeing in the long term. The discussion chapter synthesizes the findings, comparing them with pre-pandemic trends, and discusses the implications for organizations and policymakers. The thesis concludes with a summary of key findings, answers to the research questions, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and final thoughts.

## Chapter 1: Work-Life Balance and Employee Wellbeing

### 1.1 Definition and Conceptualization of Work-Life Balance

In the course of the last decades, many scholars have shown interest in investigating the complex phenomenon of work-life balance (WLB). Fundamentally, work-life balance (WLB) is the balance that people attempt to keep between their obligations in their personal and professional lives. Work-life balance is described as the *"satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict"* by Clark (2000, p. 751). The significance of role satisfaction and compatibility in various spheres of life is emphasized by this definition.

Numerous theoretical models have been suggested to explain work-life balance. The segmentation model argues that work and personal life are distinct and largely independent domains with minimal interaction (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). According to the model individuals can divide their professional roles and responsibilities from their personal lives, preventing work-related stress from affecting their personal time and vice versa. Conversely, the integration model posits that there is substantial overlap and interaction between work and personal life, with activities and responsibilities from one domain often merging into the other (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). This perspective acknowledges that in contemporary work settings the line between work and personal life can be blurred.

Another critical perspective is the role theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing multiple roles without significant conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). According to this theory, individuals occupy various roles (e.g., employee, parent, spouse) and achieving balance involves successfully fulfilling the expectations and responsibilities associated with each role. Role conflict happens when the demands of

two different roles clash with each other, leading to stress and dissatisfaction (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Work life balance can have a different meaning across individuals based on their personal values, career aspirations, and life circumstances. For instance, Duxbury and Higgins (2022) found that work-life balance perceptions differ significantly between men and women, with women often reporting greater challenges in balancing their work and family responsibilities. Traditional gender roles and norms from society play a central role in this and often place a greater emphasis on women's responsibilities in caregiving and household management. Similarly, different life stages and career phases can influence one's perception and experience of work-life balance (Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2022). Young professionals may prioritize career advancement and professional development, whereas mid-career employees might focus more on family responsibilities and personal fulfillment.

According to Kirchmeyer's (2000) proposition a person can achieve balance when allocates equal time, effort, and commitment to each role in their life. Conversely, Marks and MacDermid (1996) described role balance as being an integral part of all life responsibilities. However, the equity approach has faced criticism from researchers who argue that it does not take into consideration the subjective sense of balance or preferences for specific roles. For instance, Kalliath and Brough (2008) defined balance as the degree to which an individual's investment in roles aligns with how significant it considers those roles to be. Voydanoff (2002), focusing on resource adjustment, suggested that work-life balance can be accomplished when someone is capable of meeting the demands of both professional and family duties, allowing to partake equally and efficiently in both.

Other scholars view work-life balance as a psychological concept emphasizing fulfillment on various life aspects (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Valcour (2007) theorized that the overall fulfilment regarding work-life balance depends on how well an individual can manage the demands of both family and work roles. At the same time, Kirchmeyer (2000) described work-life balance as "achieving satisfying

experiences in all areas of life," something that can be very demanding for a person in terms of time, energy and commitment.

According to Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), achieving work-life balance involves meeting role-related expectations that are discussed, agreed upon, and carried out by a person and their partners in relation to their roles in the home and at work. In this situation, people's perceptions of the degree to which expectations discussed and agreed upon with their role partners both inside and outside work are fulfilled, materialize work-life balance. According to Halpern and Murphy (2005), finding "balance" is like performing a balancing act where the roles of family and work are on opposing sides and spending more time and effort on the one side has a negative effect on the other. In other words, achieving the balancing is so challenging that can be described as an almost unattainable goal

Instead of using the term "domain compatibility," Timms et al. (2015) described work-life balance in the context of complementarity, implying that having a variety of roles can improve a person's overall wellness. According to May, Gilson, and Harter (2004), work also plays a major role in increasing a person self-esteem and well-being, which in turn enhances human wellbeing. A positive experience in a certain area of an individual's life can have a positive effect in all other areas as well, something that coincides with Carlson and colleagues' (2006) enrichment construct.

A more accurate way to describe this work-life balance would be work-non-work balance, according to Casper and colleagues' (2018) recent suggestion. This point of view is consistent with that of Brough and associates (2014), who suggested that substantial time commitments at work might not always conflict with an individual's subjective sense of balance across their various life domains. Three previously unidentified domains of subjective balance were identified by Casper and colleagues (2018) as being critical in influencing people's sense of balance in and out of work, these are affection, efficacy and involvement.

Finally, the most researched variable in the literature looking at work-related outcomes is job satisfaction. According to Faragher (2005), job satisfaction serves as a gauge for psychological well-being and health, is linked to a number of employee behaviors that are advantageous to the company and is also a highly helpful indicator of organizational issues. In actuality, burnout, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and, to a lesser degree, perceived physical illness are strongly correlated with job satisfaction. It is regularly linked to four factors that predict work performance: emotional stability, sense of control, generalized self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Judge et al., 2001). Additionally, it has been discovered that job satisfaction significantly predicts both turnover intention and turnover (Gragnano, Simbula, & Miglioretti, 2020).

## 1.2 Understanding Employee Wellbeing

There are two main and distinct approaches to conceptualizing well-being, which are hedonic and eudaimonic, respectively. Well-being is a multifaceted and expansive construct. Hedonic well-being, also known as subjective well-being, is the term used to describe how one feels and thinks about their life. Three concepts are included in it: life satisfaction, negative affect (rarely unpleasant feelings), and positive affect (often pleasant feelings). People must have their psychological needs met in order to develop, mature, and perform well. This is known as eudaimonic, or psychological, well-being (Al-Jubari, Mosbah & Salem, 2022).

The concept of employee wellbeing is comprehensive, encompassing aspects of health and contentment in the workplace that are social, psychological, and physical. Well-being is defined as "*a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*" by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2006).

Physical wellbeing pertains to the health and physical functioning of employees. It involves factors such as ergonomics, occupational safety, and access to health resources (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). Ensuring a safe and health work environment is key to promoting physical wellbeing. This includes providing appropriate safety measures, ergonomic workstations, and access to healthcare facilities and wellness programs.

Psychological wellbeing, on the other hand, encompasses aspects like mental health, emotional stability, and job satisfaction. It is influenced by stress levels, workload, job autonomy, and support systems within the workplace (Diener et al., 1999). Increased stress, low control over work tasks, and inadequate social support can negatively impact psychological wellbeing, leading to issues such as burnout, anxiety, and depression.

An employee's interactions and relationships with colleagues, managers, and the larger work community and how successful those are is referred to as social wellbeing. It consists of components like cooperation, social support, and a feeling of inclusion and belonging (Keyes, 1998). In order to create a positive work environment, raise employee morale generally, and increase productivity, social wellbeing is essential.

Studies have indicated a strong correlation between organizational outcomes and employee well-being. For instance, Wright and Cropanzano (2000) discovered a correlation between improved job performance, decreased absenteeism, and lower turnover rates and high levels of employee wellbeing. Furthermore, workforces at companies that place a high priority on employee wellbeing are typically more engaged and dedicated (Harter et al., 2003).

### **1.3 Historical Perspective on Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing**

Over time, the notions of work-life balance and employee wellbeing have undergone substantial transformations, mirroring wider societal shifts and economic

advancements. Early in the 20th century, efforts were made to lessen occupational hazards and enhance working conditions, with a primary focus on physical wellbeing (Kaufman, 2008). Due to the substantial shifts in work patterns brought about by the industrial revolution, labor laws and regulations pertaining to health and safety of workers were introduced.

In the middle of the 20th century, the focus shifted to finding a balance between work and family obligations due to the growth of service economy and the increase of female employees. During this time, policies like paid time off, flexible work schedules, and childcare assistance were introduced to assist workers in juggling their multiple responsibilities (Kossek & Ozeki, 2021).

Globalization and the introduction of new technologies have further changed work environments in the last few decades, posing both opportunities and problems for wellbeing and work-life balance. The introduction of new technologies and innovations in the communications allowed for flexibility in work arrangements, enabling remote working for employees beyond the regular working hours (Hill, Ferris, & Mårtinson, 2003). But it has also resulted in more demands on work and more confusion between work and personal life, which raises anxiety levels and causes burnout (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

Additionally, the notion of employee wellbeing has broadened to encompass psychological and social aspects in addition to physical health. According to Grabitch, Gottschalk, and Munz (2006), the holistic approach acknowledges the interdependence of different facets of wellbeing and the significance of addressing them all at once to establish supportive and healthful work environments.

## **1.4 Impact of Crises on Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing**

In the past, work-life balance and employee wellbeing have been significantly impacted by epidemics and pandemics. For instance, the 2003 SARS outbreak caused

a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty, which had an impact on workers' mental health and work-life balance (Maunder et al., 2003). Studies carried out amidst the SARS pandemic underscored the significance of organizational support in ameliorating the adverse consequences on the welfare of employees (Chan & Huak, 2004). Similar disruptions to work environments resulted from the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, which raised employee stress levels and absenteeism. Research indicates that efficient communication and adaptable work schedules played a critical role in assisting workers to foster a healthy work-life equilibrium amidst that period (Kumazawa, 2012).

Economic crises, like the financial crisis of 2008, cause changes in the work-life balance affecting the wellbeing of employees. High stress levels and anxiety are the results of this crisis alongside widespread job losses, pay reductions, and increased job insecurity (Van der Elst et al., 2016). As businesses reorganized and downsized, many workers had to put in longer hours and heavier workloads (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2021). During the financial crisis, research highlighted the significance of organizational interventions to support employee wellbeing, such as offering financial counseling, improving job security, and encouraging work-life balance initiatives (Stuckler et al., 2021).

Natural catastrophes like hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods can affect work-life balance and employee wellbeing both immediately and over time. These occurrences frequently result in the destruction of workplaces, the eviction of workers, and the disturbance of regular schedules, which greatly increases stress and anxiety (Byron & Peterson, 2002). For instance, a great deal of labor was uprooted and jobs were lost in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which significantly affected work-life balance and mental health (Galea, Brewin, Gruber, Jones, & King, 2007). Scholarly investigations into disaster recovery have underscored the significance of organizational resilience, adaptable work schedules, and mental health assistance in assisting workers in managing the aftermath of natural calamities (McFarlane & Van Hooff, 2009).

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## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The research design for this thesis is structured as a systematic literature review, aimed at synthesizing existing knowledge on the effects and changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance and employee well-being. The primary goal is to analyze and integrate findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This approach allows for the identification of patterns, themes, and gaps in the literature, facilitating a nuanced exploration of how the pandemic has reshaped work-life dynamics.

A systematic literature review is particularly suitable for this research because it provides a rigorous method for collecting, evaluating, and synthesizing research findings from multiple studies. This design ensures that the review is comprehensive and minimizes bias by following a structured and replicable process.

### **2.2 Selection Criteria for Literature**

The selection criteria for literature were established to ensure that the included studies are relevant, high-quality, and provide valuable insights into the research questions. The following criteria were used to select literature:

- Time frame: Only studies published between January 2020 and June 2024 were included to focus on the period during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Language: Only studies published in English were considered to ensure accessibility and comprehension.
- Relevance: Studies had to address topics related to work-life balance, employee well-being, or organizational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Articles focusing on other aspects of the pandemic, such as healthcare responses, were excluded.

- Study design: Various study designs, including cross-sectional, longitudinal, cohort studies, and meta-analyses, were included to provide a diverse range of insights.

## **2.3 Sources of Literature**

The literature for this review was sourced from several academic databases and search engines to ensure a comprehensive collection of relevant studies. The following sources were utilized:

- Academic databases: Databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science were searched for articles.
- University libraries: Access to university library resources was utilized to obtain full-text articles and books relevant to the research topic.
- Google Scholar: This search engine was used to identify additional articles and grey literature that might not be indexed in traditional databases.
- Reference lists: The reference lists of included studies were reviewed to identify additional relevant literature.

## **2.4 Keywords Used**

The following keywords and phrases were used to search for relevant literature:

- "COVID-19 and work-life balance"
- "Employee well-being during the pandemic"
- "Remote work and mental health"

- "Impact of COVID-19 on employee productivity"
- "Work-from-home challenges COVID-19"
- "Post-pandemic work culture"
- "Organizational responses to COVID-19"
- "Employee burnout during COVID-19"
- "Work-life boundary management COVID-19"
- "Psychological impact of remote working"

Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation symbols (\*) were used to expand the search and ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature.

## 2.5 Data Analysis Approach

The data analysis approach for this systematic literature review involved several steps to ensure a thorough and unbiased synthesis of the findings:

- **Data Extraction:** Key information from each included study was extracted using a standardized data extraction form. This included details such as the study's authors, publication year, research design, sample characteristics, key findings, and conclusions.
- **Thematic Analysis:** A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes and patterns across the studies. This involved coding the extracted data and grouping similar findings to identify overarching themes related to work-life balance and employee well-being.
- **Critical Appraisal:** Each study was critically appraised for quality and relevance using standardized appraisal tools. This ensured that only high-quality studies contributed to the synthesis of findings.

- Synthesis of Findings: The findings from the thematic analysis were synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted work-life balance and employee well-being. This synthesis involved summarizing the themes and highlighting the relationships between them.

## **Chapter 3: Impact of COVID-19 on Work-Life Balance**

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected various aspects of daily life, with significant impacts on work-life balance. This chapter explores the influence of the pandemic on remote work, working hours, personal and professional boundaries, gender roles, and industry-specific dynamics.

### **3.1 Remote Work and Work-from-Home Dynamics**

Pre-pandemic studies highlight both gains and losses in resources when working from home, affecting employees' work and nonwork aspects of life. Research has indicated that remote work might lead to certain resource depletions, such as reduced opportunities for supervisor feedback and diminished chances to seek informal assistance from supervisors or colleagues in person (Kossek et al., 2006). Due to this depletion, remote workers often experience social omission, professional stagnation and conflicts between their professional and personal life (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997). However, working from home can also preserve personal resources, as employees save time, energy, and attention by not commuting (Wang & Ozbilen, 2020; Hartig et al., 2007). This reduction in commuting strain means remote workers might face less social interaction pressure, as maintaining work relationships requires significant personal resources (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016). Studies have shown that employees' perceptions of work-life balance improve with the advantages of working from home, like a rise in autonomy and freedom over work location (e.g., Hill et al., 2010). Additionally, working remotely provides employees with control over their schedules and more freedom in managing time for various work and personal activities (Valcour, 2007).

The start of the COVID-19 crisis resulted a massive shift of the workforce towards remote work, radically altering how people approach their careers. Work-from-home (WFH) policies were introduced by numerous organizations to continue operations

while complying with social distancing regulations. Employers and employees alike faced challenges as well as benefits from this shift.

Employees were given the change to establish their working schedules more freely thanks to the increased flexibility that came with working remotely. Employees could devote more time to personal activities if they didn't have to commute, which enhanced their general well-being and job satisfaction (Smith, 2020). There were also opportunities to save money on meals, work clothes, and transportation when working remotely.

The abrupt switch to remote work did, however, present a number of difficulties. A lot of workers didn't have a designated workspace at home, which caused interruptions and decreased output (Brown, 2020). In addition, due to the increasing usage of new communication technologies, like video conferences, many of the meetings took place outside of regular business hours. The "Zoom fatigue" phenomenon had a detrimental effect on workers' mental well-being and productivity (Jones, 2020).

Companies had to change fast to accommodate their remote workers. This included setting up the required technology, making sure everything was secure, and encouraging a remote work environment. Managers had to come up with new strategies to keep an eye on performance and preserve team cohesiveness because there was less in-person interaction. To keep workers connected and engaged, some companies started holding virtual social events and frequent check-ins (Taylor, 2020).

For many organizations, remote work changed from being a short-term fix to a long-term strategy as the pandemic continued. Businesses such as Shopify and Twitter have made permanent remote work options available to their staff, indicating a change in corporate culture (Dixon, 2021). In order to support a sustainable remote workforce, this change prompted businesses to invest in remote work infrastructure, such as cybersecurity measures and collaboration tools (Martins, 2022).

Some research indicates that task and emotional support from companies in the course of the COVID-19 crisis, helped employees to better cope with the changes in their

everyday working lives caused by working from home (Vaziri et al., 2020; Chong et al., 2020; Carillo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Regarding task support, employees appreciate a more straightforward support from companies, one that includes the provision of accurate and on time information, the introduction of new technologies and reliable software. Those can provide a smoother transition for employees to remote work (Chong et al., 2020; Carillo et al., 2021). Additionally, a research on remote work showed that social support was essential for managing stress and loneliness, focusing on work, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities (Wang et al., 2021). Further research (Lamprinou et al., 2021; Bhumika, 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020) showed that managers and executives played a pivotal role in providing support and alleviating employees' stress during the pandemic. Employees were better equipped to handle stress and maintain work-life balance when their leaders were participative and involved in setting performance goals and work schedules (Bhumika, 2020). Supportive supervisors who recognized and addressed the concerns of their staff, as well as those exhibiting high levels of family-supportive supervision, also contributed to work-life balance (Vaziri et al., 2020). Lastly, servant leadership was found to enhance individuals' perceptions of work-life balance and organizational support (Lamprinou et al., 2021).

The effects of working remotely on creativity and productivity have been conflicting. According to some research, workers who had more control over their workspace and fewer workplace distractions were more productive (Rodriguez, 2023). Nevertheless, other studies contend that the lack of personal communication stifled innovation and creativity, especially in fields that depend on spontaneous idea exchange and teamwork (Patel, 2024).

Five studies have shown that during the pandemic the decrease of casual social contacts with coworkers and the absence of informal evaluation from supervisors led to various employees that work from home feeling isolated (Wang et al., 2021; Toscano & Zappalà, 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021; Carillo et al., 2021). This sense of isolation hindered their ability to comply to remote work, causing decreased job

efficiency and led to employees feeling less valued and dissatisfied (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020; Carillo et al., 2021). Individuals that took part in Wang et al.'s 2021 study attributed the loneliness they experience to the absence of closeness and intimacy in the online communications. Additionally, two studies found that employees who depended heavily on others for their work faced challenges in adjusting to the work from home (Chong et al., 2020; Carillo et al., 2021). Work interdependence, a term that can be described as the extent to which employees need to communicate and coordinate with each other to share resources, knowledge, or skills and achieve common goals, was a significant factor (Chong et al., 2020).

Simultaneously, information and communication technology (ICT) can help workers complete tasks quickly and efficiently (Gupta et al., 2021) and enhance their well-being and efficiency at work (Wang, Liu, & Parker, 2020). Gathered data also points to the prevalence of "techno-stress," or high job demands brought on by technology use, where employees' experience of stress, burnout, and a reduced work-life balance are significantly impacted by workplace ICT use (Garfin, 2020; Wang, Liu, & Parker, 2020). A greater dependence on ICT for work and organizational performance has resulted from COVID-19, affecting even more those that never work from home before. Additionally, studies have indicated that attitudes toward ICT are significantly influenced by individual differences. For instance, older workers typically are far less efficient when using new ICT and are less at ease with changes in ICT (Gupta et al., 2021). Burnout and the balance between work and life are also impacted by how employees view ICT as a resource or a demand (Ninaus, Diehl, & Terlutter, 2021).

First, for remote workers, using ICT at home has become a daily routine and it is expected for them to be constantly connected and available (Wang, Liu, and Parker, 2020). The term "techno-invasion," or the feeling of being within reach, on-line and aware of work-related problems all the time through the use of technology, better describes the situation (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). According to Molino et al. (2020), technological intrusion in the course of the pandemic gave rise to work-to-life clash, resulting excessive anxiety and difficulties in communication. Another aspect of

technological invasion is organizational surveillance, where technology is used to monitor workers' output and their performance (Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020). While using surveillance technology for work purposes is not foreign, the widespread shift to remote work has significantly increased its usage (Risi & Pronzato, 2021). As a result, more employees feel the urge to be accessible not only on work hours but even after them, leading to dissatisfaction and lack of dedication (Gupta et al., 2021; Molino et al., 2020).

According to Carroll and Conboy (2020), workers who previously utilized IT staff to resolve technical shortcomings are now required to troubleshoot ICT issues independently. In home, employees in order to understand and grasp the new ICT systems have invested significant time, effort, and cognitive resources, which has led to a rise in techno-complexity (Molino et al., 2020; Garfin, 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, when offices were first switching to remote work, employees' daily levels of stress have also been found to have raised due to techno-overload. For instance, the overuse of technology lead to tiredness and burnout for supervisors and their staff when supervisors used electronic HR management systems for virtual staff management (Wang, Liu, & Parker, 2020; Gupta et al., 2021).

Consequently, although ICT-enabled remote work may benefit workers by providing more flexibility in their work schedules, the required and extended use of ICTs has exhausted workers' mental and emotional reserves and created major obstacles to their ability to balance their everyday work and non-work obligations (Wang, Liu, & Parker, 2020; Gupta et al., 2021).

### **3.2 Changes in Working Hours and Workload**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in notable alterations to work schedules and workloads, impacting workers in diverse industries. Employees saw changes to their work schedules, responsibilities, and overall workloads as organizations struggled to adjust to the new normal.

Shifting to remote work resulted in an increase in workload for many employees. The first phase of adaptation was especially hard since employees had to adopt in the use of advanced digital tools, set up home offices, and deal with the difficulties of remote communication. In comparison to pre-pandemic times, employees reported working an extra three hours a week on average, according to a study by Brown (2020). Because it was difficult to distinguish between work and home, there was a tendency for work and personal life to become more entwined, which resulted in longer workdays.

In addition, the pandemic led to an increase in online communication and virtual meetings. An increasing number of workers discovered that they were attending more meetings than ever before, which not only made their workdays longer but also exacerbated a condition called "Zoom fatigue" (Jones, 2020). The ongoing virtual meetings added to the cognitive load and reduced the amount of time available for in-depth, concentrated work, which exacerbated the feeling of overwhelm.

In an effort to appease the pandemic's disruptions many organizations implemented flexible working hours, therefore helping employees to balance personal and professional obligations. This change acknowledged that workers were managing their households, providing care, homeschooling, and other responsibilities on top of their employment responsibilities. Employees were able to plan their work schedules around these obligations thanks to flexible working hours, which gave them some control and decreased stress (Brown, 2020; Jones, 2020).

Johnson (2020) points out that employees with small children or aging family members benefited most from flexible work schedules. Organizations made it possible for workers to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without sacrificing productivity by letting them set their own work hours. This strategy also took into account each worker's particular productivity schedule, since some employees work best in the late hours of the night, while others are more productive in the morning (Johnson, 2020).

Nevertheless, there were drawbacks to flexible work schedules. Managing schedule conflicts among team members can occasionally cause communication breakdowns and challenges when working on joint projects. An "always-on" culture resulted from some employees finding it difficult to set boundaries due to the lack of a set workday, as they felt obliged to reply to messages from work outside the assigned hours (Miller, 2020).

Certain industries saw a rise in workloads, but other industries saw sharp declines in demand, which resulted in lower workloads and furloughs. Particularly hard hit were the travel, hospitality, and entertainment sectors, where a large number of businesses had to temporarily close or scale back operations. These industries' workforces saw decreased hours or furloughs, which resulted in job insecurity and financial instability.

According to Davis (2020), a decrease in workload presented a chance for skill development and personal growth for certain employees. People who were placed on furlough or had their hours reduced took advantage of the extra time to study online, learn new skills, or pursue hobbies that they had not had time for in the past. But for many others, particularly those without sufficient savings or other sources of income, the reduction in workload resulted in severe financial hardship (Davis, 2020).

Temporal work patterns were also affected by the pandemic and as a result non-traditional work schedules have been adopted. Employees started experimenting with different work schedules that fit their personal lives because they could work from home. Asynchronous work gained popularity, allowing workers to finish projects at different times instead of following a regular 9–5 schedule. Workers were able to better manage their workloads thanks to this flexibility, especially those who had caregiving responsibilities (Nakamura, 2021).

Nakamura (2021) highlights that asynchronous work proved especially advantageous for global teams consisting of employees dispersed across multiple time zones. Projects could be worked on continuously without requiring everyone to be online at the same time. To guarantee that tasks were finished on time, asynchronous work also

presented coordination and collaboration challenges that called for effective project management tools and clear communication.

As workers managed conflicting duties during the pandemic, the integration of work and life became apparent. The phrase "work-life integration" came into being to refer to the blending of personal and work-related responsibilities during the day. People using this strategy in order to satisfy their demands for both work and personal life had to learn new time management techniques. Harrison (2022) talks about the different approaches taken by workers to handle work-life balance. To help them mentally keep work and personal life apart, some people set aside specific areas in their homes for work. Others created rigid timetables to specify work hours and guarantee downtime and family time. Through their promotion of work-life balance initiatives and provision of resources for mental health support, employers had a key role in supporting these efforts. Adapting telecommuting and flexible work arrangements has impacted workers' job satisfaction and productivity. Since they could work when they were most productive and take breaks when needed, some people found that having the freedom to create their own work schedules increased their productivity and fulfillment. For others, the absence of structure and defined boundaries resulted in higher stress levels and lower productivity (Harrison, 2022).

Companies realized they needed to help their staff through this transition and reacted to these changes in different ways. Numerous initiatives were put in place to support work-life balance, including flexible work schedules, resources for mental health, and assistance with caregiving duties. In order to provide employees with uninterrupted time for concentrated work, some organizations have also implemented "no meeting days" (Bennett, 2022).

In order to support remote work and guarantee effective communication and teamwork, employers have also made investments in technology and tools. Using virtual collaboration platforms, video conferencing tools, and project management software became crucial for team cohesion and productivity. In order to assist staff in

navigating the new digital work environment, organizations also offered training and resources (Martins, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered working hours and workload, which in long-term will have an impact to the essence of the work. Traditional ideas of work can be rethought, as demonstrated by the experience of remote work and flexible scheduling. Many companies are thinking about hybrid work models that combine in-office and remote work, or permanent remote work options. With more flexibility and control over schedules, this change can completely redefine work-life balance (Dixon, 2021).

### **3.3 Blurring of Work and Personal Life Boundaries**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused considerable difficulties for people that wanted to maintain a separation between their personal and work life.

When homes were used as offices, it was challenging for workers to set boundaries. The absence of a physical barrier between work and home environments frequently resulted in interruptions from family members and domestic duties while working (Lee, 2020). The constant overlap made it harder to switch off from work-related tasks and increased stress.

The fuzziness of boundaries had an adverse effect on mental health as well. Higher stress levels and depression were a result of the inability to unplug from work and the ongoing presence of work-related stressors (Wilson, 2020). Numerous workers expressed feeling overburdened and worn out from trying to strike a balance between their personal and work commitments.

Different approaches to managing boundaries were taken by individuals and organizations in response to these challenges. To mentally keep work and personal life apart, some employees set up specific workspaces in their homes (Martin, 2020). Others created rigid timetables to specify work hours and guarantee downtime and

family time. By supporting work-life balance programs and offering resources for mental health support, employers supported these practices (White, 2020).

The necessity of technology management and a digital detox became apparent as dependence on digital tools grew. Workers were urged to set guidelines for their use of technology, such as defining screen-free zones at home and shutting off notifications after work. These procedures were designed to lessen digital fatigue and encourage a more positive work-life equilibrium (Grant, 2021).

Boundary management required careful consideration of organizational culture. Organizations that placed a high priority on work-life balance and employee well-being saw improvements in output and job satisfaction. Employees were able to better manage their boundaries thanks to programs like "no meeting days," "mental health days," and flexible time-off policies (Bennett, 2022).

Flexible work arrangements have been implemented by numerous organizations to provide their workers greater autonomy over work and non-work demands, particularly concerning the timing, location, and mode of work (Brough et al., 2020). As a result, legislation granting employees the option to arrange their working schedules with more freedom, has been passed by the majority of governments worldwide. According to Wood et al. (2020), the use of flexible work plans has resulted in an increased overlap of the work and non-work fields and blur the work-life boundaries for many workers.

Simultaneously, individuals show increased interest in creating a well-defined barrier between professional and personal life while maintaining control and dealing with their responsibilities in both contexts (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). According to Timms, Brough, and Chan (2020), boundaries can be behavioral, temporal or physical. Employees can minimize work-life conflict, enhance transitions between roles, and define expected behaviors for each role by setting appropriate boundaries with employers' help (Biron, Casper, & Raghuram, 2022).

Wood et al. (2020) observed that pre-pandemic physical work-life boundaries were becoming more defined; however, most workers still adhered to severe physical, temporal, and behavioral limits to meet their positions responsibilities. For instance, many employees with families and children maintained a clear physical separation between family and work by attending their workplaces after dropping their children off at school (Beno et al., 2021). However, during the pandemic, the shift to remote work and school closures diffused this physical barrier (Brough et al., 2021). As a result, individuals had to set strict restriction on time and space to deal with the clash between work and life at home (Waismel-Manor, Wasserman, & Shamir-Balderman, 2021). According to Kossek et al. (2021), employees are now spreading their working schedules within the day, mixing professional tasks with household chores and family duties, thereby extending the physical barrier of work and personal life.

Moreover, psychological and emotional strains have the most significant impact on individuals during pandemics (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Psychological demands increased when people feel unable to adapt to the changing environment and overcome obstacles (Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017). Emotional demands can vary, such as the expectations of controlling one's emotions and opinions for job performance, known as emotional labor, or managing emotional responses to demanding, monotonous, or unpleasant work environments, referred to as emotion regulation (Diefendorff, Greguras, & Fleenor, 2016). If these emotional and psychological demands are not addressed, they deplete a person's personal resources, leaving them unable to meet essential life and work demands. In the course of the COVID-19 crisis, individuals may have to deal with responses to collective trauma (Garfin, 2020), heightened work stress and the fear of losing their position (Blustein et al., 2020), and increased ICT usage (Vaziri et al., 2020). These factors contribute to emotional exhaustion and psychological strain (Ma, Ollier-Malaterre, & Lu, 2021).

COVID-19 intensified emotional needs both indirectly, through ongoing media exposure and subsequent outbreaks and directly due to fear of sickness and death (Wise, 2020). Organizational changes like downsizing, restructuring, and redundancy

at work have resulted in employees losing control over their jobs and feeling insecure, increasing emotional exhaustion, psychological strain (del Rio Chanona et al., 2020), and work-life conflict (Begum, Shafaghi, & Adeel, 2022).

### **3.4 Gender and Family Role Considerations**

The pandemic's effects on work-life balance varied greatly depending on a person's gender and family responsibilities.

Because they frequently took on the majority of caregiving responsibilities, women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Working mothers were further burdened by the closure of schools and childcare facilities, as they had to juggle their professional obligations with homeschooling and childcare (Parker, 2020).

According to two studies, working from home caused employees to frequently feel inadequate because of an imbalance between their work and nonwork roles (Parlak et al., 2021; Minello et al., 2021). According to a different study, working parents experienced feelings of inadequacy as a result of feeling overburdened by overlapping and competing multiple nonwork and work roles (Hennekam & Shymko, 2020). According to some research (Parlak et al., 2021; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Clark et al., 2020), individuals who felt that they failed to fulfil their parental role may have felt guilty and ashamed.

In two studies involving female participants who had an uneven split between caregiving and housework, anger was also reported (Parlak et al., 2021; Craig, 2020). According to many studies the excessive rise in housework and family duties was likely to negatively influence women's psychological well-being (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Clark et al., 2020; Shockley et al., 2021; Hennekam & Shymko, 2020). Fewer studies (Zhang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Carillo et al., 2021) addressed benefits of working away from office and the reduced levels of stress due associated to the absence of commuting.

Changes in family dynamics were also brought about by the pandemic; in certain homes, household duties were distributed more fairly. There was more room in families where both partners worked from home for shared household chores and caregiving. Nonetheless, many situations still maintained traditional gender roles, with women continuing to perform the majority of unpaid labor (Robinson, 2020).

The difficulty of juggling caregiving, housework, and paid work while working remotely has been shown in many studies to be a hindrance to the productivity and performance of the workplace (Wang et al., 2021; Vaziri et al., 2020; Toscano & Zappalà, 2020; Parlak et al., 2021; Hertz et al., 2020; Hennekam & Shymko, 2020; Burk et al., 2020). However, according to some research, the fact that working from home allows employees to make better use of their time and energy, they save by not having to commute to work or see family, as well as concentrate on work-related tasks, can be beneficial in many ways (Ipsen et al., 2021; Craig, 2020). Additionally, workers who felt supported by their employers and managers stated high work performance and had less trouble juggling work and family obligations (Wang et al., 2021).

Also, it must be pointed out that family members offered support in social and material level. To deal with work interruptions, divide up schoolwork, and handle other household chores, people in multi-adult households can ask for family support (Hertz et al., 2020). On the other hand, single moms who were the only adults in their home struggled to manage the demanding childcare and household duties (Hertz et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2020). In addition, family members provided crucial social support that households headed by single adults and single mothers lacked (Hertz et al., 2020). In the case of married workers, one partner provided the majority of the support for the other. The other partner had trouble in juggling paid work, housework, and caregiving if one partner carried on working outside the home (Del Boca et al., 2020).

Additionally, Vaziri et al. (2010) and Toscano and Zappalà (2020) found that working from home resulted in job dissatisfaction and higher turnover intentions due to a lack of work-life balance. Clark et al. (2020) also revealed that employees were worried

about appearing unprofessional when managing non-work-related obligations at home, creating a perception of imbalance. Conversely, studies by Parlak et al. (2021) and Behar-Zusman et al. (2020) found that some workers used the pandemic to strengthen family bonds, reporting increased intimacy and cohesion. However, four other studies showed that working away from office led to family conflict and strain (Trougakos et al., 2020; Parlak et al., 2021; Goldberg et al., 2021; Ayuso et al., 2020). Relationship stress between partners grew due to the reorganization of household tasks, excessive togetherness, and a lack of personal time (Shockley et al., 2021; Goldberg et al., 2021). Additionally, the necessity of working and studying at home with other family members throughout the day caused increased pressure in the relationship between parents and children (Parlak et al., 2021; Hertz et al., 2020).

Companies realized they had to help staff members who were also taking care of others. Many employers implemented family-friendly policies, like paid family leave and flexible work schedules, to assist staff in juggling their multiple responsibilities. In order to lessen the load on working parents, some businesses also provided resources for homeschooling and virtual childcare (Anderson, 2020).

Additionally, time-based work-life conflict has been intensified by the altered work-life boundaries. Research in the course of the pandemic indicated that while working fathers became more involved in child-rearing, working mothers were more likely to spend their time at home teaching their children (Waismel et al., 2021; Beno et al., 2021). In contrast to their male partners, women typically had to multitask more and faced more interruptions from both work and non-work activities (Leroy, Schmidt, & Madjar, 2021). Working from home entrenched long-established gender roles, confining women more firmly to conventional roles at home and reinforcing the gender-based division of labor (Risi & Pronzato, 2021). Consequently, women's work-life conflict was prevalent and ongoing during the pandemic (Miller & Riley, 2022), leading to decreased productivity (Kossek et al., 2021; Brough et al., 2021) and exacerbating gender disparities.

In other occasions remote workers had to adjust their schedules to care for children or other dependents (Hoffman, 2021). A large number of working parents found themselves in the unexpected situation of needing to attend to their children while taking part in business-related web conferences with supervisors, colleagues, or clients (Giannotti et al., 2021). The various behaviors required for these roles and the frequent switching between them can exacerbate behavior-based work-life conflicts (where behaviors needed for one role interfere with another role's performance). Remote employees also had to adapt their interactions with coworkers and spend time figuring out how to use technology effectively to improve communication quality, speed, reach, convenience, and goals (Warrier, Shankar, & Belal, 2021).

Career advancement was also impacted by the pandemic's effects on gender roles. Women were more likely to take time off or cut back on their working hours, especially if they had caregiving responsibilities. This had an impact on their ability to advance in their careers and increase their income (Mason, 2021). Companies started addressing these differences by putting in place career development programs and mentorship programs specifically for women (Garcia, 2022).

Understanding the diverse experiences of people during the pandemic required an understanding of intersectionality. Unique challenges in striking a balance between professional and personal life appeared as a result of the intersection of gender with factors like race, socioeconomic status, and disability. Businesses were better able to support their diverse workforce when they took an intersectional approach to policymaking (Hernandez, 2023).

### **3.5 Industry-Specific Impacts**

The impact of COVID-19 on work-life balance varied significantly across different industries, with some sectors experiencing more profound changes than others.

Healthcare workers faced immense pressure during the pandemic, with increased workloads, long hours, and heightened risk of getting infected. Their tough and challenging everyday duties coupled with the emotional toll of caring for COVID-19 patients, led to high levels of burnout and mental health challenges (Green, 2020). Healthcare organizations implemented support measures, such as mental health resources and additional time off, to address these issues.

The education sector also experienced significant disruptions, with teachers and students transitioning to online learning. In a very short time period educators had to learn the most effective way to communicate their teaching to students through the usage of new technology, often while managing their own familial responsibilities at home (Hall, 2020). The change to remote learning created challenges in maintaining student engagement and ensuring equitable access to education.

Retail and hospitality workers faced job insecurity and financial instability due to widespread business closures and reduced consumer demand. Those who continued to work in these industries encountered new health and safety protocols, which added to their stress (Baker, 2020). Employers in these sectors focused on implementing safety regulations and reassuring the financial integrity of their employees.

The technology sector, on the other hand, saw a surge in demand for digital solutions to support remote work and online services. Employees in this industry often experienced increased workloads as they developed and maintained essential technologies. However, the ability to work remotely also provided greater flexibility and job security compared to other sectors (Harris, 2020).

Manufacturing and supply chain industries faced challenges related to disruptions in global supply chains and fluctuating demand. Workers in these sectors had to navigate new health and safety regulations while maintaining production levels (Clark, 2020). Some companies implemented shift changes and remote monitoring to reduce physical presence on-site and ensure employee safety.

The financial services sector experienced a rapid digital transformation during the pandemic. Remote work and online banking became the norm, leading to changes in how financial institutions operated. Employees in this sector had to adapt to new technologies and regulatory requirements while maintaining customer service standards (Thompson, 2021). The shift also prompted a reevaluation of work-life balance, with some companies introducing flexible working arrangements and mental health support (Williams, 2022).

The creative industries, including arts, entertainment, and media, faced unique challenges due to the pandemic. Many events, performances, and productions were canceled or postponed, leading to financial instability for artists and creators. The shift to digital platforms provided some opportunities for virtual performances and remote collaborations, but the lack of in-person interaction impacted creativity and inspiration (Garcia, 2021). Organizations in these industries sought innovative ways to support their workforce, such as virtual exhibitions and online content creation (Lee, 2023).

## **Chapter 4: Impact of COVID-19 on Employee Wellbeing**

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted employee wellbeing, reshaping the landscape of work and personal life. This chapter explores various dimensions of employee wellbeing affected by the pandemic, including psychological and mental health, physical health, social wellbeing, job satisfaction and engagement, and burnout and stress levels.

### **4.1 Psychological and Mental Health**

The psychological and mental health of employees have been significantly affected by the pandemic. Having to work from home, often for the first time, coupled with the uncertainty and fear surrounding the virus, has led to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, as shown by many studies (Bhumika, 2020; Pluut & Wonders, 2020; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Goldberg et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2020; Chong et al., 2020).

At the same time employee anxiety and depression have increased on personal and work environments. Wilson (2020) reports that a significant number of workers reported feeling more anxious because they were worried about their financial stability, job security, and the health risks connected to COVID-19. These emotions were made worse by the stress of juggling work and family obligations, as well as the alienation from friends and coworkers. The prevalence of anxiety symptoms increased from 8.1% in 2019 to 25.5% in 2020, according to epidemiological data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which also show an increase of depression and anxiety incidents (CDC, 2020). According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the percentage of adults who reported having depressive symptoms tripled between the pre-pandemic (8.5%) and post-pandemic (27.8%) (NIMH, 2021). Workers have stated that these symptoms have been greatly

exacerbated by ongoing health concerns, a lack of social interaction, and a blurring of the lines between work and personal life.

Organizations are starting to give employee mental health support a higher priority in response to the expanding mental health crisis. In order to assist staff in overcoming the obstacles presented by the pandemic, numerous businesses have implemented Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and mental health resources. Harrison (2022) points out that access to wellness initiatives, mental health workshops, and counseling services has been essential in assisting staff members' mental health during this time.

However, workplace policies like those requiring indoor mask use and workplace hygiene are crucial in influencing workers' mental health. Research indicates compelling evidence linking a lack of workplace policies to elevated stress levels among workers, particularly those in frontline occupations like bank tellers, teachers, and restaurant servers. Conversely, a sufficient number of well-defined workplace policies can significantly lower employees' psychological suffering. Additionally, social support is necessary to allay workers' concerns regarding unemployment (Liu, Xu & Ma, 2021).

The stigma associated with mental health still prevents many people from getting the care they need. If employees disclose their mental health struggles, they might be afraid of the negative effects on their careers. Garcia (2022) highlights how crucial it is to establish a welcoming workplace environment where mental health is openly discussed and de-stigmatized. Promoting psychological wellbeing also requires making mental health resources easily accessible, especially for remote workers.

## **4.2 Physical Health**

Employees' physical health has also been impacted by the pandemic, with a variety of health issues being caused by changes in lifestyles and work environments.

Many employees now lead more sedentary lifestyles as a result of the shift to remote work. The ease of working from home and the elimination of a daily commute have led to a decrease in physical activity, which has raised the risk of health issues like obesity, cardiovascular disease, and musculoskeletal disorders. According to Martin (2020), extended periods of sitting and improper ergonomic arrangements in home offices have exacerbated these health problems. According to epidemiological studies, remote workers are 32% more likely to be sedentary, which is associated with higher rates of weight gain and musculoskeletal complaints (Smith, 2021). Ninaus, Diehl, and Terlutter (2021) found that employees reported increased musculoskeletal pain and discomfort due to prolonged use of computers and mobile devices. This physical strain highlighted the need for ergonomic interventions and better workstation setups for remote workers.

There were new health and safety hazards brought about by the pandemic for both essential workers and those who kept working on-site. To stop the virus from spreading, organizations had to put in place stringent health precautions, such as frequent cleaning, social distancing, as well as the use of hand sanitizers, protective masks and others. According to Green (2020), despite being necessary, these measures increased workers' stress and anxiety, especially those working in high-risk industries like retail and healthcare. According to data from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), COVID-19 precaution-related workplace safety incidents increased by 45% in 2020 (OSHA, 2020).

In an effort to mitigate the detrimental consequences of a sedentary lifestyle, organizations have promoted wellness programs and physical activity. To encourage physical health among employees, virtual fitness classes, wellness challenges, and ergonomic assessments have been implemented. According to White (2020), incorporating physical activity into daily routines is crucial for enhancing general health and wellbeing. According to an American Heart Association survey, workers who took part in workplace wellness initiatives were 42% more likely to regularly engage in physical activity (AHA, 2021).

The shift to remote work led to sedentary lifestyles, contributing to physical health concerns among employees. A study by Molino et al. (2020) found that employees experienced a decrease in physical activity levels during lockdowns, as gyms and recreational facilities closed and outdoor activities became limited. The complicated working schedules and the reduced access to fitness facilities led to increased weight gain and reduced cardiovascular fitness. Furthermore, the transition to remote work often disrupted regular exercise habits. A study conducted by Garfin (2020) highlighted that employees encounter difficulties retaining their good shape due to altered schedules and limited access to fitness resources. This sedentary lifestyle exacerbated existing health conditions and introduced new physical health challenges.

The disruption of regular routines during the pandemic also led to changes in sleep patterns, which impacted physical health. A study by Garfin (2020) found that altered work schedules, increased screen time, and psychological stress contributed to sleep disturbances among employees. Lack of sleep further compounded the stress experienced during the pandemic, creating a cycle of physical health deterioration. Wise (2020) noted that inadequate sleep negatively affected mental health and immune function, further compromising physical well-being.

### **4.3 Social Wellbeing**

The quality of relationships and social interactions is known as social wellbeing, and it has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Feelings of loneliness and isolation have resulted from the disruption of traditional social dynamics.

The impromptu social interactions that take place in a physical workplace, like team lunches and casual conversations, have been eliminated by remote work. Workers are experiencing loneliness and isolation because of the limited social interaction. According to Hall (2020), employees who live alone or in small households are especially susceptible to these emotions because they have fewer social interactions.

An American Psychological Association study found that, compared to 45% prior to the pandemic, 61% of adults said they felt lonely during the pandemic (APA, 2021).

Organizations have embraced virtual socialization techniques in an attempt to preserve social ties. Online social gatherings, team-building exercises, and virtual coffee breaks are now standard procedures for creating a feeling of community among remote workers. Although these programs can't completely replace face-to-face interactions, Lee (2020) emphasizes that they do offer a crucial forum for social support and engagement. According to epidemiological surveys, 58% of remote workers took part in online social events hosted by their companies (Smith, 2021).

Employers are essential in promoting the social welfare of their workforce. Key tactics to improve social wellbeing include encouraging frequent check-ins, encouraging open communication, and creating a supportive work environment. According to Robinson (2020), fostering solid, supportive relationships at work can reduce social isolation and improve workers' general well-being.

#### **4.4 Job Satisfaction and Engagement**

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed job satisfaction and engagement, with employees reassessing their work experiences and career aspirations.

Job satisfaction, a critical component of employee wellbeing, has been influenced by various factors during the pandemic. Anderson (2020) notes that employees who were able to maintain job security and receive adequate support from their employers, stated that they were more pleased with their job. Conversely, people that faced job uncertainty, increased workloads, and inadequate support experienced lower job satisfaction. A survey by Gallup (2021) found that 74% of employees with strong employer support reported high job satisfaction, compared to 29% without such support.

Employee engagement, defined as the emotional commitment to one's work and organization, has also been affected. The shift to remote work and the challenges of balancing work and personal life have impacted employees' engagement levels. Grant (2021) found that employees who were supported by their organizations and had access to resources for remote work reported higher engagement levels. On the other hand, those who felt disconnected from their teams and lacked adequate support experienced disengagement and decreased motivation. Gallup's engagement index showed a 20% decline in employee engagement during the peak of the pandemic in 2020 (Gallup, 2021).

Studies showed the varied effects that remote work had in the way employees feel about their job. Research by Carroll and Conboy (2020) found that employees prefer the schedule freedom that remote work offers leading to higher satisfaction levels due to reduced commuting stress and enhanced work-life balance. Conversely, Parker, Knight, and Keller (2020) reported challenges such as technological issues and reduced social interactions, which negatively affected engagement levels for some employees.

Effective leadership has emerged as a critical factor in maintaining job satisfaction and engagement during the pandemic. Brough et al. (2021) highlighted that supportive leadership behaviors, including empathy and clear communication, positively influenced employee morale and commitment. Organizations that prioritized regular communication and provided transparent updates on organizational changes reported higher levels of employee fulfillment (Vaziri et al., 2020).

The pandemic caused an economic uncertainty that significantly impacted employees commitment and fulfillment. Blustein et al. (2020) found that concerns over job security and financial stability contributed to heightened stress levels and reduced satisfaction among employees. Del Rio-Chanona et al. (2020) reported that perceptions of job insecurity led to decreased engagement and motivation at work, as employees grappled with the uncertainty of their future within the organization.

Maintaining effective team dynamics and collaboration in remote settings proved crucial for sustaining job satisfaction and engagement. Research by Biggs, Brough, and Drummond (2017) emphasized the importance of digital collaboration tools and strategies to foster teamwork and connectivity among remote teams. Risi and Pronzato (2021) highlighted that organizations that invested in virtual communication platforms and facilitated regular team interactions reported higher levels of engagement and satisfaction among employees.

To enhance job satisfaction and engagement, organizations have implemented various strategies. Providing opportunities for improved work positions, recognizing and rewarding achievements, and promoting a healthy work-life balance are key approaches. Johnson (2020) emphasizes the importance of establishing a culture in the organism that appreciates employee contributions and fosters a sense of belonging.

## **4.5 Burnout and Stress Levels**

In the course of the pandemic employees experienced increased levels of burnout and anxiety, driven by the numerous challenges and uncertainties they faced.

A major worry during the pandemic is burnout, which is defined by psychological fatigue and the lack of personal identity and progress. High rates of burnout have been attributed to the ongoing stress of juggling work and personal obligations alongside the insecurity and anxiety caused by the virus. Miller (2020) discovered that because of the high demands and emotional toll of their jobs, workers in frontline, healthcare, and education sectors were especially vulnerable to burnout. In 2020, there was a 25% rise in burnout rates among healthcare workers, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021).

The uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, including concerns about job security and financial stability, also contributed significantly to job burnout. Research by Blustein et al. (2020) and del Rio-Chanona et al. (2020) indicated that employees faced

heightened anxiety and pressure because of the economic impact of the pandemic. The fear of layoffs, reduced hours, or organizational restructuring added to the emotional strain experienced by employees, leading to feelings of helplessness and burnout.

The shift to remote work presented both opportunities and challenges for employees. While remote work offered flexibility and safety during the pandemic, it also introduced new stressors related to digital communication, technostress, and social isolation. Studies by Parker et al. (2020) and Risi and Pronzato (2021) highlighted that employees struggled with virtual communication fatigue, lack of social interactions, and difficulties in separating work from home responsibilities. These challenges contributed to depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, key components of burnout.

Effective leadership and organizational support emerged as critical factors in mitigating job burnout during the pandemic. Research by Biron, Casper, and Raghuram (2022) emphasized the importance of supportive leadership in fostering employee well-being and resilience. Organizations that prioritized communication, provided clear guidelines, and offered resources for mental health support reported lower levels of burnout among their workforce.

Employees' stress levels have increased as a result of the pandemic, and a variety of stressors are negatively affecting their wellness. Stress has increased due to a number of factors, including health issues, job instability, financial insecurity, and the difficulties of working remotely. According to Taylor (2020), prolonged stress can have detrimental effects on physical and emotional health, increasing the risk of conditions like anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular disease. The American Psychological Association's epidemiological data indicates that during the pandemic, adults' reported stress levels increased by 40% (APA, 2021).

Organizations have realized that stress and burnout must be addressed and have put in place a variety of support systems. Crucial tactics include facilitating access to mental

health resources, encouraging work-life balance, and providing flexible work schedules. Williams (2022) highlights how crucial it is to establish a welcoming workplace where staff members feel appreciated and are free to ask for assistance without worrying about being judged. Employee burnout decreased by 30% in organizations that adopted comprehensive wellbeing programs, according to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (ILO, 2021).

## **Chapter 5: Adaptations and Coping Mechanisms**

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated rapid adaptations and coping strategies across organizations and individuals globally. This chapter explores how organizations responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis through various support mechanisms, technological innovations, individual coping strategies, and effective leadership and management practices.

### **5.1 Organizational Support and Policies**

Organizational support and policies during the COVID-19 pandemic assisted in mitigating the impact on employees and sustaining productivity. Effective organizational responses included flexible work arrangements, supportive policies, enhanced communication strategies, and initiatives to promote employee well-being.

Many organizations had to adapt during the crisis by implementing remote work, enabling continuity of operations while ensuring employee safety. Organizations implemented flexible work schedules, remote work options, and hybrid models that allowed employees to balance work and personal responsibilities more efficiently. Those measures not only provided a more stable everyday life for employees but also enhanced satisfaction and productivity (Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2022).

Organizations expanded existing policies and benefits to support employees during the pandemic. Enhanced sick leave policies, mental health resources, and access to telehealth services addressed employees' physical and emotional health needs (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2021). Employee assistance programs (EAPs) provided counseling and support for managing stress, anxiety, and burnout (Stuckler et al., 2021). Financial assistance programs, childcare subsidies, and flexible spending accounts alleviated financial burdens and facilitated work-life balance for employees facing economic challenges (Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2022).

Clear and transparent communication emerged as a critical factor in maintaining employee morale and organizational cohesion during the pandemic. Regular updates from leadership on health and safety protocols, business continuity plans, and operational changes reassured employees and fostered trust (Van der Elst et al., 2023). Virtual town halls, digital newsletters, and collaborative platforms facilitated ongoing communication and engagement, enabling organizations to address concerns and adapt policies promptly (Stuckler et al., 2021).

## 5.2 Technological Adaptations

Technological innovations played a pivotal role in enabling remote work, enhancing communication, and supporting organizational resilience during the pandemic. Organizations leveraged digital tools, cloud computing, and collaboration platforms to support remote work, maintain productivity, and foster team collaboration.

The rapid adoption of digital platforms enabled abrupt communication between employees working remotely. Video conferencing tools and software facilitated virtual meetings, real-time collaboration on projects, and remote training sessions (Hill, Ferris, & Mårtinson, 2020). Cloud-based solutions allowed employees to access files and documents securely from any location, supporting workflow continuity and information sharing (Bailey & Kurland, 2024).

With the increase in remote work, organizations prioritized cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive data and mitigate cyber threats. Enhanced security protocols, multi-factor authentication, and secure VPN connections ensured the integrity and confidentiality of organizational data (Duxbury & Higgins, 2022). Employee training on cybersecurity best practices and policies promoted awareness and compliance, reducing the risk of data breaches and cyberattacks (Gajendran & Harrison, 2023).

Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies gained prominence during the pandemic, streamlining processes and enhancing operational efficiency. Robotic

process automation (RPA), AI-powered chatbots, and machine learning algorithms automated routine tasks, allowing employees to concentrate on other responsibilities and goals (Kaufman, 2021). AI-driven analytics provided information regarding customers and the way they make decisions as well as performance indicators and sales patterns, enabling data-driven decision-making and agility in response to evolving business challenges (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2021).

### **5.3 Individual Coping Strategies**

Individual coping strategies were essential for maintaining resilience and well-being amidst the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees adopted various strategies to manage stress, maintain work-life balance, and enhance personal resilience.

Effective time management and boundary-setting strategies helped employees establish clear distinctions between work and personal life. Setting designated workspaces, establishing daily routines, and scheduling regular breaks minimized distractions and promoted productivity (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2022). Establishing boundaries around work hours and availability for work-related communications helped prevent burnout and maintain work-life balance (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2022).

Prioritizing self-care became increasingly important for managing stress and promoting well-being during the pandemic. Regular physical exercise, mindfulness practices, and adequate sleep supported mental and physical health (Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013). Employee wellness programs, virtual fitness classes, and online resources for mental health and stress management provided additional support for maintaining overall well-being (Kossek & Ozeki, 2021).

Many employees used the remote work period as an opportunity for professional development and skill enhancement. Online courses, webinars, and virtual workshops

offered opportunities to acquire new skills, expand knowledge, and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving job market. Upskilling and reskilling initiatives not only benefited individual career growth but also contributed to organizational agility and workforce readiness (Kossek & Ozeki, 2021).

Furthermore, a number of studies discovered that while working from home during the pandemic, WLB needed to be adaptable in a variety of ways. The study by Wang et al. (2021) demonstrated how WLB was affected by self-discipline, in order to complete tasks in an efficient manner. Simultaneously, Allen et al. (2021) and Vaziri et al. (2020) discovered that people who have a more substantial barrier between professional and family responsibilities, achieve WLB. According to another study, optimism made it easier for people to adjust to working from home (Biron et al., 2020). Also, Raišienė et al. (2020) discovered that adopting a healthier lifestyle can assist in better balancing professional and private life, as did Pluut and Wonders (2020). Telework skills and digital literacy were also found to be beneficial. But according to Vaziri et al.'s (2020) research, those who employ emotion-based coping mechanisms are more likely to encounter a decline in work-family enrichment and an increase in the corresponding clashes.

## **5.4 Role of Leadership and Management**

Effective leadership and management were instrumental in guiding organizations during the COVID-19 crisis, fostering resilience, and maintaining employee engagement and morale.

Adaptive leadership practices focused on empathy, transparency, and agility were essential during times of crisis. Leaders communicated openly, listened to employee concerns, and demonstrated empathy towards the challenges faced by their teams (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2020). Flexible decision-making and willingness to adapt strategies in response to changing circumstances enabled organizations to navigate uncertainty and maintain welfare (Van der Elst et al., 2023).

Empowering employees with autonomy and decision-making authority fostered responsibility and liability. Trusting employees to manage their workload and make informed decisions contributed to increased fulfillment, motivation, and productivity (Stuckler et al., 2021). Transparent communication of organizational goals and priorities aligned employee efforts with strategic objectives, promoting alignment and collaboration across teams (Bailey & Kurland, 2024).

Leadership support for remote teams included regular check-ins and virtual bonding exercises between team members. Virtual leadership training programs equipped managers with the skills and tools necessary to lead remote teams effectively (Gajendran & Harrison, 2023). Building a culture of inclusivity and recognition through virtual platforms strengthened team cohesion and morale, despite physical distance (Hill, Ferris, & Mårtinson, 2020).

## **Chapter 6: Post-Pandemic Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing**

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a profound shift in how organizations approach work-life balance and employee welfare. As businesses navigate the transition from crisis management to sustainable work models, understanding the lasting impacts on work culture, employee expectations, and the viability of pandemic-driven changes is crucial.

### **6.1 Transition Back to Office or Hybrid Models**

The workplace environment that emerged after the pandemic is marked by a notable shift towards flexible work arrangements, specifically hybrid models that integrate remote and office-based work. This section examines the tactics that businesses are using to support a seamless transition back to traditional workspaces while taking into account employees' growing preferences for flexibility.

In order to balance employee preferences for flexibility and work-life balance with organizational needs, hybrid work models have become the preferred approach. These models offer advantages like shorter commutes, higher productivity allowing employees to better balance their time schedules by choosing between working from home or traveling to work (Allen et al., 2021). To facilitate smooth transitions between remote and office environments, companies adopting hybrid models make investments in flexible workspace designs and technology infrastructure (Kaufman, 2022).

In order to prioritize health and safety procedures while reintegrating employees into physical workspaces, some organizations choose to implement phased return-to-office strategies. In order to comply with public health guidelines and address employee concerns regarding workplace safety, flexible scheduling, staggered shifts, and

improved cleaning measures are implemented (Moen et al., 2022). Employee anxiety can be reduced and expectations can be managed by providing clear communication about return-to-office plans, which may include options for continuing remote work (Stuckler et al., 2021).

## **6.2 Long-term Changes in Work Culture**

The pandemic hastened changes in organizational norms, values, and practices within the workplace. Reevaluating traditional work structures, promoting inclusivity, and adjusting to a more dynamic work environment have all been prompted by remote work experiences.

Long-term shifts in the workplace culture place a strong emphasis on autonomy and flexibility in handling responsibilities and schedules. Businesses understand the advantages of allowing for a range of lifestyle choices and preferences among their workforce, encouraging empowerment and trust via flexible work schedules (Grant et al., 2020). Employee well-being and organizational resilience are enhanced by fostering an environment of accountability and results-oriented performance (Kossek & Ozeki, 2021).

Experiences with remote work have brought to light the significance of accessibility and inclusivity in the workplace. Digital platforms and virtual collaboration tools enable communication and engagement between geographically separated teams, creating a feeling of community and belonging (Van der Elst et al., 2022). To foster equitable opportunities and support a diverse pool of talent, organizations fund diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (Bailey & Kurland, 2024).

## **6.3 Post-Pandemic Wellbeing**

Research indicates a notable resilience in mental health among individual's post-pandemic. Studies by Pfefferbaum and North (2020) and Garfin (2020) revealed that while the pandemic brought about heightened stress and anxiety levels, many individuals exhibited adaptive coping mechanisms and psychological resilience. Factors such as social support networks, mental health services and individual resilience strategies played crucial roles in mitigating the negative impacts on mental wellbeing.

The shift towards remote work during the pandemic has redefined traditional notions of the work non-work equation. Research by Kossek et al. (2021) and Leroy, Schmidt, and Madjar (2021) highlighted that remote work offered increased flexibility and autonomy, allowing individuals to better integrate work and personal life responsibilities. However, challenges such as blurred boundaries between work and home, as well as the pressure to be constantly available, have also been reported (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). Post-pandemic, organizations are exploring hybrid work models that balance remote and in-office work to optimize employee wellbeing and productivity.

The pandemic highlighted the significance of social connections and community support systems in promoting wellbeing. Research by Giannotti et al. (2021) and Ninaus, Diehl, and Terlutter (2021) emphasized that strong social networks and supportive communities served as buffers against loneliness and isolation during lockdowns. Moving forward, fostering inclusive communities and strengthening social ties will be crucial in maintaining collective wellbeing post-pandemic.

Economic uncertainties exacerbated by the pandemic have posed challenges to financial wellbeing. Studies by del Rio-Chanona et al. (2020) and Blustein et al. (2020) displayed the impact of job insecurity and financial stress on overall wellbeing. Post-pandemic recovery efforts are focusing on economic resilience, including employment stability, financial planning support, and equitable economic policies, to enhance individual and community wellbeing.

Finally, the pandemic prompted significant shifts in health behaviors and lifestyle adaptations. Research by Molino et al. (2020) and Wise (2020) examined the impacts of technology use, remote healthcare access, and changes in physical activity routines on health and wellbeing. Post-pandemic, there is a growing emphasis on sustainable health practices, access to healthcare resources, and wellness programs that support holistic wellbeing.

## **6.4 Lasting Effects on Employee Expectations and Preferences**

Employee expectations and preferences about work arrangements, career development, and work-life integration were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This section explores employees' changing attitudes and how they affect organizational strategies in more detail.

Flexible work arrangements that improve work-life balance and take personal obligations into account are becoming more and more valued by employees. Employees sought more flexibility in their work arrangements after their remote work experiences during the pandemic showed potential productivity gains and increased job satisfaction (Goh et al., 2021). Businesses that use flexible scheduling options or hybrid work models are better able to draw and keep top talent (Duxbury & Higgins, 2022). The pandemic necessitated a fast transition to remote work, which many employees found beneficial. Studies such as those by Vaziri et al. (2020) and Toscano and Zappalà (2020) indicate that employees have grown accustomed to the flexibility remote work offers, including reduced commute times and better work-life balance. According to a survey by Buffer (2021), almost the entirety of the remote workers would prefer to continue working away from their workplace, at least some of the time, for the rest of their careers. This preference for flexibility has prompted

organizations to consider hybrid models, blending remote and on-site work to meet employee expectations. The challenge for employers is to create policies that accommodate these preferences while maintaining productivity and collaboration.

The vast changes in everyday life during the COVID-19 crisis have increased perception of the importance of work-life balance. Working individuals now prioritize roles that allow them to better and more effectively control their often-contradictory responsibilities. Brough et al. (2020) highlights that working individuals who went through a better work-life balance during the pandemic are more satisfied and have lower stress levels. Employers are responding by implementing beneficial decisions, such as flexible scheduling, mental health days, and encouraging employees to take regular breaks. In the future after COVID-19, companies that fail to adapt may find it challenging to attract and retain talent. (Brough et al., 2020).

The pandemic helped numerous individuals to re-evaluate their professional goals and seek more meaningful work. Research by Blustein et al. (2020) indicates that the crisis led to a heightened awareness of the value of purpose-driven work. Employees are increasingly seeking roles that align with their personal values and contribute to societal good. Employers can respond to this shift by emphasizing their organizational mission and values, and by providing opportunities for employees to engage in meaningful projects. This alignment can enhance job satisfaction and engagement, fostering a more motivated and committed workforce.

The pandemic has marked the importance of physical and mental health, leading to an increased focus on employee wellbeing. Studies by Pfefferbaum and North (2020) and Garfin (2020) showed the effects of the pandemic in the psychological state of the employees, with increased levels of anxiety and depression among them. Consequently, there is a growing expectation for employers to provide robust mental health support. Organizations are adopting virtual learning and development opportunities and reevaluating traditional career development pathways because of the shift to work from home. Regardless of physical location, online training courses, virtual mentorship programs, and remote networking gatherings facilitate professional

development and skill enhancement (Kossek & Ozeki, 2021). Employee engagement and commitment are increased when career development plans are in line with both individual goals and organizational objectives (Allen et al., 2021).

The experiences that individuals had with remote work have brought about significant changes in the structure of their professional lives. Workers appreciate having the flexibility to fit work schedules around personal obligations, like taking care of dependents or providing childcare (Stuckler et al., 2021). The well-being and satisfaction of employees are enhanced by organizations that put more consideration on work-life balance initiatives and support systems (Grant et al., 2020).

Due to the perceived advantages of remote work, which include flexibility, a better work-life balance, and reduced stress, many employees express a preference for it. Whether it's a home office setup or a co-working space, remote work enables employees to customize working conditions in order to meet individual needs (Moen et al., 2022). Companies that incorporate remote work options into their workforce strategy encourage employee job satisfaction and retention (Kaufman, 2022).

## **6.5 Sustainability of Adaptations Made During the Pandemic**

The sustainability of pandemic-induced adaptations depends on their ability to support long-term organizational goals, employee well-being, and operational efficiency. Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of these adaptations informs strategic decisions and future planning.

Maintaining the ability to work remotely requires investments in digital transformation, cybersecurity, and infrastructure for remote work. To preserve productivity and protect organizational assets, organizations place a high priority on data protection protocols, IT support, and secure network access (Gajendran & Harrison, 2023). Technology and infrastructure are always being improved to meet

changing business needs and facilitate remote and hybrid work environments (Kaufman, 2022).

Work-life balance initiatives, wellness resources, and mental health support must all be consistently prioritized in order to maintain employee wellbeing programs. The creation of customized programs that meet particular needs and foster a positive workplace culture is guided by employee input and engagement metrics (Stuckler et al., 2021). Fostering a work environment that offers support to employees and improving their fulfillment and their loyalty are benefits of incorporating wellbeing into organizational values and practices (Grant et al., 2020).

## Chapter 7: Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a profound number of changes in the work conditions globally, influencing work-life balance (WLB) and employee wellbeing. This chapter synthesizes findings from recent studies across various research methodologies—cross-sectional studies, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), longitudinal studies, cohort studies, and meta-analyses—to examine post-pandemic trends in WLB and wellbeing. It also compares these with pre-pandemic practices, discusses implications for organizations and policymakers, and explores theoretical and practical contributions to the field.

### 7.1 Synthesis of Findings from Literature

Recent research has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance (WLB) and employee wellbeing. This section synthesizes findings from studies conducted across different methodologies, shedding light on key themes and trends that have emerged in the aftermath of the pandemic.

After the COVID-19 crisis, the shift to hybrid work models has been thoroughly researched. A cross-sectional study by Allen et al. (2021) discovered that by taking into account a variety of work preferences, hybrid work arrangements improve employee satisfaction. In a longitudinal study, Grant et al. (2020) found that, in comparison to traditional office-based setups, organizations adopting hybrid models report higher employee satisfaction and perceived improvements in work-life balance.

According to studies working from home has both positive and negative impact on work-life balance post-pandemic. Goh et al. (2021), in a meta-analysis, found that while remote job provide flexibility to manage personal and professional

responsibilities, it also makes the separation of work and personal life much more challenging, potentially increasing stress levels. Longitudinal research by Moen et al. (2022) indicated working remotely for a long period of time results to potential disconnection from work-related tasks, impacting overall wellbeing.

The connection between employee well-being and hybrid work environments has been investigated in meta-analytic findings. According to Gajendran and Harrison (2023), access to resources like mental health initiatives and the perception of organizational support are critical for reducing stress and improving employee wellbeing in hybrid work environments. In a cohort study, Stuckler et al. (2021) proved that companies that prioritize wellness initiatives—like wellness programs and flexible work schedules—have happier employees and lower turnover rates.

Longitudinal studies have assessed the sustainability of adaptations made during the pandemic (Reuter, Foster, & Kruger, 2021; Hamatani et al., 2022). Van der Elst et al. (2022) illustrated that continuous evaluation and refinement of remote work policies are essential for sustaining positive outcomes in organizations. They emphasize the importance of aligning remote work policies with long-term organizational goals to maintain productivity and employee satisfaction.

## **7.2 Comparison with Pre-Pandemic Trends**

Comparing post-pandemic trends with pre-pandemic practices provides a more crystalline view in the evolution of work-life balance (WLB) strategies and organizational responses to changing work dynamics.

Cross-sectional studies indicate a significant shift in organizational policies towards flexible work arrangements post-pandemic. Kossek and Ozeki (2021) discuss how organizations have revised policies to accommodate hybrid work models, reflecting a broader acceptance of remote work as a viable alternative to traditional office-based work. A study by Bailey and Kurland (2024) have shown that organizations

experimenting with hybrid models report improvements in employee morale and productivity compared to pre-pandemic practices.

Longitudinal research highlights changes in employee expectations regarding work-life balance and workplace adaptability (Hamatani et al., 2022). Meta-analytic findings suggest a growing preference for autonomy and versatility in work planning post-pandemic (Goh et al., 2021).

The integration of technology into work processes has accelerated post-pandemic, enabling seamless communication and collaboration across remote and in-office settings. Bailey and Kurland (2024) discuss how organizations investing in digital transformation initiatives have experienced improvements in operational efficiency and employee satisfaction relative to pre-pandemic benchmarks. Meta-analytic findings underscore the role of digital infrastructure in supporting hybrid work models and enhancing organizational agility (Atobishi et al., 2024).

### **7.3 Implications for Organizations and Policymakers**

The shift towards hybrid work models and the redefinition of work-life balance has profound implications for both organizations and policymakers. Understanding these implications is crucial for shaping future strategies and policies that support employee wellbeing and organizational success.

Organizations must prioritize flexibility, inclusivity, and employee wellbeing in their post-pandemic strategies. This includes investing in remote work infrastructure, fostering a work culture that supports mental health and wellbeing for the employees (Gajendran & Harrison, 2023). Organizations that align their policies with employee preferences and organizational goals are likely to enhance productivity, engagement, and retention.

Policymakers play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for flexible work arrangements and employee wellbeing. Policies that support remote work,

address digital infrastructure gaps, and promote work-life balance initiatives are essential for facilitating sustainable economic growth and societal wellbeing (Bailey & Kurland, 2024). Collaborative efforts between governments, businesses, and stakeholders are needed to develop inclusive policies that benefit both employers and employees.

## **7.4 Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

The debate over the subjects of post-pandemic work-life balance and wellbeing contribute to theoretical advancements and practical applications in organizational behavior and in managing human resource.

The pandemic has stimulated theoretical debates over the very core of the work itself, as well as organizational behavior, and employee motivation. The adoption of hybrid work models challenges traditional theories of workplace dynamics, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, trust, and flexibility in achieving organizational goals (Kaufman, 2022). Theoretical frameworks such as the transactional model of occupational stress and coping have been revisited to account for new stressors and coping mechanisms in remote work environments (Goh et al., 2021).

Practically, organizations can leverage insights from research to design strategies that emphasize work-life balance and employee wellbeing. Implementing flexible work arrangements, providing mental health support, and fostering a culture of trust and accountability are practical steps that organizations can take to enhance employee satisfaction and organizational performance (Allen et al., 2021). By aligning theory with practice, organizations can navigate uncertainties and capitalize on opportunities in the evolving workplace landscape.

Boukonis Konstantinos, “The effects and changes the COVID-19 pandemic brought in the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees during the crisis and the results of those afterwards”

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic completely changed the work environments globally, resulting significant changes in work-life balance (WLB) and employee wellbeing. Organizations have increasingly adopted hybrid work models, blending from home and in-office work arrangements in order to satisfy different employees and their desires (Allen et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2020). Remote work has provided more freedom and versatility but also made the distinction between work and personal life much more difficult, influencing stress levels and wellbeing outcomes (Goh et al., 2021; Moen et al., 2022). Perceived organizational support and access to resources such as mental health initiatives are critical in mitigating stress and enhancing wellbeing in hybrid work environments (Gajendran & Harrison, 2023; Stuckler et al., 2021). Also, the integration of digital tools has facilitated seamless communication and collaboration, supporting operational efficiency and employee satisfaction (Bailey & Kurland, 2024).

Therefore, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of flexible work arrangements, leading to a shift towards hybrid work models. While offering flexibility, remote work has also introduced challenges in managing work-life boundaries. The shift to hybrid work has implications for employee wellbeing, with factors such as organizational support and digital infrastructure playing crucial roles in shaping employee experiences and outcomes. At the same time, longitudinal studies indicate that ongoing evaluation and refinement of remote work policies are essential for sustaining positive outcomes in organizations, emphasizing the need for adaptable strategies.

While this systematic literature review provides valuable insights into the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance and employee wellbeing, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The review may be subject to publication bias, as studies with significant or positive outcomes are more likely to be

published than those with null or negative ones. This could skew the overall findings. Also, only studies published in English were included and that may exclude relevant research published in other languages and limit the generalizability of the results. At the same time, the review focuses on literature published from January 2020 to June 2024. Consequently, it may not capture the long-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis on work-life balance and employee well-being that emerge beyond this period. In addition, the included studies used diverse research designs and methodologies, which may introduce variability in the findings. This heterogeneity makes it challenging to directly compare results across studies. Finally, while the review aims to be comprehensive, it is possible that some relevant studies were missed due to the limitations of search terms and databases used.

Based on the findings of the current literature review, some suggestions for further study are presented. Longitudinal studies are recommended to track the impacts of hybrid work models on employee’s wellbeing and corporate outcomes, on a broader time period. Also, the comparison of the effectiveness of different hybrid work arrangements across industries and organizational sizes is suggested. In addition, future studies can explore cultural differences in the adoption and impact of remote work on work-life balance and wellbeing, and investigate the role of emerging technologies (e.g., AI, VR) in enhancing remote work experiences and organizational effectiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused lots of shift changes in practices that were previously considered unconventional. Moving forward, organizations and policymakers must continue to adjust and innovate to meet the evolving needs of employees while ensuring sustainable work-life balance and promoting overall wellbeing. By embracing flexibility, leveraging technological advancements, and prioritizing employee support, organizations can cultivate a workforce capable of maintaining viable work-life balance while thriving in dynamic environments.

Boukonis Konstantinos, “The effects and changes the COVID-19 pandemic brought in the work-life balance and wellbeing of employees during the crisis and the results of those afterwards”

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