Work-Life Wellness Scale: Initial Test Development in a Sample of Remote Workers

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Abstract: Investigating work-life wellness is key to improving the physical health, mental health, and productivity of remote workers. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, more teleworkers are choosing to work remotely, and this may have an impact on their work-life wellness. We explored the structure and reliability of a work-life wellness scale with items adapted from three existing instruments. Participants were 199 remote workers from Western Canada. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the statements on a seven-point Likert scale. Exploratory factor analysis yielded two factors: work-life functioning and work-life interference. The scale was also found to have strong internal consistency.

In the present day, increasing numbers of people are working outside of traditional office settings, a situation that can be defined as "remote work" (Blount & Gloet, 2017). Research about remote work, including those who use coworking spaces and those working from home, have revealed mixed results on the benefits and challenges of working remotely. Studies conducted before the global COVID-19 pandemic revealed that remote work was a way for employers to reduce building expenses and attract talent (Anderson et al., 2015; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016; Weikle, 2018). It also increased flexibility and autonomy for employees while lowering commuting time and costs such as parking and fuel (Anderson et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2018; Weikle, 2018). The pandemic has raised the profile of remote work in the eyes of employers and employees alike, with an estimated 55% of the global workforce now expressing a preference to work from home for at least part of the time (Cigna, 2021). Working remotely during the pandemic comes with challenges such as disconnection from colleagues, loneliness, and decreased life satisfaction (Como et al., 2021; Krug et al.,

2021). Particularly for those who were not prepared to work from home, lack of appropriate office space and personal distractions have impacted their experience of working remotely (Awada et al., 2021). Furthermore, the decreased predictability around child-care and schooling impacts remote workers with families who may encounter more interruptions and role-conflict (Awada et al., 2021). In contrast, working from home during the pandemic increases worker safety by preventing workplace transmission of COVID-19. Productivity levels of remote workers are comparable to in-office levels prior to the pandemic (Awada et al., 2021).

Low work-life wellness is connected to depression, anxiety, lower self-rated health, and lower mental well-being (Haar et al., 2014; Lunau et al., 2014). Therefore, supporting the work-life wellness of remote workers may be important for bolstering their overall mental health. Accurate assessment of work-life wellness may be an important aspect of supporting work-life wellness; however, there is a lack of convenient, affordable, and generalizable assessment instruments (Abe,

2015; Bowles, 2014; Jackson et al., 2018; Schilling, 2014).

In the Asia-Pacific context, the length of the work week may differ between countries, and this may influence work-life wellness. For example, companies in countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Japan are considering moving from a five to four-day work week to allow for greater flexibility, balance, and upskilling (Japan Today, 2021; Yu, 2021). In contrast, South Korea has a workforce with one of the highest average annual hours worked per year in the world (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, work values (i.e., work ethic, work fulfillment) differ between countries due to economic and cultural factors (Kraaykamp et al., 2019). Desire for alternative work arrangements (e.g., telework) and social acceptability of long vacations may be influenced by cultural work values. For example, some European and African countries have mandated vacation days, unlike the United States of America which has none (24/7 wall st., 2019). In many Asia-Pacific countries, interdependence is highly valued, and this may increase social pressure to work, thereby decreasing work-life wellness (Cheng & Groysberg, 2020).

Work-Life Wellness

Work-life wellness is defined as being well in various life domains and feeling well about how your work and personal life connect (Como et al., 2021). Although work-life wellness is a term used in the workplace, it is newer to academia and, therefore, there are few published articles specifically relating to work-life wellness (Como et al., 2021). Work-life wellness contrasts with work-life balance and work interaction with personal life. Work-life balance has been defined as the subjective application of time to work and personal life at varying ratios to suit the individual (Soni & Bakhru, 2019). An individual with high work-life wellness may adapt to differing demands from life and work to foster work-life balance (e.g., taking vacation days when a relative visits).

Work interaction with personal life has been defined as work's enhancement and interference with personal life (Fisher et al., 2009). In particular, work-life interference happens when work demands are prioritized over personal demands. For example, working longer hours to finish a big project at work may decrease wellness in your personal life and your overall work-life wellness.

Meeting the commitments of work and personal life contribute to the overall functioning of the individual in terms of work performance and personal success (Schilling, 2014; Talukder, 2019). However, meeting the demands of work and life is secondary to feeling well in these spheres. Feeling well about work may be experienced as enjoying work and making friends at work rather than simply working fewer hours. On the other hand, feeling well at home may include sufficient personal time and enjoyable hobbies. In terms of the connection between work and personal life, high work-life wellness may involve work that enhances personal life (e.g., a job that supports you emotionally) or does not interfere much with personal life (e.g., you only work late occasionally).

Remote Work and Work-life Wellness

Remote work may be associated with greater work-life wellness due to greater time for personal life, increased comfort, lower commute time, and less distractions from coworkers (Como et al., 2021; Hill et al., 2003; Johri & Teo, 2018). Teleworkers are as productive as traditional workers, and firms with remote work options may experience lower turnover. Remote workers appreciate flexibility of work hours, such as for making multi-national calls or completing household labor (Grant et al., 2013). Martinez-Amador (2016) found that work-location enjoyment mediated productivity, especially for remote workers who spent more than three days a week working remotely. Remote workers also have lower role stress than traditional employees (Rudolph et al., 2020). Remote workers may be more enthusiastic about

their job, more loyal to their organization, and have greater job satisfaction (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

Alongside the benefits, remote workers may also experience greater work-home spillover than traditional employees. Remote workers tend to overwork, experience work intensification, and have trouble switching off (Felstead & Hensenke, 2017; Gambhir, 2020). Overworking can interfere with one's personal life and has a negative correlation with mental health, general health, and well-being (Grant et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2019).

Remote workers may enjoy being around family, even when they are engaging in work (Grant et al., 2013). Additionally, working from home increases autonomy and allows for flexibility related to family needs and tasks. However, family members being at home during work hours may increase work-family tension due to role conflict (Fedakova & Istonova, 2017). A lack of dedicated office space within the home may decrease work-family boundaries (Cockayne, 2021). Furthermore, children may disrupt work duties, increasing family pressure and stress (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014; Fedakova & Istonova, 2017). Some remote workers may not live with family members; however, these individuals still have personal responsibilities, such as taking care of pets, that may conflict with work demands (Fisher et al., 2009; Schilling, 2014).

Present Study

In the present study, we used existing scales that we theorized to reflect aspects of work-life wellness (WLW) to develop a WLW scale: a work-life balance scale (WLB), a work enhancement of personal life scale (WEPL), and a work interference with personal life scale (WIPL; Fisher et al., 2009; Schilling, 2014; Syrek et al., 2011). We did not include personal life interaction with work in our instrument because remote workers tend to struggle with overworking rather than allowing their personal life to limit their time at work, denoting a one directional spillover (Grant et al., 2013). In the present study, we combined items from the three scales (WLB, WEPL, WIPL) to form a single scale to explore the possibility that work-life wellness encompasses these three domains. Due to the infancy of the work-life wellness construct, we avoided confirmatory and causal analyses such as path analysis. The purpose of creating the scale was to provide an initial exploration of the structure of work-life wellness, and to develop a practical instrument to assess work-life wellness.

Method

Participants

The original sample consisted of 201 adult remote workers residing in two cities and several smaller communities in Western Canada. All participants self-defined as entrepreneurs. See Table 1 for additional demographic information. Participants were recruited via electronic invitations to complete the survey, which were distributed through entrepreneurial centers, hubs, and coworking spaces. Each participant who completed the survey was offered an incentive valued at $20CAD.

Table 1

Aggregate Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic	Number of Participants (201)
Gender	
Male	111
Female	89
Skipped	1

Generation	
24-29	22
30-38	105
39-54	65
Other/Skipped	9
Relationship status	
Single (never married)	25
Married or Domestic Partnership	164
Divorced/Widowed/Skipped	12
Parental status	
No children	40
Parent with 2+ dependent children	104
Parent with 1 dependent child	49
Other/Skipped	8
Primary caregiver for an elderly adult	
Yes	74
No	125
Skipped	2
Time as an entrepreneur	
1-5 years	99
6-10 years	78
Other/Skipped	24
Current organization started	
Less than 1 year ago	14
1-5 years ago	100
6-10 years ago	67
Other/Skipped	20
Hours a week	
More than full-time (over 40 hours per week)	74
Full-time (40 hours per week)	104
Part-time/Other/Skipped	23
Industry	
Customer Service	29
Engineering	28
Information Technology	46
Other/Skipped	98
Number of Employees	
0-10	46

11-50	75
51-100	36
101-500	25
Other	17
Skipped	2
Highest level of education	
Bachelor's Degree	100
Master's Degree	79
Other	20
Skipped	2

Instruments: Work-life Wellness Scale

The work-life wellness scale was constructed using items from three validated scales from literature (Fisher et al., 2009; Schilling, 2014; Syrek et al., 2011). The scale originally consisted of 11 questions based upon the three validated scales: work-life balance (4 items), work interference with personal life (5 items), and work enhancement of personal life (2 items). One item was removed during the factor analysis process as it did not load strongly on any factor. See Table 2 for the wording of the 10 items that made up the final version of the scale. We asked participants to rate items according to a seven-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). A higher score represents higher self-rated work-life wellness.

Procedures: Ethics Review, Data Collection and Data Analysis

The study was reviewed and approved by the authors' institutional research ethics board prior to recruitment and data collection (REB19-1604). All data were collected using an online self-report survey consisting of (a) screening questions to ensure participants were adult entrepreneurs working remotely; (b) the Work-Life Wellness Scale; (c) a demographics questionnaire. Participants took an average of 3 minutes 20 seconds to complete the survey. We used principal axis factoring (PAF) to conduct an exploratory factor analysis of the Work-Life Wellness Scale, with the intention of validating and describing the psychometric properties of the scale that we constructed.

Table 2

Correlations for the Work Life Wellness Scale Items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. I am satisfied with my balance between work and personal life.	–									
2. My job gives me energy to pursue activities outside of work that are important to me.	.61	–								
3. I can equally meet the needs of my personal life and my career.	.61	.54	–							
4. I achieve a good balance between work stress and personal time to rejuvenate.	.65	.53	.65	–						
5. I am satisfied with how my priorities are distributed in relation to my work and personal life.	.68	.52	.65	.59	–					

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. My personal life suffers because of my work.	.49	.40	.38	.47	.47	—				
7. When I finish my work, I am too tired to do things I would like to do.	.36	.48	.31	.35	.37	.50	—			
8. My job makes it difficult to maintain the kind of personal life I would like.	.48	.47	.40	.41	.46	.55	.57	—		
9. I often neglect my personal needs because of the demands of my work.	.35	.39	.36	.44	.37	.53	.54	.45	—	
10. I miss out on important personal activities because of my work.	.45	.41	.40	.41	.40	.53	.50	.45	.42	—

Results

Data Screening

Two cases were removed due to missing data. Screening for outliers and skew, resulted in the removal of one item (i.e., "Because of my job, I am in a better mood at home") from the scale, due to low variability. The final sample size (n = 199), with approximately 20 cases per test item, met the minimum number of cases needed to conduct an exploratory factor analysis. Factorability was determined reasonable by examining the correlation between the items. As revealed in Table 2, all correlations were greater than .03. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .91, which is within the range for adequate sampling for factor analysis. The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix ranged from .867 to .935, which indicate good factorability. Communalities were above .3, meaning that items shared common variance (Table 3).

A direct oblimin oblique rotation was implemented because the two factors were correlated. This factor analysis yielded a final structure with two factors accounting for

Table 3

Communalities and Factor Loadings of the WLW Principal Axis Factoring Analysis

	Communalities		Factor	
	Initial	Extraction	Work-life Functioning	Work-life Interference
I am satisfied with my balance between work and personal life.	.621	.688	.811	.027
My job gives me energy to pursue activities outside of work that are important to me.	.493	.498	.515	.248
I can equally meet the needs of my personal life and my career.	.564	.644	.860	-.090
I achieve a good balance between work stress and personal time to rejuvenate.	.561	.609	.743	.054
I am satisfied with how my priorities are distributed in relation to my work and personal life.	.574	.629	.768	.036
My personal life suffers because of my work.	.494	.536	.118	.647
When I finish my work, I am too tired to do things I would like to do.	.497	.622	-.148	.881

My job makes it difficult to maintain the kind of personal life I would like.	.469	.519	.121	.633
I often neglect my personal needs because of the demands of my work.	.421	.461	.010	.672
I miss out on important personal activities because my work.	.395	.427	.149	.544
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization				

64.74% of variance: work-life functioning (WLF, eigenvalue: 5.28) and work-life interference (WLI, eigenvalue: 1.19). See Table 3 for the factor loadings of each scale item. WLF included both work-life balance and work enhancement of personal life items such as "I am satisfied with my balance between work and personal life" and "My job gives me energy to pursue activities outside of work that are important to me." Whereas WLI contained items reflecting ways that work can interfere with personal life, such as "My job makes it difficult to maintain the kind of personal life I would like" and "My personal life suffers because of my work." The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .898.

Discussion

We found that the 10-item version of the WLW scale was a reliable and internally consistent measure of work-life wellness, with items divided into two psychometrically distinct factors: work-life functioning and work-life interference. However, because these two factors are complimentary aspects of work-life wellness, we encourage the use of the full-scale score. There is insufficient evidence to treat the WLF and WLI as two independent subscales. Our new scale aligns conceptually with conflict theory because it takes into consideration the balance between work and personal life and how work influences personal life (Talukder, 2019). The major contribution of our study is the initial development of a WLW scale, which is the first one of its kind and an important step along the way to expanding the currently small amount of research literature on work-life wellness (Como et. al, 2021).

Conservation of resources theory states that people encounter stress when resources are directed away from the individual (Fisher et al., 2009; Hobfoll, 1989; Talukder, 2019). With total resources remaining equal, accelerating work demands may reduce personal resources resulting in stress. We see conservation of resources theory in play under the WLI factor, which includes items describing the resource tension between personal life and work. Additionally, the WLF factor also encapsulates the trade-off or balance between work and personal life.

Furthermore, work-family conflict theory has identified time, strain, and behaviour-based conflicts (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Fisher et al., 2009, Talukder, 2019). The WLW scale aligns with work-family conflict theory since it has items related to personal life strain due to work demands. In addition, the inclusion of items related to work enhancement of personal life is supported by role accumulation theory, which explains how a role can have benefits such as status and personal enrichment (Fisher et al., 2009; Sieber, 1974). Including work enhancement of personal life captures how work supports personal life (positive spillover). For example, working as a professional artist may enhance one's personal life through providing opportunities for meaningful self-expression.

Implications for Career Development Work

The WLW tool is freely accessible online in English.[1] When an individual completes the tool, they receive feedback comparing their score

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1 https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/worklifewellnessassessment

relative to the scores of other respondents, suggestions for improving their work-life wellness based on their scores, and links for further reading. The specific application of the WLW tool will depend on the workplace and national culture of the teleworker. The speed of completing the scale allows for convenient use in career development practice. When using the WLW tool, career development practitioners may ask follow-up questions about how clients understand work-life wellness in their lived experience and assign homework involving self-reflection or behavioural changes. In addition, considering the prevalence of burnout and compassion fatigue in the field, career practitioners may benefit from personal use of the WLW tool.

In countries where career counseling is not universally covered by health benefits or government programs, many teleworkers may not have access to professional career development services. Individuals in this situation may still benefit from using the WLW tool for themselves. The online version of the tool is quick, free, and easy to use, which is ideal for teleworkers who may be strained for time and funds. The customized results provide further reading and reflections for those who are not working with a career practitioner.

We also recommend that employers and organizations across the Asia-Pacific carefully consider the nuances of their workplace along with individual needs before implementing new policies and programs regarding work-life wellness. Cheng and Groysberg (2020) suggest that Asian corporations may particularly benefit from a structured and team-focused approach to wellness. Nonetheless, employers may benefit from providing the WLW tool to their teams and aggregating the results to determine what departments may need extra resources to support employee wellness. The scale could also be used to identify specific employees who are struggling with work-life wellness so that leaders can ask how to best support them.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that we only surveyed teleworking entrepreneurs in Western Canada; therefore, the WLW scale may not generalize across the entire Asia-Pacific region. Replicating this study in other countries and with other types of workers will be important to determine if these results stand universally. An additional limitation was that we used a self-report data collection method and provided a monetary incentive for participating, potentially leaving room for false or careless reports to obtain the incentive. The data were collected during January 2020, which was prior to the widespread emergence of COVID-19 in Canada. It is unclear how WLW scores may change once people have worked remotely for extended periods after the pandemic ceases.

Future Research

The next step for future research will be to build on the initial exploratory factor analysis conducted in this study by establishing the construct and discriminant validity of the WLW with additional samples of participants. It will also be important to validate the scale for the post-pandemic world of work. Assuming our scale remains reliable and is confirmed to be valid in future research, the WLW could be used in future studies on work-life wellness and be adopted as a useful tool in career development practices. In terms of the Asia-Pacific context, validation and translation across different countries will be important in determining the strength of the instrument and benefiting numerous teleworkers globally. After validating the scale across several contexts, mediation and moderation analysis may be useful to better understand the nature of the relationships between WLW, WLF, and WLI. Qualitative research may provide rich insight into how remote workers understand these terms and encounter them in their lives. As per the demand-control model of demand strain, it may be useful to investigate strain in relation to work-life wellness (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014).

Moreover, it is essential to understand how WLW connects to other career outcomes to strengthen advocacy around teleworker wellness.

Conclusion

Investigating work-life wellness is key to improving the physical health, mental health, and productivity of remote workers. Our scale was found to have a clear factor structure, as well as high reliability and internal consistency. Therefore, it has good potential to be useful for career development practices, individual teleworkers, and by employers and organizations. Future research will determine the robustness of the WLW scale across different populations and locations. Supporting remote workers with their work-life wellness is essential to improving mental health following the COVID-19 pandemic.

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