



## **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WORK LIFE BALANCE IN CULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL NORMS**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines work life balance as a socially constructed understanding shaped by collective expectations, cultural ideals, and everyday moral judgments. It advances a normative account of how societies authorize certain time uses as respectable, while casting other uses as suspect or indulgent. Workplace cultures often equate dedication with constant availability, rapid responsiveness, and visible sacrifice, which normalizes boundary erosion between paid work and private life. Family norms and gendered obligations define what counts as proper presence at home, producing conflicting standards that individuals internalize as guilt or self doubt. Digital connectivity intensifies these expectations by extending work oriented contact into hours associated with recovery and intimate relations. The argument emphasizes recognition dynamics: approval, praise, and reputational safety frequently follow conformity to dominant ideals of productivity, while boundary setting may be interpreted as weak commitment. The article concludes that balance is less a technical schedule problem than a legitimacy problem concerning which boundaries are socially accepted, who is permitted to draw them, and how sanctions and rewards circulate in workplaces and communities.

**Keywords:** work life balance, social construction, cultural norms, moral expectations, organizational culture, gender norms, digital connectivity.

## Introduction

Work-life balance is often treated as a personal choice that can be managed through willpower, discipline, and time management. This view seems simple, yet the experiences of many show that the boundary between work and life is not born from individual will alone. That boundary is formed through social habits, moral judgments, and definitions of what constitutes a "good worker." This becomes important because, essentially, an employee's job satisfaction is highly influenced by how they are able to align office affairs with personal matters (Arifin et al., 2021). When someone leaves on time, they may be praised as an organized individual, but they may also be suspected of lacking dedication, depending on the prevailing norms in their social environment. When someone brings work home, that action can be read as responsibility, yet it can simultaneously reduce the space for relationships and self-recovery. These conflicting perceptions demonstrate that work-life balance is a social construct that lives in everyday language, in jokes, in praise, and in reprimands (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Interactions occurring within a group indeed always involve unique behaviors that influence one another (Darmawan, 2013). Because this construction is widespread, individuals often judge themselves through criteria they did not even formulate, but rather inherited from their social and cultural environment.

Changes in communication technology accelerate the blurring of workspace and private space. The availability of instant messaging, online meetings, and task management through applications allows work to be present at any time, including times previously considered for family or recovery. However, the pervasive presence of work does not always trigger resistance, as many organizations teach that connectivity is a sign of professionalism. This condition demands that we become smarter in managing emotions so that mental health remains maintained amidst daily busyness (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021). At the experiential level, a person may feel guilty when not responding, even while engaged in family activities or worship. This guilt often does not stem from a direct command, but from expectations maintained collectively. In many environments, availability is considered evidence of commitment, and commitment is considered the measure of a worker's value (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Chesley, 2014). Often, support from the workplace is greatly

needed so that employees feel comfortable and can provide new creative ideas (Ningwulan et al., 2012). Because these measures are social, individuals adapt through repetitive patterns, such as checking messages before bed or postponing meal times to complete tasks. Thus, work-life balance cannot be understood merely as a technique, as it pertains to norms regarding obedience, loyalty, and reputation.

The understanding of work is also shaped by a cultural ethos that glorifies busyness. Busyness is often used as a symbol of productivity, ambition, and success. In daily conversation, phrases like "having no time to rest" can emerge as a disguised pride. When busyness is praised, leisure time loses moral legitimacy, as if rest is a luxury that must be paid for with guilt. At this point, work-life balance is no longer viewed as a psychological right, but rather as a weakness that needs to be hidden (Bellezza et al., 2017). If we want everything to run smoothly in the long run, we must be able to balance economic, social, and environmental matters in the places we live (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2021). In work environments that value resilience as a virtue, an individual can internalize the belief that fatigue must be endured and boundaries must be constantly renegotiated. Within the family, such beliefs can be transmitted through parenting styles; for example, parents emphasizing achievement and viewing exhaustion as a natural part of character building. This experience shows that balance is not a matter of dividing hours, but a matter of social legitimacy toward rest, self-care, and personal relationships (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Social norms regarding gender also influence how work-life balance is defined. Demands on women and men often differ in terms of domestic responsibilities, caregiving, and emotional availability at home. When work demands long hours, domestic burdens are often still regarded as obligations that must not diminish. Therefore, it is crucial for every organization to have appropriate strategies in supporting employees from diverse backgrounds (Hariani et al., 2021). Consequently, some individuals lead two colliding rhythms: the formal work rhythm and the household work rhythm. This clash gives rise to complex moral judgments; for instance, someone may be judged as successful at the office but deemed negligent at home. These judgments are not always stated explicitly but are present through small comments,

comparisons, and asymmetrical standards (Eby et al., 2005; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). At the same time, norms of masculinity can pressure men to prioritize work as evidence of economic responsibility, causing emotional needs and self-care to be viewed as less important. Through these mechanisms, work-life balance becomes an arena for identity negotiation, where individuals strive to fulfill the image deemed appropriate by their social environment.

Social class and economic mobility shape different expectations toward work and leisure. In certain groups, long working hours may be seen as a reasonable career investment, while in others, they are a survival necessity that is difficult to refuse. Regardless, the quality of a person's work will usually increase along with the experience and work spirit they possess (Arifin & Putra, 2020). Despite differing motives, both can result in similar consequences: the reduction of space for recovery and relationships. However, social judgment of these consequences is often unbalanced. There are environments that praise long work hours as an aspiration, and others that view them as an inability to manage one's life. Furthermore, access to support services such as childcare, transportation, and domestic help affects a person's ability to maintain the boundary between work and life (Kelly et al., 2014). Teamwork and good relationships between colleagues are also key to ensuring all tasks can be completed with satisfying results (Putra et al., 2021). When this access is limited, balance is often judged a failure, even though the structural burden is heavy. Thus, the discussion of social construction needs to examine how moral judgments about balance attach to social positions, so that those facing the heaviest burdens are precisely at risk of obtaining the greatest stigma.

The primary problem arises when work-life balance is treated as a universal norm that supposedly applies equally to everyone. In organizational policy language and popular conversation, balance is often presented as an ideal condition achievable through self-regulation. Behind this lies a sharp difference regarding who can refuse overtime, who can turn off their work phone, and who can request flexibility without fear of being labeled disloyal (Fleetwood, 2007; Özbilgin et al., 2011). When a universal norm is imposed, diverse individual experiences are forced into a single measure. This single measure then produces hasty moral conclusions; for

example, an individual is judged as lacking discipline when they are actually facing significant family demands, or an individual is judged as uncaring toward family when they are within a work culture that demands constant connectivity. This problem is conceptual because it relates to how society defines balance, not merely how individuals organize their schedules. As long as the social definition remains narrow, public discussion easily shifts into personal judgment rather than a scientific understanding of the mechanisms of expectation formation.

Another problem arises from the tension between the narrative of well-being and the narrative of productivity, both of which possess social legitimacy (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014). Many people acknowledge the importance of mental health, family relationships, and recovery time. However, at the same time, many work environments maintain symbols of dedication such as rapid responses, presence outside of working hours, and a willingness to take on additional tasks. This tension creates normative ambiguity. Individuals are encouraged to practice self-care, yet are also taught that work is the measure of value. This ambiguity can give birth to paradoxical self-management practices; for example, someone taking leave but still monitoring messages, or someone attending a family event while their mind remains anchored to unfinished tasks. Such ambiguity shows that balance is not a stable state, but a field of social judgment that changes according to the situation and power relations. Because these judgments are scattered across families, organizations, and communities, individuals often experience uncertainty about which standard must be met to be considered "appropriate."

This study aims to shape an understanding and expectations toward work-life balance. Without a tidy conceptual understanding, this issue is easily reduced to time management recipes or well-being slogans, even though what is at work are social mechanisms that produce a sense of obligation, guilt, and standards of dedication (Lewis et al., 2007). A structured normative description is needed so that readers can distinguish between personal choices and disguised social pressures. Furthermore, a good understanding can help organizations and policymakers assess whether seemingly reasonable work rules actually drive excessive connectivity and normalize the neglect of recovery. In the realms of family and community, conceptual explanations can reveal how daily comments,

praise, and reprimands help build the definition of the ideal worker and the ideal family member. When these definitions are understood as constructions, a space for reflection opens to assess the fairness of expectations that have long been accepted as something natural.

The purpose of this writing is to formulate a conceptual framework that explains the social mechanisms behind the formation of understanding and expectations regarding work-life balance. The description is directed toward organizing the relationship between work ethic, family norms, the morality of leisure time, gender identity, and reputation assessment within organizations. This objective also includes asserting normative implications regarding the fairness of dedication standards and the fairness of connectivity demands, so that readers can judge whether an expectation functions as support or as disguised pressure. The results of this writing are expected to help academic readers and practitioners see balance as a result of value negotiation, not merely an individual skill. With such a framework, policy discussions and organizational practices can be directed toward the formation of norms that are more humane and accountable.

## Method

This study utilizes a qualitative literature study to construct a normative argument regarding the social construction of work-life balance. Materials were selected from books and scientific articles discussing work norms, organizational culture, the morality of leisure time, and identity formation through social practices. The selection process emphasized conceptual rigor and reasoning coherence, ensuring that terms such as balance, expectations, and normality are not used loosely. Bryman (2016) emphasizes the importance of a clear research design so that the reading of materials does not turn into a mere summary, but rather a synthesis that produces conceptual propositions. Bailey (2008) reminds us that social research methods demand precision in distinguishing between description and explanation, so that the narrative can demonstrate how a norm functions, rather than simply stating its existence. In this study, readings were conducted repeatedly to identify patterns of moral judgment, forms of social legitimacy, and the ways in which behavioral standards are disseminated and normalized in the workspace and the home.

The processing of materials was carried out through thematic synthesis, organizing themes such as the productivity ethos, symbols of dedication, family norms, gender norms, work time boundaries, and digital connectivity practices. Baronov (2015) emphasizes the need for a strong conceptual foundation to explain social constructions, as construction requires a description of the processes of meaning validation and dissemination. May and Perry (2022) position social research as a series of interpretive decisions that must be argumentatively transparent, including decisions on how a theme is formed from various texts. Validity is maintained through logical consistency between concepts, the traceability of the reasoning flow from premise to implication, and the cross-examination of seemingly contradictory ideas. Because this writing is normative in nature and does not present quantitative data, the primary weight lies in the precise use of concepts, the clarity of categories, and the ability to explain the social mechanisms that shape expectations of work-life balance.

## Result and Discussion

Work-life balance can be understood as the result of a negotiation of meaning that occurs through language, habits, and moral judgments. In social life, people learn the meaning of being a "good worker" through examples, stories, and the environment's reaction to specific behaviors. When someone prioritizes family at a certain time, they may be praised as a responsible individual, but they may also be labeled as lacking ambition. In fact, a supportive workplace atmosphere and the competence of employees actually determine how well they perform (Arifin & Mardikaningsih, 2021). These diverse assessments show that balance is not a technical concept that can be applied uniformly. It is a social category that contains criteria of appropriateness. Those criteria circulate through expressions such as "a professional must be ready to be contacted," or "family must be the priority." These expressions seem simple, yet they harbor demands that can collide with one another. Individuals then formulate decisions based on their reading of the social situation, not merely based on personal needs (Guest, 2002; Reiter, 2007). Within this framework, balance is a practice of self-arrangement in the face of the social eye, where time becomes a symbol of value. Because symbols of value are

collectively formed, the understanding of balance is always linked to who is judging, how that judgment is conveyed, and what the social consequences of that judgment are.

Society often builds the image of an ideal worker through easily visible signs. These signs can take the form of clock-out times, availability to answer messages, or willingness to accept additional tasks. Easily visible signs tend to overshadow qualities that are difficult to see, such as clarity of thought, precision, and the ability to maintain health. Because social assessment favors simple indicators, work-life balance can be distorted into a matter of presence and responsiveness. A good leader should be able to bring about positive change and improve the existing values within an organization (Rojak et al., 2022). This distortion produces pressure to demonstrate dedication, even when the dedication shown does not always relate to good work results (Sarker et al., 2021). At a certain stage, individuals learn that maintaining boundaries can trigger reputational risks. That risk drives self-adjustment practices, such as providing brief replies just to remain visible as active (Fenner & Renn, 2010). Such practices allow work to seep into the recovery space. In normative discussion, this illustrates how social construction organizes behavior through mechanisms of reward and reproach, such that balance becomes an arena for professional identity stakes.

Organizational culture shapes the definition of balance through formal rules and informal habits (McCloskey, 2020). Formal rules may state working hours, leave, or flexibility. However, informal habits often determine how those rules are actually used. If informal habits regard overtime as loyalty, then taking leave can be viewed as a burden to the team. A comfortable work environment and continuously developing self-abilities are keys for everyone to provide their best results (Arifin & Mardikaningsih, 2021). If informal habits glorify non-stop work, then rest can be read as laziness. Here, balance becomes a matter of social legitimacy, not a matter of the availability of rules. Individuals assess whether utilizing the rules will reduce promotion opportunities, disrupt relationships with superiors, or trigger comments from colleagues (Thompson et al., 1999; Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Because these assessments occur every day, individuals build symbolic strategies to remain socially safe, such as announcing that they remain ready if

needed. Symbolic strategies make boundaries blurred. Within this framework, work-life balance is not just a division of time, but an impression management formed by organizational culture regarding loyalty, resilience, and commitment.

Family norms shape strong expectations regarding who should be present physically and emotionally (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Families may view arriving home on time as proof of love, or view long work hours as proof of economic responsibility. These two norms can coexist and produce demands that are difficult to fulfill simultaneously. The role of a leader is very important to change old perspectives into a more advanced value system that supports all parties (Rojak et al., 2022). When someone chooses to fulfill economic needs, they may lose recognition for emotional presence. When someone chooses to be present at home, they may lose professional recognition. This conflict is often personalized, as if the individual failed to organize, when what is actually happening is a clash of standards that are equally valid in social assessment. Because the family also shapes identity, individuals face risks of complex guilt. Guilt is not just a personal emotion, but a product of the standards the family uses to judge appropriateness (Voydanoff, 2005; Borelli et al., 2017). In normative discussion, balance must be understood as the result of negotiation between norms inherent in relationships, so that success or failure cannot be explained solely through individual choices.

Gender norms organize the division of domestic labor and shape how society evaluates time choices (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). In many environments, women are expected to maintain the home, care for children, and manage the family's emotional work. These expectations can remain strong even when women hold demanding formal jobs. We must remember that extraordinary work achievements are born from a combination of proficient expertise and a healthy work atmosphere (Arifin & Mardikaningsih, 2021). Consequently, work-life balance for women often means accumulating two types of obligations (Vasumathi, 2018). Meanwhile, norms for men may emphasize economic achievement and resilience, such that the needs for recovery and emotional engagement are often sidelined. In both directions, gender norms limit the legitimacy of boundaries. When a woman requests time for work, she may be viewed as neglecting her family. When a man requests time for his family, he may be viewed as less serious about his work.

This assessment creates a social trap (Wayne et al., 2004). This trap forces individuals to adapt through compromises that often harm their health. Within a normative framework, the social construction of balance cannot be separated from gender norms because those norms determine who is considered justified in prioritizing work and who is considered justified in prioritizing the home.

The productivity ethos is often promoted through values that glorify hard work, discipline, and sacrifice (Dave & Purohit, 2016). These values can help society build standards of reliability, yet they can also transform sacrifice into an unlimited moral demand. Therefore, there is a great need for driving figures who can bring fresh new values into existing regulations (Rojak et al., 2022). When sacrifice becomes the norm, work-life balance becomes something that must be justified. People who take time to rest feel the need to provide a reason, as if rest were a deviation from virtue. In this situation, leisure time loses its standing as a human necessity and turns into a reward that must be earned. The morality of productivity also causes people to judge themselves by the number of tasks completed rather than the quality of life lived. This kind of self-assessment makes it easy for work to enter private spaces, as private space is deemed usable for pursuing moral value. In normative discussion, the productivity ethos shows how culture shapes structures of guilt and structures of pride. These structures guide individuals in making choices, even when those choices are exhausting and erode recovery.

Digital connectivity introduces new forms of social surveillance and self-surveillance (Wajcman et al., 2010). When work messages can appear at any time, individuals feel the need to always be ready. This readiness is not just due to commands, but due to the fear of judgment that arises if a response is delayed. In many circles, a delayed response is read as a lack of care, even if the delay occurs because the individual is meeting family needs or the need for recovery. Through this mechanism, technology expands the space of work norms. Work norms no longer stay at the office; instead, they are present at home through screens. Individuals then develop the habit of checking notifications repeatedly, which fragments attention and reduces the quality of relationships (Derks et al., 2015; Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). This habit can be considered normal because so many people do it, making any deviation from the habit seem strange. In normative

discussion, digital connectivity illustrates how communication tools can change social expectations regarding availability. Work-life balance then becomes a matter of boundary management that is constantly tested by seemingly trivial small interactions.

Symbols of dedication in the workplace are often performative. People show dedication through visible actions, such as arriving earlier, staying later, or responding quickly. These visible actions can create moral competition, where workers feel the need to match the behavior of others to avoid being seen as falling behind. Moral competition produces new, stricter norms, as standards shift to follow the most extreme behaviors. In this state, work-life balance becomes difficult because reasonable boundaries are no longer used as a reference (Perlow & Kelly, 2014). New norms then form expectations for everyone, including those with large family responsibilities or specific health conditions. When extreme standards become the benchmark, the diversity of human needs is considered an interference. Normative discussion shows that balance cannot be discussed without discussing the politics of symbols in organizations (Anteby et al., 2016). The politics of symbols determines who is valued and who is marginalized. If rewards are given for relentless connectivity, then the space for recovery diminishes, and those attempting to maintain boundaries will face reputational risks.

The morality of leisure time is an essential part of the social construction of balance (Bergen & Bressler, 2019). Leisure time can be viewed as a space for self-care, a spiritual space, or a space for relationships. However, leisure time can also be viewed as laziness if the culture judges that human value is measured by work. This morality influences how people use their free time. Many people fill their leisure time with activities that remain productive, such as courses or side jobs, so that the leisure time maintains legitimacy. Consequently, leisure time loses its recovery function (Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). This shows that balance can transform into another form of productivity, such that the term seemingly masks the same problem. In normative discussion, the morality of leisure time asserts that balance is not merely a matter of having time, but a matter of the meaning of time (Ciulla, 2001; Sonnentag, 2003). If rest time is considered immoral, then that time will

be filled with new obligations. Thus, social construction determines whether recovery is regarded as a legitimate need or as a weakness that must be disguised.

Social class influences how society evaluates work choices and family choices (Jackson et al., 2020). In certain groups, leisure time can be viewed as an appropriate lifestyle, while in other groups, leisure time can be viewed as an undeserved luxury. This assessment influences how individuals talk about balance. There are people who can state the need to maintain boundaries without fear of being labeled lazy because their social status provides symbolic protection. There are others who must demonstrate relentless hard work to gain recognition because their social position is considered vulnerable. Thus, work-life balance can function as a status marker. When balance becomes a status marker, public discussion easily loses its sense of justice, as suggested solutions tend to follow the experiences of more protected groups. Normative discussion demands a separation between the moral ideal and the conditions that make that ideal possible. If conditions are unequal, then expectations of balance will produce unfair judgments toward those struggling with heavier burdens.

Popular language regarding balance often produces standards that oversimplify reality. Phrases like "just set your priorities" sound comforting, yet they can erase value conflicts that are actually complex. Value conflict occurs when someone must choose between a demanding job and family responsibilities that are equally demanding, while both demands hold moral legitimacy in the eyes of the environment. Popular language that oversimplifies value conflicts tends to shift the burden to the individual, causing the individual to feel like a failure when unable to meet two demands simultaneously (Ozbilgin et al., 2011). In normative discussion, this simplification needs to be criticized because it reduces the understanding of the social constructions that produce demands. If demands are collectively produced, then the judgment of the individual must consider the social processes that form the standards. Thus, work-life balance needs to be discussed as an object of social understanding, not as a motivational slogan (Fleetwood, 2007). An organized description helps to see how language shapes expectations, how expectations shape guilt, and how guilt shapes decisions that erode recovery.

Work-life balance is also influenced by generational orientation and changing social expectations regarding careers (Lewis et al., 2007). There are environments that emphasize stability and loyalty to the organization, such that long work hours are considered a moral investment. There are other environments that emphasize flexibility and the search for meaning, such that work boundaries are considered part of personal dignity. Both orientations can meet within organizations and families, subsequently causing friction. Younger individuals may be seen as less resilient when demanding boundaries, while older individuals may be seen as sacrificing too much for the family when continuing to prioritize work. This friction shows that expectations of balance are not just an individual problem, but a problem of differing standards between social groups. In normative discussion, these differing standards can be understood as differing definitions of the "good life." When these definitions collide, individuals experience pressure to choose an identity that is accepted. Work-life balance then becomes a space for symbolic conflict, where people negotiate life values through everyday actions.

Power relations within an organization determine how legitimately an individual can establish boundaries (Sarker et al., 2021). Workers in high-ranking positions often possess greater autonomy in determining their time, while workers in vulnerable positions often must follow the rhythms set by superiors or the system. When autonomy differs, the definition of balance also differs. A responsible leader should always pay attention to the well-being of their members so that group productivity remains maintained (Darmawan et al., 2022). For some, balance means managing one's own schedule. For others, balance means resisting work interruptions so they do not damage family relationships. When these definitions blend in public discussion, a misunderstanding arises as if everyone has the same space to choose. Normative discussion asserts that the social construction of balance is always linked to the legitimacy of boundaries, and boundary legitimacy is influenced by power. In every action, honesty and integrity are greatly needed so that justice can be felt by all parties (Saktiawan et al., 2021). Those with power can define normality for example, that it is normal to always be online. When normality is defined from the top, workers below internalize that normality as a moral demand. Therefore, understanding balance means

understanding how organizations produce compliance through norms, not just through rules.

Work-life balance is often discussed as a matter of human resource policy, yet social construction reveals that formal policies do not automatically change practices. If an organization has a flexibility policy, but leadership signals that flexibility lowers one's reputation, then workers will be hesitant to utilize it. Leadership style and a positive work atmosphere are very influential in increasing an employee's sense of loyalty (Hariani & Irfan, 2022). Signals can take the form of small comments, jokes, or performance reviews that emphasize availability. In normative discussion, these social signals are the primary media for the dissemination of norms. Signals shape practical knowledge regarding what is safe to do. This practical knowledge is more powerful than documents because practical knowledge relates directly to consequences. Every individual also has the right to participate in providing opinions for the progress of their social environment (Rojak et al., 2021). When signals direct workers to always be available, balance becomes a project that must be carried out secretly. People maintain boundaries without admitting to maintaining them for example, working from home while pretending to be busy all the time. Such practices damage openness and obscure the need for recovery. The social construction of balance thus demands a reading of the informal practices that shape daily work life (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

The relationship between identity and work makes balance an existential issue. Many people build their sense of self-worth through work, as work provides status, social networks, and a sense of competence. When work becomes the primary source of identity, boundaries with other aspects of life become difficult, because boundaries feel like a threat to identity. It is very important for organizations to create an atmosphere that supports creativity so that the quality of life for their workers becomes better (Irfan & Rojak, 2022). In this state, an invitation to maintain balance can sound like an invitation to diminish oneself. Normative discussion demands an understanding that identity is not merely a private possession, but a result of social recognition. If social recognition is primarily given through work, then people will pursue work as the source of that recognition. A leader who possesses good ethics will certainly always think about their social responsibility in running the organization (Rojak

& Darmawan, 2021). Balance then becomes difficult not because people do not know how, but because the structure of recognition directs them (Ashforth et al., 2000). The structure of recognition can also appear within the family; for example, a family praising a member who works hard while ignoring a member who maintains their health. When recognition flows toward sacrifice, balance loses its moral appeal. Therefore, the social construction of balance must examine how recognition is distributed within organizations and families.

Social expectations regarding caregiving shape the type of balance that is considered appropriate. In many environments, caregiving is viewed as work that must be performed with full presence. Yet, at the same time, caregivers are also expected to be economically productive. These two expectations drive an almost impossible ideal: being fully present at home and fully present at work. If the workload is too heavy and imbalanced, it can make someone feel uncomfortable and want to search for a new workplace (Mardikaningsih & Arifin, 2022). This impossible ideal generates recurring guilt. This guilt then becomes a tool of social control, as individuals attempt to redeem their guilt by increasing effort in one of the domains. Normative discussion shows that balance is not about finding a mathematical middle point, but about negotiating socially constructed ideals. When ideals are set too high, balance transforms into a source of suffering rather than a source of well-being. Because ideals are formed through norms, changing the understanding of balance requires changing the way society values caregiving, values work, and values the need for recovery (Thébaud et al., 2021). Thus, balance is a collective moral issue that spans the family, the workplace, and the public sphere.

The social construction of balance is also influenced by how society manages private and public boundaries. In some organizational cultures, personal life is considered a private matter that is inappropriate to bring to the office. In other cultures, organizations ask workers to bring their whole selves, including emotions, values, and personal stories. These two orientations produce different consequences. When personal life is excluded, family needs find no room for justification, forcing balance to be fought for in secret. Leadership that cares about the well-being of subordinates is proven to be able to increase maximum work results

(Darmawan et al., 2022). When the whole self is required to be present, private boundaries can erode because the organization feels entitled to the worker's emotional attention (Kreiner et al., 2009). Normative discussion asserts that both orientations can cause problems if they are not accompanied by respect for boundaries. Respecting boundaries means acknowledging that humans have non-negotiable needs, such as recovery, intimate relationships, and quiet time. Therefore, the application of fair and ethical rules must always be upheld in any profession (Saktiawan et al., 2021). When respect is absent, balance turns into a tool for judging compliance. Those who refuse connectivity may be seen as lacking team spirit. Such social constructions clarify that balance is a value-system issue regarding legitimate boundaries.

Work-life balance often becomes a subject of social comparison. People judge themselves by observing how others manage work, family, and leisure time. This comparison generates its own pressure, especially when comparisons are made against unequal standards. A strong work culture and great leadership are very influential on a person's level of devotion to their job (Hariani & Irfan, 2022). An individual compares themselves to a colleague who has domestic support, while they themselves do not. An individual compares themselves to a colleague who has work autonomy, while they themselves are strictly supervised. Such comparisons produce a sense of inadequacy and failure. Active participation from the community is greatly needed to create better social change for all of us (Rojak et al., 2021). In normative discussion, social comparison is a mechanism for spreading norms because it teaches standards without the need for commands. Standards spread through success stories, through narratives of people capable of managing everything, and through praise for those who appear consistently strong. When these narratives are dominant, those who need boundaries feel as though they are deviating (Fleetwood, 2007). Consequently, the need for recovery is suppressed and well-being issues are covered up. Understanding balance means understanding how social comparison produces strong self-discipline, even when that discipline is harmful.

Work-life balance is ultimately the result of the arrangement of values within society. Values regarding work, family, success, and the dignity of life converge in the small choices made every day. These choices

appear personal, yet they are shaped by expectations that have been institutionalized through organizational culture and community norms. A leader who upholds high morality will exert a great influence on the creation of a healthy work culture (Rojak & Darmawan, 2021). The answer to the research question indicates that society, culture, and social norms shape the definition of balance through mechanisms of moral validation, the dissemination of symbols of dedication, and the distribution of recognition. Furthermore, the sense of employee engagement and time balance are very important so that they do not feel the urge to leave their jobs (Mardikaningsih & Arifin, 2022). When dedication is measured by availability, boundaries become illegitimate. When leisure time is considered immoral, recovery loses its space. When gender norms divide obligations unequally, balance becomes an uneven burden. To that end, innovation in organizational culture must be continuously carried out so that everyone feels happy in their work (Irfan & Rojak, 2022). Thus, work-life balance is not a technical matter of dividing hours, but a matter of social legitimacy regarding reasonable boundaries. This normative description asserts that discussing balance means discussing collective values about the good human, the good worker, and the good family, as well as how those values are translated into binding expectations (Ozbilgin et al., 2011).

## Conclusion

Work-life balance is a social construction formed by society, culture, and norms that regulate the definition of legitimate work, appropriate leisure time, and morally valued family responsibilities. The definition of balance does not stand as a technical concept, but rather as a category of evaluation produced through symbols of dedication, the productivity ethos, and mechanisms of recognition within organizations and families. Digital connectivity expands expectations of availability, while organizational culture often assesses loyalty through visible indicators, such as rapid responses and presence outside of working hours. Family norms and gender norms create demands for presence that do not always align with work demands, causing individuals to experience value conflicts that are easily personalized as a failure to manage one's life. This description positions balance as the result of a value negotiation, with

the consequence that achieving balance depends on the legitimacy of boundaries granted by the social environment, rather than solely on individual skills.

Implications and suggestions emphasize the need to restructure how organizations and communities evaluate dedication, so that healthy boundaries obtain social legitimacy. In the organizational realm, performance appraisals need to avoid equating availability with work quality, as well as avoid the symbolization of overtime as a higher morality. In the realm of family and community, daily conversations need to be directed toward the recognition that recovery is a human necessity and family relationships are valuable social work, so that unnecessary guilt can be reduced. A conceptual suggestion for further research is to clarify the categories of the morality of leisure time, the politics of dedication symbols, and the structure of recognition, so that discussions on balance do not get trapped in time management recipes. Practical suggestions point toward the formation of work communication norms that respect boundaries, the strengthening of ethical literacy regarding digital connectivity, and the development of a work culture that allows people to be fully present in their tasks without having to sacrifice recovery space and core relationships.

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