

# SUSTAINABLE WORK PRACTICES AND WORK–LIFE BALANCE: A REVIEW OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MALAYSIA’S FINANCIAL SECTOR

## *PRÁTICAS DE TRABALHO SUSTENTÁVEIS E EQUILÍBRIO ENTRE VIDA PROFISSIONAL E PESSOAL: UMA REVISÃO DO QUADRO CONCEITUAL PARA O SETOR FINANCEIRO DA MALÁSIA*

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the landscape of work, prompting organizations worldwide to adopt sustainable work practices that prioritize employee well-being and flexibility. This conceptual paper explores the relationship between sustainable work practices, namely flexible work arrangements, remote work, job sharing, and supportive leave policies, and employee work–life balance (WLB), with a specific focus on Malaysia’s financial sector. Grounded in Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), the paper argues that these practices function as critical resources that help employees reduce work–family conflict, preserve personal energy, and manage competing demands across life domains. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) framework is employed to position organizational support as a moderating influence,

### Resumo

A pandemia da COVID-19 transformou o cenário do trabalho, levando organizações em todo o mundo a adotarem práticas de trabalho sustentáveis que priorizam o bem-estar e a flexibilidade dos funcionários. Este artigo conceitual explora a relação entre práticas de trabalho sustentáveis, nomeadamente arranjos de trabalho flexíveis, trabalho remoto, compartilhamento de funções e políticas de licença com apoio, e o equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal (EVP) dos funcionários, com foco específico no setor financeiro da Malásia. Fundamentado na Teoria da Conservação de Recursos (TCR), o artigo argumenta que essas práticas funcionam como recursos críticos que ajudam os funcionários a reduzir o conflito trabalho-família, preservar a energia pessoal e gerenciar demandas



suggesting that when employees perceive their organizations as supportive, they are more likely to reciprocate with greater engagement, loyalty, and well-being. Furthermore, Work-Family Border Theory (BT) is used to contextualize how individuals navigate and manage the boundaries between professional and personal responsibilities. The proposed conceptual framework outlines eight propositions that link sustainable practices and WLB, as well as the interaction effects of organizational support. This paper contributes to theory by integrating resource, boundary, and exchange-based perspectives, offering a multidimensional view of how workplace sustainability strategies affect employees' holistic well-being. Practical implications are also discussed, including how human resource practitioners and policymakers in Malaysia's financial sector can design and implement inclusive work policies that not only improve employee satisfaction and retention but also align with broader sustainability goals such as the United Nations SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By drawing attention to the interplay between supportive organizational environments and sustainable work design, this paper offers a timely foundation for future empirical studies and evidence-based policy development in the post-pandemic workforce.

**Keywords:** Remote Work. Work Life Balance. Flexible Work Arrangements. Quality Jobs. Work Boundaries. Supportive Leave Policies. Sustainable Growth. Well-Being.

*concorrentes em diferentes domínios da vida. A estrutura da Teoria da Troca Social (TTS) é utilizada para posicionar o apoio organizacional como uma influência moderadora, sugerindo que, quando os funcionários percebem suas organizações como apoiadoras, é mais provável que retribuam com maior engajamento, lealdade e bem-estar. Além disso, a Teoria da Fronteira Trabalho-Família (FTF) é usada para contextualizar como os indivíduos navegam e gerenciam as fronteiras entre as responsabilidades profissionais e pessoais. A estrutura conceitual proposta delineia oito proposições que vinculam práticas sustentáveis e EVP, bem como os efeitos de interação do apoio organizacional. Este artigo contribui para a teoria ao integrar perspectivas baseadas em recursos, limites e trocas, oferecendo uma visão multidimensional de como as estratégias de sustentabilidade no local de trabalho afetam o bem-estar holístico dos funcionários. Implicações práticas também são discutidas, incluindo como profissionais de recursos humanos e formuladores de políticas no setor financeiro da Malásia podem projetar e implementar políticas de trabalho inclusivas que não apenas melhorem a satisfação e a retenção de funcionários, mas também estejam alinhadas com objetivos de sustentabilidade mais amplos, como o ODS 3 (Saúde e Bem-Estar) e o ODS 8 (Trabalho Decente e Crescimento Econômico) das Nações Unidas. Ao chamar a atenção para a interação entre ambientes organizacionais favoráveis e o design de trabalho sustentável, este artigo oferece uma base oportuna para futuros estudos empíricos e desenvolvimento de políticas baseadas em evidências na força de trabalho pós-pandemia.*

**Palavras-chave:** Trabalho Remoto. Equilíbrio entre Vida Pessoal e Profissional. Arranjos de Trabalho Flexíveis. Empregos de Qualidade. Limites no Trabalho. Políticas de Licença Apoiadoras. Crescimento Sustentável. Bem-Estar.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Balancing professional and personal life demands has become an acute challenge in today's high-pressure work environments (Yusof, 2023). This is especially evident in Malaysia's financial sector where long working hours and high job stress have

traditionally strained employees' well-being (Tan *et al.*, 2025). Problems such as burnout, mental fatigue, and work-family conflict are pervasive, underscoring the need for interventions that promote better WLB (WLB). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted these issues: during the pandemic many organizations were forced to implement flexible work arrangements (FWAs) like remote work and flexitime, which temporarily eased employees' juggling of work and family roles (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). However, in the post-pandemic era, some employers remain hesitant to continue these practices citing concerns about productivity or oversight (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). This hesitancy is problematic as the absence of WLB measures (for example, flexible scheduling or supportive leave) often leads to heightened stress, reduced well-being and poorer performance (Tan *et al.*, 2025).

The significance of these issues is increasingly recognized at both policy and organizational levels in Malaysia. The government's 12th Malaysia Plan explicitly calls for expanding flexible work options to improve the well-being of Malaysian workers and their families, with the expectation that better WLB will also boost job satisfaction and productivity (Ismail & Michael, 2025). In the financial and banking industry, recent evidence paints a stark picture where nearly one-third of professionals have contemplated resigning due to excessive stress (Tan *et al.*, 2025). Such findings have spurred conversations around implementing sustainable work practices including flexible scheduling, remote work opportunities, job sharing arrangements, and more supportive leave policies as strategies to alleviate stress and retain talent (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). For instance, one survey found that 2 in 5 Malaysians would consider quitting if compelled to return to rigid, full-time office schedules (Ranstad, 2024). A recent Southeast Asian survey of working mothers (including Malaysians) revealed that 68% felt remote work and flexible arrangements would improve their WLB and career prospects, while a majority voiced dissatisfaction with current maternity leave provisions and called for more supportive leave policies free of stigma (Milieu Insight, 2024). These suggests employees now expect and benefit from more sustainable, family-friendly work practices, and organizations in high-stress sectors like finance must adapt to meet these expectations (Blom *et al.*, 2025).

Despite this clear imperative, there remains a gap in our theoretical understanding of how such sustainable work practices influence WLB and under what conditions their

benefits are maximized. This conceptual paper addresses that gap by developing a theoretical model that connects key sustainable work practices to employees' WLB with organizational support proposed as an important moderating variable. We draw on three complementary theories to ground our arguments: Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, to explain how flexible arrangements and related practices serve as resources that help employees achieve balance; Social Exchange Theory, to explain why organizational support might strengthen the impact of these practices; and Work-Family Border Theory to conceptualize WLB as an outcome of effectively managing the boundaries between work and personal domains. By integrating these perspectives, we aim to provide a nuanced explanation suitable for the Malaysian financial context and beyond, where the post-pandemic workforce is actively seeking sustainable ways to balance work and life.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical justification**

#### *2.1.1 Conservation of resources (COR)*

Hobfoll's COR Theory posits that individuals are motivated to obtain and protect valued resources (such as time, energy, and support) and that stress occurs when these resources are threatened or lost (Kruyen *et al.*, 2024). In the context of WLB, COR Theory suggests that employees struggle when work demands deplete their personal resources (e.g. leaving little time or energy for family), whereas resource gains or conservation can alleviate stress (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Flexible and supportive work practices can be viewed as resource-providing mechanisms by granting employees more control over their schedules or workload, these practices help conserve critical personal resources (time, energy) and reduce conflict between work and non-work roles (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). Recent research explicitly applying COR to work-life issues supports this view. For example, study by Pensar & Rousi (2023) identifies flexible work arrangements, autonomy, and time-saving as key resources that enable employees to maintain WLB in remote work settings. Such resources offset the resource drains of work demands, thereby improving employees' ability to meet both work and family obligations. In our model,

COR Theory underlies the expectation that sustainable work practices will enhance WLB by replenishing or protecting employees' resources (time, flexibility, support), ultimately reducing stress and work-family conflicts.

### 2.1.2 Social exchange theory (SET)

SET holds that the employment relationship comprises a series of reciprocal exchanges when employees receive beneficial treatment from their organization, they feel obliged to reciprocate with positive attitudes or behaviors (Ramlall, 2025). Within SET, employees' perceptions of how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, through a culture that genuinely endorses WLB prompt reciprocation with greater loyalty, engagement, and productivity (Barokah *et al.*, 2025). In terms of moderation, SET posits that even if flexible policies exist on paper, their effectiveness hinges on the social exchange context: a supportive organization signals that employees are trusted to utilize these arrangements without career penalties, thereby encouraging fuller engagement with their benefits (Zhang & Dousin, 2025). For example, research in Malaysia's financial sector demonstrates that organizational support, reflecting social exchange principles, enhances work engagement and mediates improved WLB, with employees reciprocating via greater commitment and reduced stress (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Similarly, a study among university employees found that supportive mechanisms like flexible policies and leadership endorsement significantly bolstered WLB and well-being outcomes (Zhang & Dousin, 2025). Employees who feel supported thus leverage provided resources more effectively, demonstrating heightened commitment that further amplifies positive outcomes (Dorai *et al.*, 2026).

### 2.1.3 Work-family border theory

Developed by Clark (Peng *et al.*, 2022), Work-Family Border Theory examines how individuals manage the boundaries (or borders) between work and personal life domains in order to achieve balance. This theory emphasizes that work and family are separate spheres with their own cultures and demands, and individuals are "border-crossers" who make daily transitions between them (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015; Peng

*et al.*, 2022). Key concepts include the permeability and flexibility of boundaries: permeability refers to the degree to which elements of one domain infiltrate the other, while flexibility denotes the border's ability to expand or contract to meet demands (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). Border Theory posits that poorly managed permeable or overly flexible boundaries lead to role blurring, heightening conflict and impeding balance such as when work intrudes into family time (Peng *et al.*, 2022). Conversely, effective management enables positive integration (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). This is especially relevant in the post-pandemic era where remote work has blurred physical and temporal boundaries, leading to constant availability through technology and challenges in disengaging (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). Empirical evidence confirms that high permeability promotes role blending, eroding the necessary separation for rest and family time (Peng *et al.*, 2022). Accordingly, Border Theory conceptualizes WLB as effective boundary management (Peng *et al.*, 2022). Sustainable work practices such as flexible scheduling, remote work, job sharing, and supportive leave modify these boundaries by providing control over timing and location (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). Although they can risk further blurring without proper safeguards, these practices primarily enhance balance when combined with organizational support that promotes healthy boundary management, like "border-keeper" backing from supervisors (Peng *et al.*, 2022). In our model, this theory complements COR and SET by explaining how practices and support optimize boundary dynamics to achieve WLB.

## **2.2 Sustainable work practices and WLB**

The sustainable work practices in this paper refers to HR and organizational policies designed to promote employees' long-term well-being and work-life integration namely flexible work arrangements, remote work, job sharing, and supportive leave policies. Each of these has been discussed in recent literature to improve employees' WLB.

### 2.2.1 Flexible work arrangements (FWA)

FWA offer employees adaptability in managing their work schedule, location, and the nature of their job (Ismail & Michael, 2025). These encompass various models, including flexible scheduling, part-time options, telecommuting, job-sharing, and compressed workweeks (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023; Wahab *et al.*, 2024). FWAs have gained momentum in Malaysia, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic and amendments to the Employment Act 1955 in 2022 (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). The increasing emphasis on WLB and technological advancements have driven employers to adopt FWAs to enhance employee performance, productivity, and job satisfaction (Ismail & Michael, 2025).

By providing greater control over how, when, and where they fulfill job responsibilities, FWAs enable employees to better align work with personal commitments (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023; Wahab *et al.*, 2024). This flexibility can significantly reduce work-family conflict and related stress, as individuals can adjust work hours or location to accommodate personal responsibilities, such as caregiving duties (Ismail & Michael, 2025; Wahab *et al.*, 2024). Flexible working hours promote a sense of autonomy and psychological control, contributing to lower occupational stress and improved job performance (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Empirical evidence suggests that flexible arrangements are a particularly powerful driver of WLB for employees, allowing them to manage family duties and personal activities alongside their jobs with less conflict (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Furthermore, improved WLB through FWAs can lead to increased loyalty, reduced turnover, and higher productivity for organizations, making them more attractive to job seekers, especially among younger generations who prioritize WLB (Wahab *et al.*, 2024).

However, the efficacy of FWAs is not universal and can be a "double-edged sword" if not managed effectively (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). While beneficial for autonomy and time savings, flexible and remote work can lead to negative consequences, including blurred boundaries, isolation, difficulty disengaging from work, and working beyond formal hours (Aczél *et al.*, 2021; Pensar & Rousi, 2023). This blending of work and personal life can increase multitasking and work-family role blurring, potentially increasing strain rather than reducing it (Aczél *et al.*, 2021). Employees may experience

a decline in their WLB when engaged in excessive remote work (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Moreover, without a supportive culture, simply granting flexible hours might not reduce work-life conflict and could even lead to unintended consequences, such as employees feeling guilt for using flextime (Ismail & Michael, 2025). Studies caution that in the absence of organizational support, FWAs can blur boundaries and increase feelings of being "always on", potentially increasing strain (Aczél *et al.*, 2021). All employees may also not realize the full benefits especially those with limited resources or lower boundary control (Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, while FWAs are viewed as beneficial for balance, their success hinges on complementary measures and a supportive environment. Management support is recognized as a key element in influencing the success of FWAs, with encouragement from managers making employees more likely to embrace them without worrying about adverse effects (Ismail & Michael, 2025). Workplace administrators and line managers play a crucial role in creating this supportive culture through explicit discussions, training, and by removing concerns about potential career repercussions (Dickson *et al.*, 2024). Without such support, even well-intended policies may falter, and employees might not fully utilize the resources offered (Dickson *et al.*, 2024). Overall, we expect flexible work arrangements to have a positive influence on employees' WLB, particularly within supportive environments.

### 2.2.2 Remote work

Remote work is a specific type of flexible arrangement where employees perform their job duties outside the traditional office, typically from home, using technology to stay connected. Remote work became mainstream during the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting the discourse from a "privilege" to a "necessary" or recommended form of work (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). It remains common in the post-pandemic era as part of hybrid work models with a triggered expectation for such flexibility to continue (Lund *et al.*, 2021).

Its impact on WLB has been widely studied in the past few years, revealing a complex picture. On the positive side, remote work can significantly improve WLB by removing geographical and temporal constraints. Employees benefit from reduced

commuting time and costs, allowing resources to be reallocated to family, rest, or personal development (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). This increased scheduling autonomy and greater control over where and when they work contribute to a better balance between work and personal life (Aczél *et al.*, 2021; Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Employees working from home consistently report greater job motivation and satisfaction due to increased work-related control and work-life flexibility (Aczél *et al.*, 2021). Studies also find that remote work is associated with lower work-family conflict and higher job satisfaction lead to enhanced autonomy and time savings (Leonardi *et al.*, 2023; Dorai *et al.*, 2026).

However, remote work also presents a "double-edged sword" character with respect to well-being and WLB (Leonardi *et al.*, 2023; Pensar & Rousi, 2023). The negative side often stems from blurred boundaries, isolation, and difficulty disengaging from work (Aczél *et al.*, 2021). Working and living in the same space can make it challenging to disconnect from work, leading to longer working hours or interruptions of home life by work tasks (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Remote workers can also experience social isolation and a reduced sense of support due to a lack of social information in virtual media and less identification with coworkers (Aczél *et al.*, 2021; Göçer *et al.*, 2025; Leonardi *et al.*, 2023). These challenges can lead to frustration, increased scrutiny from supervisors, and difficulty establishing coordinated routines, potentially increasing work-home conflict (Leonardi *et al.*, 2023).

### 2.2.3 Job sharing

Job sharing is a flexible work arrangement where two employees voluntarily share the responsibilities of one full-time position (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023). This model allows each individual to work part-time, typically dividing tasks, hours, and benefits of a single role, thereby ensuring full-time coverage for the employer (Crampton *et al.*, 2003). Job sharing offers distinct advantages, particularly for individuals aiming to achieve better WLB due to family commitments, educational pursuits, or personal preferences (Crampton *et al.*, 2003). For employees, job sharing can significantly enhance WLB by providing reduced working hours and more time for personal life, without requiring a complete withdrawal from their careers (Crampton *et al.*, 2003). Employees participating in job-sharing arrangements frequently report higher job satisfaction and may exhibit

increased productivity during their dedicated work periods (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023; Crampton *et al.*, 2003). This approach can be especially valuable for individuals, such as women, who are seeking career advancement while simultaneously managing personal and family responsibilities, as it offers opportunities to acquire new skills and gain diverse organizational experience (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023). By distributing the workload, job sharing also serves to alleviate burnout and mental fatigue, which are prevalent in demanding professional environments (Crampton *et al.*, 2003).

Job sharing remains an emerging and underutilized concept in Malaysia due to low awareness and the perception of administrative complexity contribute to its limited adoption among both employers and employees (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Despite these challenges, job sharing aligns with the increasing demand for flexibility and could serve as a valuable strategy in sectors like finance, which are characterized by demanding jobs and traditionally long hours (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). When implemented with robust management support, clear frameworks, and a cultural shift towards valuing output and employee well-being, job sharing has the potential to positively affect employees' WLB by offering a viable path to reduced individual work time and associated stress.

#### 2.2.4 Supportive leave policies

Supportive leave policies encompass generous or accommodating provisions that allow employees to take time off for personal or family reasons beyond basic statutory requirements. These often include paid parental leave, caregiving or elder care leave, compassionate leave for bereavement or serious illness, sabbaticals, and mental health or wellness leave (Kitwange & Habi, 2024; Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Such policies are a recognized component of family-friendly workplaces allowing employees to tend to the needs of others (Blom *et al.*, 2025).

These policies significantly enhance WLB by mitigating the depletion of personal resources during crises, thereby reducing burnout and work-family strain (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). When employees feel empowered to take necessary time off, they experience less conflict between their work and personal roles. For instance, paid parental leave enables new parents to bond with their child and adjust to new family demands, facilitating a smoother return to work (Kitwange & Habi, 2024).

In Malaysia, recent legal developments, specifically the Employment Act 2022, which came into force on January 1, 2023, have formalized the right for employees to apply for flexible working arrangements, including variations in hours, days, or location (Wahab *et al.*, 2024). Under Sections 60P and 60Q of the Employment Act 1955, employers are now legally required to provide a written response to such requests within 60 days (Wahab *et al.*, 2024). While these amendments introduced minimum standards for maternity and paternity leave, the broader adoption and the actual utilization of flexible and supportive leave remain uneven across the private sector (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Challenges persist for Malaysian women, who often face increased domestic obligations and unpaid care duties, contributing to a "double burden" that intensifies stress (Yusof, 2023). Surveys reveal that many female parents experience moderate to severe burnout due to work-life imbalance and feel guilt for not doing more at home or at work (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023). Earlier studies from Malaysia also indicated that significant numbers of married women professionals left their jobs to care for children or at their husband's request, highlighting long-standing issues with work-life integration (Yusof, 2023). When these policies are well-defined, effectively communicated, and underpinned by genuine organizational encouragement and a culture that respects boundaries, employees are likely to experience greater WLB, reduced work-family conflict, and higher overall well-being (Dickson *et al.*, 2024; Kitwange & Habi, 2024).

### 2.2.5 Employees' WLB

WLB is a multifaceted concept that has evolved significantly in recent years (Kruyen *et al.*, 2024; Lee, 2024). Historically, it was often defined as the degree to which an individual is equally engaged in and satisfied with both their work and family roles (Lee, 2024). However, contemporary literature has expanded this view, referring to WLB as the ability of individuals to effectively manage and harmonize their work responsibilities with all aspects of personal life, including family commitments, leisure, health, and personal development (Hariri *et al.*, 2024; Lee, 2024). This balance is crucial for minimizing conflicts and enhancing motivation, productivity, and overall well-being (Lee, 2024). Rather than a static state, WLB is increasingly seen as a dynamic process that acknowledges the changing nature of work and life demands over time (Lee, 2024).

In practical terms, WLB implies an individual's satisfaction with their capacity to meet both work and personal demands, ensuring sufficient time and energy for all life domains while experiencing minimal role conflict (Opatrná & Procházka, 2023). It encompasses not only the absence of conflict but also the presence of work-life integration or enrichment, where success in one role can positively influence another (Lee, 2024). High WLB is associated with numerous benefits for employees, including better mental health, reduced stress, and increased job satisfaction (Opatrná & Procházka, 2023). When WLB is effectively managed, employees experience less cognitive overload, allowing them to fulfill their duties with improved focus and precision (Ismail & Michael, 2025).

For organizations, fostering employee WLB is a strategic imperative linked to tangible business outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that organizations implementing effective WLB policies experience improved employee retention, higher job satisfaction, increased productivity, and lower turnover rates (Lee, 2024; Rani & Priya, 2022). A positive WLB environment can significantly reduce workplace stress, fostering better interactions among employees and a more harmonious workplace (Ismail & Michael, 2025). Employees who feel valued and supported in balancing their work and personal obligations tend to be more collaborative, motivated, and engaged (Ismail & Michael, 2025; Rani & Priya, 2022). Furthermore, the availability of WLB policies minimizes employee absenteeism, contributing to cost advantages for businesses (Rani & Priya, 2022).

A critical aspect of achieving WLB, especially in today's increasingly flexible work environments, is effective boundary management (Ramlall, 2025). Work and family are conceptualized as two distinct yet interactive environments, and individuals act as "border-crossers" negotiating between them (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). Balance is attained when employees can regulate the permeability and flexibility of these borders, thereby preventing excessive interference of work into personal life and vice versa (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). When boundaries become blurred due to rigid work demands or family responsibilities, employees often face heightened stress, reduced well-being, and a weakened ability to concentrate (Aczél *et al.*, 2021; Ramlall, 2025). The recent prevalence of remote work has blurred traditional boundaries between the office and home, making it more challenging to maintain balance if not properly managed

(Kwasek *et al.*, 2025). Effective boundary management involves strategies such as temporal, physical, and communicative segmentation to delineate work and non-work domains (Aczél *et al.*, 2021).

Maintaining balance can be difficult due to uncertain socio-economic conditions and a lack of resources, particularly in developing countries (Hariri *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, cultural factors, such as those in East Asian contexts, where collectivistic organizational cultures often lead to long work hours, can significantly challenge WLB (Lee, 2024). The effectiveness of various work-life practices in promoting balance is also heavily influenced by the organizational context and the level of perceived organizational support (Hariri *et al.*, 2024). Supportive organizational climates and supervisor support can amplify the beneficial effects of WLB on employee well-being (Hariri *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, without such support, well-intentioned practices can falter, leading to blurred boundaries, employee isolation, or underutilization of benefits due to fear of career repercussions (Dickson *et al.*, 2024). This highlights that WLB is a dynamic and individual construct, requiring both robust organizational policies and a genuinely supportive culture to truly flourish (Hariri *et al.*, 2024; Kwasek *et al.*, 2025).

#### 2.2.6 Organizational support as moderator

Organizational support refers to the extent to which employees perceive that their contributions are valued, and their well-being is prioritized by the organization. It plays a crucial role in determining how employees experience and benefit from work–life balance (WLB) initiatives. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a strong foundation for understanding the moderating role of organizational support: when employees perceive high support, they are more likely to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviours, including increased engagement, loyalty, and better boundary management between work and personal life (Sulistiyani *et al.*, 2022).

Prior studies have shown that supportive environments strengthen the positive outcomes of flexible policies. For instance, Wahab *et al.* (2024) found that the presence of supervisor and peer support enhanced the effectiveness of flexible scheduling in reducing work–family conflict. Similarly, Pensar & Rousi (2023) demonstrated that remote work led to better WLB only when accompanied by clear communication and

managerial flexibility. Without such support, flexible or remote arrangements can backfire by increasing isolation or ambiguity (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2024).

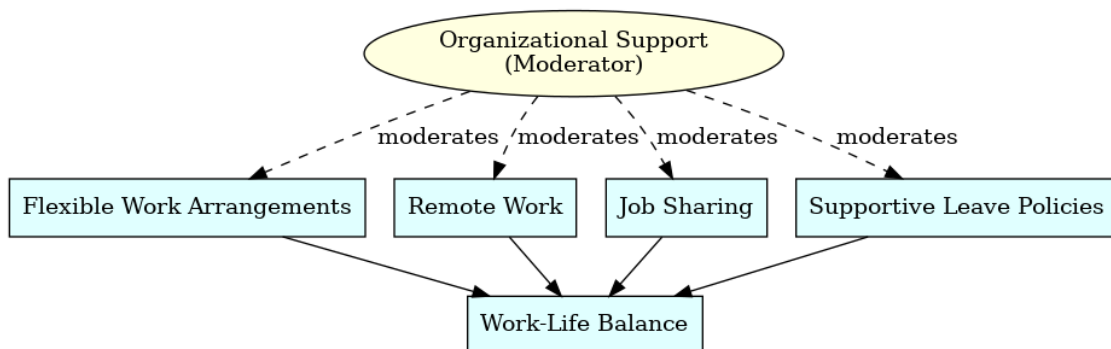
Job sharing and supportive leave policies also depend heavily on organizational backing. When organizations foster a culture that normalizes time off and shared responsibilities, employees are more likely to utilize these benefits without fear of stigma (Yu *et al.*, 2022). However, in rigid or unsupportive work cultures, employees may underutilize WLB practices due to concerns about being perceived as less committed (Zhang & Dousin, 2025).

Therefore, organizational support is not merely a background factor but a critical moderator that can amplify or limit the success of sustainable work practices.

### 3 CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND PROPOSITIONS

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework illustrating how sustainable work practices influence employees’ WLB with organizational support moderating these relationships.*



Source: Auhors

In Figure 1.0, sustainable work practices namely (1) flexible work arrangements, (2) remote work, (3) job sharing, and (4) supportive leave policies are the independent variables expected to have direct positive effects on the dependent variable (employees' WLB). These direct links (shown as solid arrows in Figure 1) are grounded in Conservation of Resources Theory and Work–Family Border Theory: each practice provides employees with greater resources or flexibility to manage the boundary between work and personal life, thereby improving balance (as discussed in the literature review).

The oval at the top of the diagram represents **organizational support** which we theorize as a moderator (shown with dashed lines) that influences the strength of each of the four relationships. In essence, a high-support context (e.g., strong organizational support) should amplify the effectiveness of each practice in enhancing WLB, whereas low support might weaken those effects. This moderating role is informed by Social Exchange Theory where employees respond more positively to flexibility and leave benefits when they feel their organization genuinely backs them, creating a virtuous cycle of support and reciprocity.

Based on this framework, we propose a series of theoretical propositions rather than testable hypotheses. Each proposition corresponds to a relationship in the model:

**Proposition 1: Flexible work arrangements are positively related to employees' WLB**

Employees who have access to and utilize flexible scheduling or work-hour arrangements will experience higher levels of WLB than those with rigid schedules. This is primarily because flexibility enables a better alignment of work with personal needs (Ismail & Michael, 2025). For instance, individuals can more easily manage family duties, such as childcare or elder care, and personal activities alongside their job, thereby reducing conflict between work and life domains (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Flexible working hours promote a sense of autonomy and psychological control, which helps in minimizing workplace stress and fosters positive interactions among employees (Ismail & Michael, 2025). This proposition aligns with Conservation of Resources Theory, as scheduling flexibility is a resource that grants employees greater control over their time and enables them to allocate energy where most needed. This enhances employees' ability to cope with work-family demands by preventing resource loss (Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

**Proposition 2: Remote work is positively related to employees' WLB**

Remote work's elimination of commute time and increased control over the work environment contribute significantly to WLB (Leonardi *et al.*, 2023). The time saved from commuting can be reallocated to personal or family activities, enhancing overall well-being (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Remote work also offers increased autonomy and flexibility in choosing one's work schedule, which is particularly advantageous for employees with heavy domestic or childcare responsibilities (Leonardi *et al.*, 2023). However, remote work also presents a "double-edged sword" character with respect to

well-being and WLB, as without clear guidance, blurred lines between work and home can lead to overwork, role intrusion, and burnout (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Effective boundary management, such as creating a dedicated workspace, structuring one's day, and knowing when to "log off," is crucial to ensure that the flexibility of remote work translates into better balance rather than unintended strain (Aczél *et al.*, 2021).

**Proposition 3: Job sharing is positively related to employees' WLB**

Employees participating in job-sharing arrangements will have greater WLB than comparable full-time employees. By effectively reducing individual work hours and spreading responsibilities, job sharing provides more free time and reduces role overload, thereby enhancing balance (Crampton *et al.*, 2003). This model can be particularly beneficial for individuals, such as working mothers or older employees, who might otherwise exit the workforce (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Job sharing allows individuals to work reduced hours, often with pro-rated benefits, enabling them to dedicate more time to family needs, education, or other personal pursuits without completely disengaging from their careers (Ah Tong *et al.*, 2023; Crampton *et al.*, 2003). This proposition assumes the job-share arrangement is voluntary and desired by the employees, and that there is strong compatibility and communication between job-sharing partners, as well as supportive managerial attitudes (Crampton *et al.*, 2003).

**Proposition 4: Supportive leave policies are positively related to employees' WLB**

Organizations that offer and encourage supportive leave will see their employees experiencing better WLB and well-being. The ability to address life responsibilities when needed, such as caring for a sick family member or attending to personal health, significantly reduces stress and prevents work-life conflicts from accumulating (Kitwange & Habi, 2024). These policies act as a critical resource protecting employees from resource depletion during challenging life events (Dorai *et al.*, 2026). Studies show that the availability and utilization of such leave correlates with lower stress, improved morale, and enhanced overall well-being (Kitwange & Habi, 2024). In Malaysia, recent amendments to the Employment Act 1955 also reflect a growing recognition of the importance of allowing employees to formally request flexible working arrangements, including leave (Wahab *et al.*, 2024).

### **Proposition 5: Organizational support moderates each sustainable work practice on WLB is stronger when organizational support is high**

In practical terms, if an organization fosters a supportive climate, then flexible arrangements, remote work options, job sharing, and leave policies will each be more effective in improving WLB. Under high support, employees feel empowered to utilize these practices fully and without negative career repercussions (Ramlall, 2025). This moderation proposition is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that supportive treatment by the organization elicits a more engaged and positive response from employees (Zhang & Dousin, 2025). When employees perceive high organizational support, they are more likely to respond with greater loyalty, engagement, and productivity (Ismail & Michael, 2025). Organizational support itself is a valuable resource that can bolster employees' ability to gain from other resources, aligning with Conservation of Resources Theory (Peng *et al.*, 2022). However, the relationship is nuanced: in some contexts, such as high-support environments, additional resources provided by specific practices like remote work or leave may yield diminishing returns as employees might already enjoy a baseline of flexibility or understanding from management (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). This pattern suggests that work–life policies and supports tend to be more valuable in contexts that are disadvantageous for balancing work and family.

## **4 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

This conceptual model carries important implications for both academic research and organizational practice particularly in the fields of human resource management, organizational behaviour, and workplace sustainability.

### **4.1 Theoretical and research implications**

First, our framework integrates multiple theories Conservation of Resources, Social Exchange, and Work-Family Border Theory highlighting the work-life dynamics are multi-dimensional, involving resource allocation, social relationships, and boundary management simultaneously (Kruiyen *et al.*, 2024; Zaitouni *et al.*, 2024). Researchers can

use this model as a basis for designing studies that empirically test the interplay of these mechanisms. For example, future studies might measure resource gains, perceptions of organizational support, and boundary permeability to see how they jointly predict WLB outcomes.

Our propositions invite researchers to investigate moderation effects: specifically, does high organizational support significantly amplify the effect of, say, remote work on reducing work-family conflict? Early evidence suggests that perceived organizational support can buffer the workload strain of flexible scheduling and is positively related to WLB, as supervisors play a crucial role as gatekeepers to resources that help individuals maintain balance and manage their work-home interface more effectively (Moreira *et al.*, 2023; Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Conversely, weak managerial support can undermine the effectiveness of flexible arrangements, leading to blurred boundaries and increased work-family conflict (Dickson *et al.*, 2024; Kossek *et al.*, 2023). More research is needed across various contexts to fully understand these interactions.

Additionally, by framing certain work practices as "sustainable" for the workforce, we align with the emerging perspective of sustainable Human Resource Management, which seeks to balance economic goals with employee well-being and social responsibility (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2022; Yusof, 2023). Future research can explore the long-term outcomes of these practices: do organizations that strongly support WLB see improved retention rates, enhanced talent attraction, or even financial performance? Studies indicate a positive link, showing that strong WLB programs lead to reduced stress, enhanced workplace performance, loyalty, and motivation, aiding in talent retention and minimizing absenteeism (Lee, 2024; Pensar & Rousi, 2023; Rani & Priya, 2022; Wahab *et al.*, 2024). WLB initiatives contribute to increased job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment, which in turn leads to improved organizational performance and lower turnover rates (Lee, 2024).

Another implication is the need to examine potential boundary conditions or contingencies in the model. Not all employees may benefit equally from a given practice, as individual differences in personality traits, job types, or family situations can moderate the effectiveness of flexible work options (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). For instance, individuals with multiple stigmatized identities may face more non-work constraints impacting their work visibility and availability (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). Cultural factors also play a

significant role. In East Asian contexts, collectivistic organizational cultures often lead to long work hours and close ties at work, which can significantly challenge WLB (Lee, 2024). Deep-rooted cultural norms can exert a strong influence on the effectiveness of WLB policies, affecting how policies are perceived and adopted in practice (Lee, 2024). If the group culture does not favour utilizing leave or flexible options, individuals might conform despite official policies, highlighting the need for a supportive culture alongside formal policies (Kossek *et al.*, 2023; Lee, 2024). Organizational support, which acts as a valuable resource, can bolster employees' ability to benefit from other resources, aligning with Conservation of Resources Theory (Kruyen *et al.*, 2024; Valcour *et al.*, 2011). However, research indicates that the effectiveness of WLB policies is often small or inconsistent, and their impact can vary significantly depending on individual differences, job types, and particularly the surrounding organizational and cultural contexts (Barokah *et al.*, 2025; Casper *et al.*, 2024). Researchers should consider these nuances using qualitative methods to explore how employees experience these arrangements and identify additional mediating processes such as trust or the impact of stigma.

#### **4.2 Practical implications for organizations**

For practitioners and leaders, the model not only introduces work practices like flexible schedules or remote work options but also reinforces the importance of organizational support to realize their full benefits (Dickson *et al.*, 2024; Hariri *et al.*, 2024; Kossek *et al.*, 2023). HR managers should focus not only on the presence of work-life policies but also on the implementation climate. This could include training managers to support rather than penalize employees who utilize flexible arrangements or take leave (Dickson *et al.*, 2024; Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Top management should communicate that WLB is a priority, leading by example. Such actions build a high organizational support environment leveraging social dynamics to improve morale, loyalty, and commitment (Ismail & Michael, 2025; Valcour *et al.*, 2011). Organizational support during leave minimizes absenteeism and turnover, fostering a resilient workforce, with WLB policies themselves minimizing employee absenteeism, which offers a cost advantage to businesses (Kitwange & Habi, 2024; Lee, 2024; Rani & Priya, 2022).

Organizations should also adapt sustainable work practices to their specific context. In high-pressure industries like banking, characterized by demanding workloads, strict regulatory frameworks, and high customer expectations (Tan *et al.*, 2025) concerns about productivity can be addressed by establishing clear performance metrics that focus on outcomes rather than face-time. Employers can implement "right to disconnect" policies to prevent flexible work from turning into round-the-clock work by setting explicit "off-hours" and encouraging managers to respect personal time. This aligns with Work-Family Border Theory, maintaining separation between work and personal life to prevent work from encroaching on personal domains (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). Additionally, supportive technology and training, such as time and boundary management workshops, can empower employees to use flexibility effectively without burnout, helping them develop strategies for maintaining a healthy WLB, like setting boundaries and prioritizing self-care (Leonardi *et al.*, 2023) Investments in such supportive infrastructure pay off in improved WLB, job performance, and commitment (Rani & Priya, 2022).

From a sustainability standpoint, organizations adopting these practices contribute to the social sustainability of the workplace (Yusof, 2023). They demonstrate corporate social responsibility by valuing employees' holistic well-being (Yusof, 2023). In Malaysia's financial sector, where talent is often highly skilled and in demand, offering robust WLB support can be a key differentiator in employer branding, making organizations more attractive to job seekers, especially younger generations who prioritize WLB (Naithani, 2010; Rani & Priya, 2022; Wahab *et al.*, 2024) Moreover, supporting WLB enhances diversity and inclusion, as WLB policies play a crucial role in promoting gender equality in the workplace and retaining women, enabling an earlier return to work after maternal leave and supporting dual-career couples (Lee, 2024; Naithani, 2010; Rani & Priya, 2022). This ensures the organization maintains knowledge and experienced staff, crucial for long-term performance.

For individual managers, the implication is to actively engage in supportive behaviors. Research shows that supervisor support for WLB can directly reduce work-family conflict for employees (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Leadership development programs should therefore include training on how to manage by objectives and trust employees to manage their time and workload effectively, rather than micromanaging (Leonardi *et al.*,

2023). The model's moderation aspect underscores that if an employee does not perceive support, they might hesitate to use the very policies that could help them (Dickson *et al.*, 2024; Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, at a broader level, our conceptual model suggests that policymakers and industry groups could promote guidelines or certifications for "WLB friendly" workplaces. In Malaysia, where the government is actively pushing flexible working arrangements through initiatives like the Employment Act 1955 amendments and the 12th Malaysia Plan, public recognition or incentives for companies that implement and support these practices could accelerate change (Ismail & Michael, 2025; Wahab *et al.*, 2024). By implementing these changes, employers will have a healthier, less stressed employee which can translate into economic benefits through reduced healthcare costs and increased productivity in the long run. Job-related stress leads to significant indirect health-related costs and absenteeism, while healthy and high well-being employees contribute more to organizational performance, leading to increased productivity (Arends *et al.*, 2017; Moreira *et al.*, 2023)

## 5 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Researchers could conduct a quantitative survey study in the Malaysian financial sector to gather data on employees' access to each sustainable work practice, their organizational support, and their self-reported work–life balance. Using regression or structural equation modeling, one could test Propositions 1–5. Do flexible hours, remote work, job sharing, and leave policies each show a significant positive association with WLB. Does organizational support significantly interact with each of these (e.g., a regression interaction term) to predict higher WLB. This would provide validation (or necessary refinement) of the model. Similar studies could be done in other industries or countries to compare results. For instance, comparing a collectivist culture like Malaysia to a more individualist culture might reveal differences in how organizational support is perceived or how strongly it moderates. Longitudinal designs would be especially valuable following employees over time as new policies are introduced could clarify causality (e.g., measuring WLB before and after implementation of a new remote work policy, and seeing if those who perceive more support gain more balance improvement).

While our model focuses on direct relationships, future research can examine *how* and *why* these practices lead to improved balance. Potential mediators include reduced work–family conflict, increased schedule control, improved well-being, or increased job satisfaction. For instance, a mediational study might find that flexible work arrangements reduce work–family conflict, which in turn leads to better perceived work–life balance and then to outcomes like higher job performance or lower intent to quit. Some research already points that WLB can mediate between HR practices and outcomes. Including multiple mediators could reveal the full process (e.g., flexible work -> less conflict -> better mental health -> higher WLB). Additionally, qualitative research can uncover employee perceptions of these mechanisms. Interviews or focus groups might ask employees: “How has working from home affected your ability to balance work and life? What helped or hindered?” Such insights could surface, for example, that trust is a key factor if the manager trusts the employee working remotely, the employee feels less pressure to overprove themselves, which helps balance. Trust could then be modelled in future frameworks as part of organizational support or as its own moderator.

Future research should consider diversity in how these practices are experienced. For example, gender is an important factor, studies often find work–life policies have especially strong effects for women (due to larger caregiving burdens), but men also benefit and may be less likely to utilize certain policies due to cultural norms. Investigating if the propositions hold equally for men and women, or for employees of different life stages (single vs. married, parents of young children vs. those with elder care responsibilities, etc.), would add nuance. Generational differences could also be explored: do Gen Z employees react differently to remote work than Gen X employees? Perhaps younger employees highly value remote flexibility but also crave social connection, whereas older employees might have different preferences. Researchers may employ a configurational approach (e.g., fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis) to see which combinations of practices and supports yield high WLB for different subgroups.

Future studies could incorporate cultural values or climate as additional moderators. For instance, power distance (how hierarchical the culture is) might influence whether employees feel comfortable taking advantage of flexible policies. In a high-power distance environment, even if HR offers flexibility, employees might stick to

traditional patterns unless top bosses openly endorse change. Cross-cultural research could test our model in multiple countries to see if organizational support plays an even bigger role in cultures where facetime is traditionally valued. If data shows that in such cultures the moderator is critical (flexibility alone does little unless support is high), it reinforces the importance of changing cultural mindsets along with policies. Also, within an organization, subcultures (e.g., one department's ethos vs. another's) could be examined. One team has a very supportive manager and sees great WLB outcomes from remote work, whereas another team with a sceptical manager does not have a natural experiment scenario.

We chose four practices, but future research could broaden the scope. For example, compressed workweeks (working 4 longer days to have a 3-day weekend) or telecommuting hubs (working from satellite offices closer to home) are other flexible models; childcare support or on-site daycare could be another supportive practice to consider; employee assistance programs (EAPs) for counselling might help reduce stress. It would be useful to evaluate if our theoretical arguments hold for these additional practices. Are they similarly resource-providing and moderated by support? Additionally, as technology evolves, new forms of flexibility (like results-only work environments or AI-assisted scheduling) could be studied. Including these under the umbrella of sustainable work practices, future conceptual work can refine the framework to ensure it stays current with workplace trends.

In pursuing these research directions, both quantitative and qualitative methods are valuable. A mixed-method approach could yield rich insight where surveys could establish broad patterns, while interviews could explain those patterns. Also, involving multiple stakeholders (employees, managers, HR leaders) in research can provide a 360-degree view of how these policies are implemented and perceived. The post-pandemic period offers a unique natural experiment-like setting: since many organizations experimented with flexibility, researchers can gather data on what was effective and what was not, thereby refining theory. Comparative case studies of organizations (one that embraced sustainable practices vs. one that reverted to "business as usual") could be particularly illuminating.

## 7 CONCLUSION

This study successfully fulfilled its objectives by examining how sustainable work practices namely remote work, flexible work arrangements, job sharing, and supportive leave policies influence employees’ WLB within Malaysia’s financial services sector. The findings revealed that three out of four independent variables remote work, supportive leave policies, and flexible work arrangements had significant positive effects on WLB. In contrast, job sharing did not yield a major influence. Furthermore, organizational support was found to significantly moderate the relationship between remote work, flexible work arrangement and WLB, while its moderating role was not significant for job sharing and supportive leave policies. These findings suggest that sustainable work practices can improve employees' ability to manage personal and professional demands particularly when organizational support is perceived to be strong.

In summary, the practical takeaway is that sustainable work practices should be part of a holistic organizational strategy. When combined with genuine support, these practices create a positive employment environment that benefits employees and employers. Companies in traditionally demanding fields can especially gain by breaking the old norms of "all work, no life" and adopting a more sustainable approach to managing human resources.

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**Authors’ Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

**Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study’s findings are fully available within the article.

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