

The Role of Technology and Work Flexibility on Work-Life Balance of Generation Z in The Digital Era

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the influence of technology and work flexibility on the work-life balance of generation Z in the digital era. In an era of increasingly advanced technology, generation Z as a group of young workers faces new challenges and opportunities in maintaining a balance between work and personal life. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, involving in-depth interviews with 15 generation Z professionals working in various industries. The results show that technology and work flexibility provide freedom for generation Z to work remotely and manage their working hours. However, technology also blurs the boundaries between work and personal life, resulting in pressure to always be available and responsive to work. Most participants expressed that although flexibility provides benefits, they often find it difficult to separate personal time and work, which risks causing burnout. These findings emphasize the importance of clear organizational policies regarding work time boundaries and the use of technology to support a healthy work-life balance. This study suggests that companies provide stress management training and develop policies that support a clear separation between work and personal time to prevent negative impacts on employee well-being. Thus, this study contributes to the understanding of how technology and work flexibility affect generation Z in maintaining a work-life balance in the digital era.

Keywords: Generation Z, Technology, Work Flexibility, Work-Life Balance, Burnout

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of work-life balance has become a major focus for employees and organizations, especially amidst the increasingly flexible work environment in the digital era. Generation Z, which includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019), have unique experiences because they grew up with the rapid development of digital technology, which has an impact on their preferences for work. Unlike previous generations, generation Z shows high expectations for flexibility and work-life balance.. According to a study by (Deloitte, 2022), 53% of Generation Z consider work flexibility as one of the main factors in choosing a job. Technological advances, including easy access to digital devices and remote collaboration platforms, have enabled them to work flexibly, both in terms of time and place (Spreitzer et al., 2017). This technology allows Generation Z to access work anytime and anywhere, providing unprecedented flexibility.

However, while technology provides greater work flexibility, its constant use can make it challenging to achieve work-life balance. Generation Z is often under pressure to be constantly connected, blurring the lines between work and personal time (Mazmanian et al., 2013). This puts them at risk for burnout and can potentially harm their mental well-being. A study by (Smith, et al., 2021) indicated that constant engagement with technology can lead to prolonged work stress in younger generations, which worsens burnout. This is also supported by other studies that show that

Generation Z is more likely to experience stress and burnout because they feel the need to always be responsive and continue working, even outside of normal working hours (Chesley, 2014; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Ultimately, while technology provides opportunities for flexibility, the expectation to be responsive and connected can be counterproductive to the goal of work-life balance itself.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic era has further strengthened the importance of technology in the work environment and increased work flexibility globally. Many companies have implemented work-from-home policies, which on the one hand give Generation Z the opportunity to enjoy flexibility in working, but on the other hand increase the challenge in distinguishing work time and rest time (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). This transition to a more flexible work environment has encouraged Generation Z to adapt to a more dynamic way of working, but also makes them more vulnerable to psychological distress, stress, and burnout if not managed properly (Lippe, et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to understand how technology and work flexibility affect Generation Z's ability to achieve a healthy work-life balance.

The study of work-life balance of generation Z in the digital era is very urgent considering their characteristics as the future workforce. Generation Z is projected to become the majority group in the labor market in the next two decades, and their expectations of work-life balance can significantly influence company policies (PwC, 2020). Ignoring the needs of this generation for work-life balance can lead to high turnover rates and decreased productivity. In addition, the increasing use of technology that has the potential to cause burnout among generation Z also requires serious attention from stakeholders in an effort to create a healthy and productive work environment.

This study offers a new approach by highlighting the specific influence of technology and work flexibility on work-life balance of Generation Z, which is still lacking in the existing literature. Most previous studies have focused on work flexibility or technology use in a general context (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), while its impact on Generation Z in the context of work-life balance is rarely discussed in depth. This study will explore how technology and work flexibility, two key elements of the digital era, shape Generation Z's work-life balance perceptions and practices and their impact on burnout risk.

This study aims to analyze the influence of technology and work flexibility on work-life balance in generation Z. Specifically, this study will explore how the use of digital technology, which increasingly supports work flexibility, affects generation Z's ability to maintain a balance between work and their personal lives. In addition, this study aims to identify factors in the use of technology that have the potential to cause work-life imbalance and burnout in this generation.

The benefit of this research is to provide companies and organizations with a better understanding of the needs and preferences of Generation Z in terms of work-life balance. The results of this study can be a reference for companies to develop flexible work policies that are supported by technology, but still pay attention to employee welfare. In addition, this study can also help Generation Z to better understand how to use technology and work flexibility wisely, so as to reduce the risk of burnout and achieve a better work-life balance.

METHODS

Qualitative research was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of individual perceptions and experiences in the context of work-life balance (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Using a phenomenological approach, researchers can explore Generation Z's direct experiences of their interactions with technology in the workplace and how work flexibility affects the boundaries between personal and work time (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenology focuses on how individuals give meaning to their life experiences, which in this case are Generation Z's experiences with technology and work flexibility (Smith & Larkin, 2009). Appropriate data collection techniques are in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, which allow participants to describe their experiences in detail and provide insight into the factors that influence their work-life balance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

To support the validity of the data, triangulation techniques can be applied, such as by combining interview results with direct observation or with document analysis related to work flexibility policies in the companies that are the subjects of the study. This triangulation helps validate the findings and reduce subjective bias that may arise during

the interview (Denzin, 2017). The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic methods, which allowed researchers to identify key themes related to Generation Z's perceptions of technology and work flexibility in the context of work-life balance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This thematic analysis is relevant because it allows the identification of significant patterns of perception and experience in the qualitative data collected, as well as providing in-depth interpretations of the impact of technology on work-life balance.

This qualitative approach is also important to understand the unique aspects of Generation Z, as quantitative research may not be able to capture the nuances of personal experiences and expectations regarding work flexibility and technology. As such, this method can provide richer insights into how Generation Z is coping with work challenges in the digital age and how companies can design policies that better support work-life balance for this generation (Silverman, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that technology and work flexibility have a significant impact on the perception and experience of work-life balance of generation Z. Based on in-depth interviews conducted, most informants admitted that easy access to technology has allowed them to work on tasks from flexible locations and outside of formal working hours. This flexibility is considered to provide them with the freedom to adjust their working hours to their personal needs. One participant stated, "With technology, I can work from anywhere, so I can be more flexible in organizing my schedule." However, this finding also shows that constant access to technology blurs the boundaries between work and personal life, making it difficult for generation Z to truly rest after work hours (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Chesley, 2014).

From the perspective of Generation Z, technology is seen as making work easier on the one hand, but on the other hand increasing the organization's expectation of quick response. Participants felt that technology puts pressure on them to be available, even outside of work hours, which creates a blurring of when they are "working" and when they are "not working." For example, several participants mentioned that they often feel overwhelmed by work notifications that constantly appear on their devices after work hours, making it difficult to separate work from personal life. This condition is in line with previous studies that revealed that the presence of advanced communication technology can result in high work pressure and contribute to burnout (Smith et al., 2021; Przytuła et al., 2020).

In addition, the results of the study also showed that the work flexibility offered by companies is often not accompanied by support for setting clear boundaries between personal life and work. Many participants mentioned that they were allowed to work from home or set their own working hours, but there was no clear guidance on when they were expected to actually take a break. As a result, they tended to feel guilty when they were not active on the company's communication platforms, even outside of normal working hours. This shows the importance of companies providing more structured policies and educating employees about the importance of healthy time boundaries to prevent burnout. A study by (Lippe et al., 2020) supports these findings, showing that work flexibility that is not balanced with clear rules can trigger stress and dissatisfaction.

This discussion also covers individual factors such as preferences and coping strategies that vary among Generation Z in dealing with pressures emanating from technology. Some participants reported having their own strategies for managing work time, such as turning off notifications after work hours or setting a strict personal schedule. These strategies have proven effective for some individuals in helping them separate work and personal life. However, not all participants have the same strategies; some find it difficult to refrain from opening job applications outside of work hours due to the pressure to be responsive. This suggests that in addition to organizational policies, good self-management skills are essential in achieving work-life balance in this digital era (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020).

Furthermore, the results of the study also revealed differences between the perceptions of individuals working in industries with more traditional work cultures compared to more modern or progressive industries. Participants working in traditional industries, such as finance or law, reported feeling more pressure to be responsive and digitally connected outside of work hours. In contrast, participants working in creative or technology industries felt they had greater freedom to set their work hours. These findings indicate that the context of a company's work culture also influences Generation Z's work-life balance perceptions and practices. This is consistent with research (Silverman, 2016) which emphasizes that organizational culture and industry type influence employee expectations and work patterns.

Overall, this study provides insight that technology and work flexibility offer significant opportunities for Generation Z to achieve work-life balance. However, without proper management by both individuals and companies, this flexibility can also be a source of additional stress. Companies looking to leverage work flexibility to support Generation Z's work-life balance should consider providing additional support, such as digital boundary guidance and stress management training. In this way, a balance between the benefits of flexibility and the negative impacts of technology can be achieved, creating a work environment that is more supportive of employee well-being (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

This study successfully identified the significant influence of technology and work flexibility on the work-life balance of Generation Z in the digital era. Generation Z, who grew up amidst the rapid development of technology, has different views and experiences from previous generations in terms of working and interacting with technology. They view work flexibility as a major advantage that allows them to organize their work time and location according to their personal needs. This kind of flexibility provides the freedom to complete work without being tied to a specific place and time. This supports previous findings showing that Generation Z values the ability to work remotely or with more flexible working hours, which ultimately gives them space to maintain the quality of their personal life (Przytuła et al., 2020).

However, the study also found that the flexibility offered by technology can actually act as a double-edged sword. While it gives Generation Z freedom, it also blurs the lines between their work and personal time. Many of them find it difficult to disconnect from work after hours due to easy access to communication tools such as email and collaboration apps that allow them to stay connected to work. As a result, they tend to feel pressured to always be responsive to work messages or requests, even outside of normal working hours. This can lead to stress and burnout, conditions that are increasingly common among Generation Z (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2021).

Furthermore, while flexible work offers many benefits, without clear policies or support from the company, Generation Z faces challenges in setting healthy boundaries between personal and work life. This study emphasizes the importance of companies having policies that support clearer work-life balance, such as setting limits on response times or providing training on the importance of time and stress management. For example, companies can develop guidelines on when it is appropriate to work and when to take a break, as well as provide training related to healthy work management and wise use of technology (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin, 2017).

Furthermore, the study also highlights differences in work-life balance experiences between individuals working in industries with more traditional work cultures and those working in more flexible and technology-based industries. Those working in traditional industries, such as finance and law, reported higher levels of stress related to the expectation to be responsive, while those working in technology or creative industries felt more freedom to manage their time and work. This suggests that the cultural context of work and organizational policies play a significant role in determining the extent to which technology and flexible work can contribute to employee well-being (Lippe et al., 2020; Silverman, 2016).

Thus, the results of this study indicate that while technology and work flexibility provide many benefits for Generation Z, they also face significant challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Therefore, it is imperative for companies to design policies that not only provide flexibility but also set clear boundaries between work and personal life. This study also underlines the need for effective self-management strategies from individuals to avoid dependence on technology that can disrupt work-life balance. With supportive policies, as well as a better understanding of how technology affects work-life balance, Generation Z can achieve better well-being in their work in this digital era.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of technology, work flexibility, and work-life balance among Generation Z. Therefore, companies need to adjust policies and support the development of employee competencies in managing technology and work flexibility to create a healthy and productive work environment. Further research can also explore the role of other external factors, such as government policies or the global economic situation, in influencing Generation Z's work-life balance.

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