

Work-Life Balance in Hybrid and Return-to-Office Settings: A TCCM-Based Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract:

Purpose: The shift from mandatory remote work to hybrid arrangements and, in many organizations, a subsequent push toward return-to-office (RTO) policies has unsettled a question that once seemed largely resolved: how do employees sustain balance between work and non-work life when the location of work itself has become contested. This paper synthesizes the fragmented body of research that has emerged around this question using the Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology (TCCM) framework.

Design/methodology/approach: A systematic search was conducted on ScienceDirect using the string ("work-life balance" OR "work-family balance" OR "work-family conflict") AND ("hybrid work" OR "return to office" OR "return-to-office" OR "RTO" OR "post-pandemic work arrangements"), filtered to the management subject area and to publication years 2024 and 2025. The search returned 640 records, narrowed to 104 after filtering and to a final corpus of 100 articles following eligibility screening. The corpus was coded and analyzed following PRISMA reporting conventions and the TCCM framework, complemented by descriptive bibliometric analysis of publication trends, source journals, and keyword co-occurrence.

Findings: The reviewed literature is theoretically anchored primarily in Conservation of Resources theory and the Job Demands-Resources model, with smaller but recurring use of person-environment fit, organizational support theory, and boundary/spillover perspectives. Empirical work concentrates heavily on knowledge workers and IT professionals, with thinner coverage of healthcare, public sector, and academic contexts, and a pronounced skew toward India, the United States, Italy, and a handful of other single-country samples. Methodologically, quantitative surveys analyzed through regression or structural equation modeling dominate, followed by qualitative interview-based designs and a substantial stream of bibliometric and narrative reviews. Across characteristics, work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and psychological withdrawal recur as the central mediating mechanisms linking hybrid and RTO arrangements to well-being, engagement, and turnover outcomes.

Originality/value: This review is among the first to apply the TCCM framework specifically to the post-pandemic hybrid/RTO phase of the work-life balance literature, offering an integrated conceptual

framework and a structured future research agenda for scholars and HR practitioners navigating this fast-moving and often contested area of organizational practice.

Keywords: work-life balance; hybrid work; return-to-office; work-family conflict; TCCM framework; systematic literature review; bibliometric analysis.

1. Introduction

The abrupt shift to remote work during 2020 was, for a period, treated by both scholars and practitioners as a temporary disruption to an otherwise stable model of office-centered employment. That assumption no longer holds. Five years on, organizations remain divided between hybrid arrangements, phased return-to-office (RTO) mandates, and, in a smaller number of cases, fully remote operating models, and employees have developed strong preferences and expectations that do not always align with what employers are willing to offer (Osorio and Madero, 2025; Luring and Jonasson, 2025). Work-life balance, once studied primarily in relation to overtime, shift work, and caregiving responsibilities, has become entangled with a much broader set of questions about where work physically happens, who controls that decision, and what psychological and relational costs follow from getting the answer wrong (George et al., 2025; Newman and Ford, 2025).

The literature that has accumulated around this question since 2024 is large, fast-growing, and scattered across disciplinary homes that rarely cite one another. Urban planning and building-engineering journals examine the built-environment consequences of remote and hybrid work (Yang et al., 2025; Norouziasas et al., 2024); vocational behavior and organizational psychology journals examine the emotional and relational costs of hybrid arrangements (Chu and Chou, 2024; Urrila et al., 2025); tourism journals track the rise of workations and digital nomadism as an adjacent phenomenon (Choe et al., 2025; Koll et al., 2025); and human resource management journals debate what hybrid work even means as a construct (Luring and Jonasson, 2025). No single review has yet drawn these strands together using a framework capable of organizing theory, context, sample characteristics, and method side by side.

This review addresses that gap using the Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology (TCCM) framework, a structure well suited to fragmented, multi-disciplinary literatures because it forces explicit attention to what theoretical lens a study uses, where and on whom it was conducted, which variables and relationships it examined, and how it was studied, before any attempt is made to synthesize findings across studies. Applied here to a corpus of 100 peer-reviewed articles published in 2024 and 2025, the TCCM approach makes it possible to see not only what is known about work-life balance in hybrid and RTO settings, but also where the field is theoretically thin, contextually narrow, or methodologically repetitive.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To map the theoretical foundations underpinning research on work-life balance in hybrid and return-to-office settings published between 2024 and 2025.
- To identify the contexts (industry sectors, countries, and employee populations) in which this research has been conducted.

- To synthesize the antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes (characteristics) examined across the corpus.
- To evaluate the methodological approaches used and identify gaps that limit the generalizability of current findings.
- To propose an integrated conceptual framework and a TCCM-structured future research agenda.

1.2 Research Questions

- RQ1 (Theory): Which theoretical perspectives have been used to explain work-life balance in hybrid and RTO contexts, and which remain underused?
- RQ2 (Context): In which sectors, countries, and employee populations has this research concentrated, and where are the contextual gaps?
- RQ3 (Characteristics): What antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes recur across studies, and how do they relate to one another?
- RQ4 (Methodology): What research designs and analytical techniques dominate the field, and what methodological gaps constrain the strength of current conclusions?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 details the review protocol and search strategy. Section 3 presents descriptive bibliometric findings. Section 4 reports the TCCM analysis in full. Section 5 proposes an integrated conceptual framework. Section 6 sets out a structured future research agenda. Sections 7 through 9 discuss implications, limitations, and conclusions.

2. Methodology

This review follows a systematic bibliometric protocol informed by PRISMA 2020 reporting standards, adapted for a TCCM-based synthesis rather than a meta-analysis of effect sizes.

2.1 Database and Search String

The search was conducted on ScienceDirect, Elsevier's full-text database, chosen for its strong coverage of management, organizational behavior, vocational psychology, and urban studies journals, all of which publish on this topic. The search string applied was:

("work-life balance" OR "work-family balance" OR "work-family conflict") AND ("hybrid work" OR "return to office" OR "return-to-office" OR "RTO" OR "post-pandemic work arrangements")

The initial search returned 640 records. Two filters were then applied within ScienceDirect's advanced search interface: subject area restricted to Management, and publication year restricted to 2024 and 2025, reflecting the review's deliberate focus on the post-pandemic hybrid/RTO phase of the literature rather than the earlier emergency-remote-work phase of 2020-2021, which has already been reviewed extensively elsewhere. This filtering step reduced the pool to 104 records.

2.2 Screening and Eligibility

All 104 records were screened by title and abstract. Four records were excluded at this stage: entries lacking usable bibliographic metadata, a book review with no original empirical or conceptual content, and entries that, on closer reading, addressed remote work only incidentally without engaging work-life balance, work-family conflict, or hybrid/RTO arrangements as a substantive theme. The remaining 100

records were retained for full-text assessment and form the final corpus for this review. Table 1 summarizes the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied.

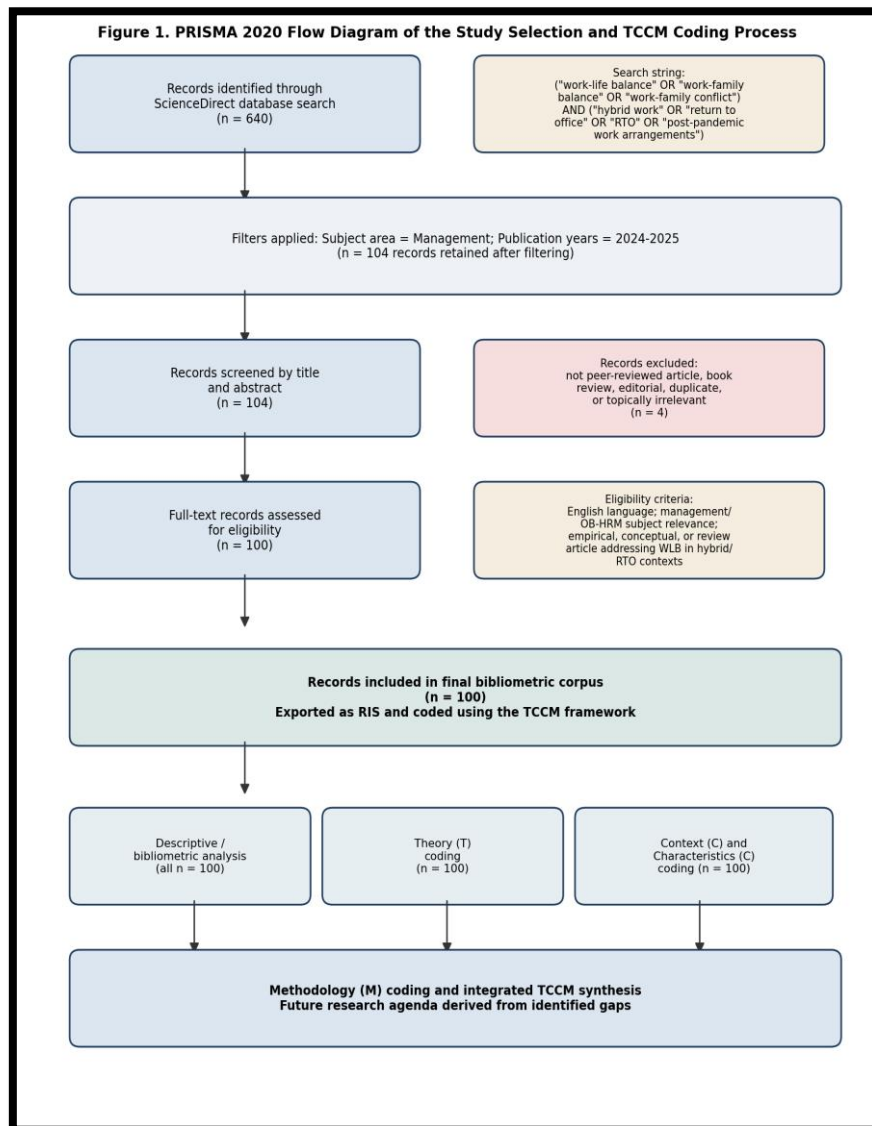


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection and TCCM coding process.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English-language publications	Non-English publications
Subject relevance	Management, organizational behavior, HRM, vocational psychology, or closely	Purely technical, engineering, or clinical studies with no work-life or organizational behavior content

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
	related fields addressing WLB in hybrid/RTO contexts	
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles (empirical, conceptual, or review)	Editorials, book reviews, erratum notices, non-peer-reviewed commentary
Time frame	Published 2024-2025	Published before 2024
Database filter	Subject area = Management (ScienceDirect classification)	Records outside the Management subject classification

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during screening.

2.4 Coding Procedure

Each of the 100 articles was coded against the four TCCM dimensions using the title, abstract, and author keywords as the primary unit of coding, consistent with standard practice in large-corpus bibliometric TCCM reviews where full-text coding of every article is impractical. Theoretical perspectives were coded when explicitly named by the authors (for example, Conservation of Resources theory, the Job Demands-Resources model). Context was coded for sector, country, and employee population where stated. Characteristics were coded as antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes based on the relationships the authors reported testing or reviewing. Methodology was coded into a small number of design categories (quantitative survey, qualitative, mixed methods, bibliometric/systematic review, conceptual/narrative review, and secondary data or simulation-based studies). Bibliometric mapping of keyword co-occurrence and publication trends was performed to complement the manual TCCM coding and to cross-validate thematic clusters. Where a study drew on more than one theory, method, or context, it was coded under each applicable category, which is reflected in the totals reported in Section 4 exceeding 100 in places.

3. Descriptive and Bibliometric Analysis

The final corpus of 100 articles is split 43 to 57 between 2024 and 2025 (Figure 2), a distribution that reflects both the recency of the RTO debate as a distinct research theme and the two-year window imposed by the search filter rather than a genuine acceleration in output, since the 2025 count includes articles published across the full calendar year while some 2025 issues were still in press at the time of the search.

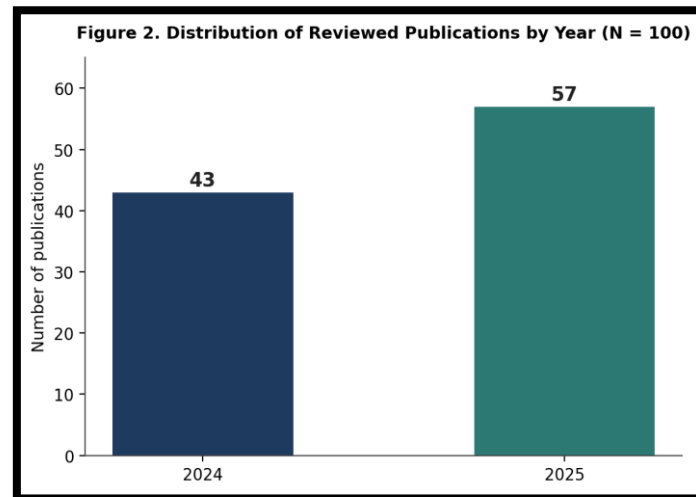


Figure 2. Distribution of reviewed publications by year (N = 100).

The corpus is dispersed across 45 distinct journals, a fragmentation that itself supports the case for a consolidating review. The International Journal of Organizational Analysis, Journal of Vocational Behavior, and Cities are the three leading outlets, together accounting for 23 of the 100 articles (Figure 3). The presence of Cities among the top three source journals is notable and reflects a substantial urban-planning and built-environment sub-literature examining how hybrid and remote work reshape commuting, housing, and city form (Yang et al., 2025; Ilham et al., 2024; Motte-Baumvol and Porcher, 2025; Shearmur, 2024; Lan and Feng, 2025), a stream of research that sits adjacent to, but is rarely cited by, the organizational behavior literature on the same phenomenon.

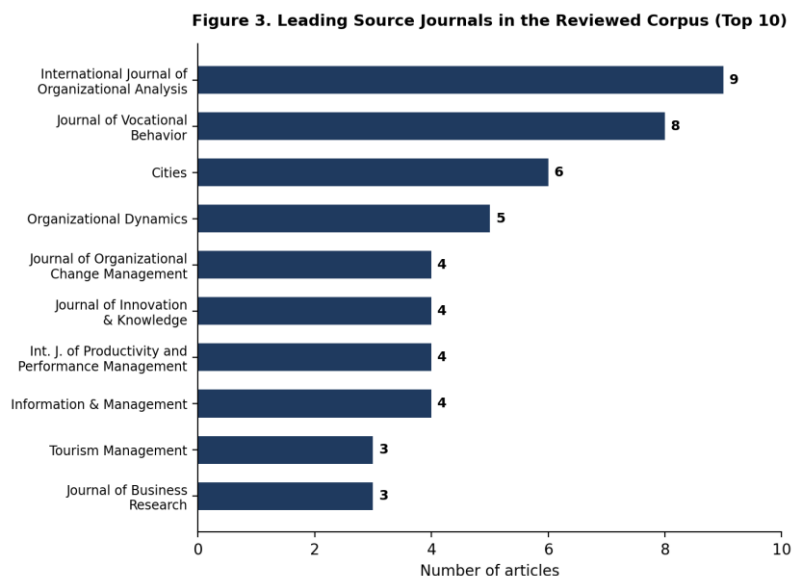


Figure 3. Leading source journals in the reviewed corpus (top 10).

Keyword co-occurrence analysis of the 415 unique author keywords in the corpus reinforces this picture. "Remote work" and "hybrid work" are the two most frequent keywords by a wide margin, followed by "telework," "COVID-19," and "well-being" (Figure 4). The continued prominence of COVID-19 as a keyword in a corpus restricted to 2024-2025 publications indicates that much of this research still frames itself relative to the pandemic as a reference point, even as the empirical focus has moved on to the post-pandemic hybrid/RTO period. "Conservation of resources theory" and "bibliometric analysis" both appear among the top ten keywords, foreshadowing the theoretical concentration and methodological duality (primary empirical studies alongside a substantial secondary stream of reviews) documented in Section 4.

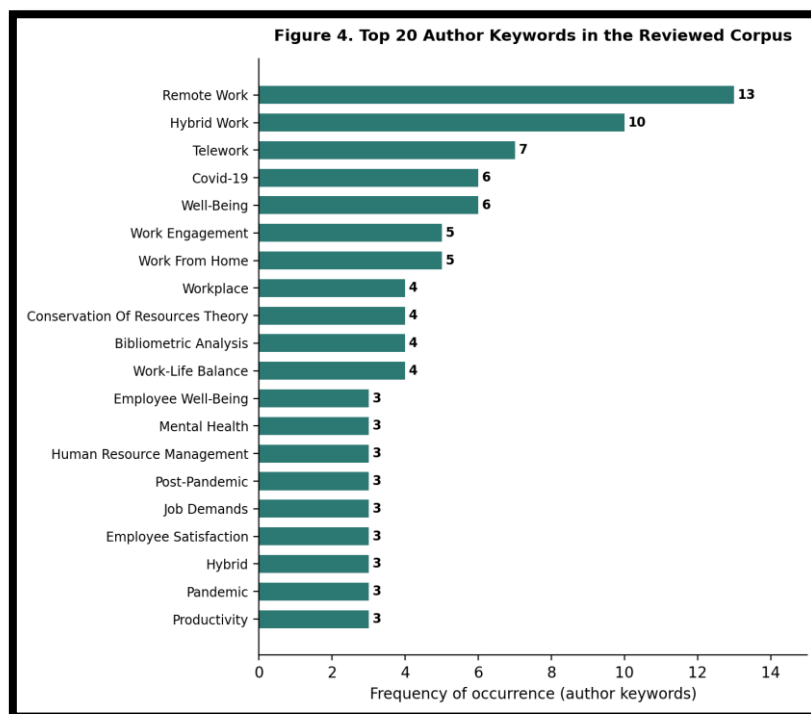


Figure 4. Top 20 author keywords in the reviewed corpus.

The corpus includes 342 unique contributing authors, and no single author or research group dominates output, consistent with an emerging rather than a mature research area. Country of study, where explicitly stated, skews toward India (6 studies explicitly set in Indian organizational contexts, including Kamboj and A, 2025; Kappal and Mishra, 2024; Raj and Gogoi, 2024; Verma and Garg, 2024; Bashir et al., 2025; and Goswami and Jena, 2024), followed by Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, with single studies located in South Korea, Germany, France, Japan, Jordan, Vietnam, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates. The large majority of studies, however, do not specify a single national context, either because they are multi-country surveys (Allen et al., 2024; Toivonen et al., 2025) or because they are conceptual and review papers with no fieldwork location.

4. TCCM Framework Analysis

This section presents the core synthesis of the review, organized around the four TCCM dimensions: Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology.

4.1 Theory (T)

A minority of the corpus, roughly a third of studies, explicitly names a guiding theory; the remainder are either descriptive/bibliometric in nature or proceed inductively without a stated theoretical frame. Among theory-explicit studies, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is by far the most frequently invoked lens (Figure 5), used to explain how hybrid and remote work arrangements affect the accumulation, protection, or depletion of psychological and emotional resources. Applications range from virtual-meeting flow states and work-family conflict (Rivkin et al., 2024), to workplace loneliness under remote work (Walz et al., 2024), to hybrid work stressors and psychological withdrawal (Chu and Chou, 2024), to escapism as a driver of workation intentions (Gong et al., 2025), to teleworking effects on adaptive performance (Taşkan et al., 2024), to the interpersonal spillover of employee resilience onto spouse outcomes (Li et al., 2025).

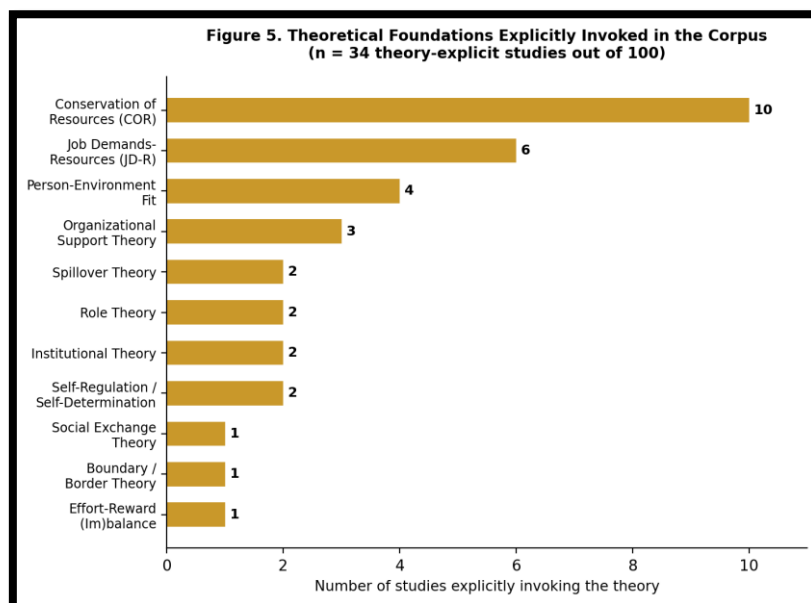


Figure 5. Theoretical foundations explicitly invoked in the corpus. Because several studies draw on more than one theory (for example, Goswami and Jena, 2024, combine COR theory, cognitive appraisal theory, and self-determination theory), the counts reflect instances of theoretical grounding rather than a strict count of distinct articles.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is the second most common lens, applied to virtual team engagement (Raj and Gogoi, 2024), health-promoting leadership and innovation performance (Parahoo et al., 2024), employee withdrawal during forced remote work (Rurkkhum and Detnakarin, 2024), and hybrid work's effects on life harmony and mental health via work-family conflict (Junça Silva, 2025). Demerouti

(2025) offers a direct theoretical comparison of COR and JD-R, arguing that the two frameworks share conceptual DNA but differ in how precisely they specify what counts as a resource versus a demand, a distinction the author argues future hybrid-work research should take more seriously rather than treating the two theories as interchangeable.

Person-environment fit theory forms a third recurring cluster, most explicitly in Osorio and Madero's (2025) explanation of Gen Z's hybrid work preferences, Kamboj and A's (2025) model of work-family boundaries and turnover intentions, George et al.'s (2025) Remote Work Autonomy matrix built explicitly on fit theory, and Yin et al.'s (2024) integration of fit theory with social support and COR theory to explain the "social connectivity paradox" in digital work communication. Organizational support theory appears in three studies examining how perceived organizational support shapes well-being and commitment outcomes in remote and communication-industry contexts (Eng et al., 2024; Rurkkhum and Detnakarin, 2024; Hasle et al., 2025). Smaller but theoretically interesting clusters include institutional theory, used to explain cross-national differences in how Indian and Chinese banks align HRM practices with Sustainable Development Goals (Shahid et al., 2025); role theory, applied to hybrid work's effect on life harmony (Junça Silva, 2025); boundary/border theory and gender egalitarianism, applied to cross-cultural boundary management preferences across 27 countries (Allen et al., 2024); and self-determination theory, applied both to remote abusive supervision outcomes (Goswami and Jena, 2024) and to digital-technology leadership more broadly through adaptive structuration theory (Bauwens and Cortellazzo, 2025).

A notable theoretical gap emerges from this pattern. The theories in active use are almost entirely resource-based or fit-based, explaining work-life balance as a function of resource gain, loss, or mismatch between person and environment. Largely absent from the theory-explicit portion of the corpus are identity-based theories (social identity, role identity) beyond Roberson et al.'s (2024) career-lifecycle diversity review, and temporal or boundary-theoretic accounts that treat time and space as actively managed resources rather than as background conditions, despite Luring and Jonasson (2025) explicitly building a three-dimensional definition of hybrid work around exactly these constructs (modality, location, temporality) without embedding it in a named boundary theory.

4.2 Context (C)

The dominant contextual setting in the corpus is the knowledge-work and information-technology sector, whether studied directly (Tortumlu and Uzun, 2024, on software developers in Türkiye; Raj and Gogoi, 2024, and Bashir et al., 2025, on Indian IT professionals; Alsaad et al., 2025, on software and IT service workers) or indirectly through samples of white-collar remote and hybrid employees whose sector is not otherwise specified. Healthcare and social-care contexts form a smaller but distinct cluster, including digital social care counsellors in Germany (Gnugesser et al., 2025), audit professionals (Lombardi et al., 2025), and workforce-shortage challenges in intellectual disability care (Peters et al., 2024). Tourism and hospitality contexts appear specifically in relation to the workation/digital-nomad phenomenon (Choe et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2024; Koll et al., 2025; Gong et al., 2025), representing a context-specific extension of work-life balance research into leisure-work hybridity rather than the conventional home-office dichotomy. Public-sector and academic contexts are comparatively thin, represented by South Korean

public servants (Jo, 2025), Danish public administration line managers (Hasle et al., 2025), and academic library administrators in the southeastern United States (Stewart et al., 2025).

Geographically, India is the most frequently named single-country context, appearing in six studies spanning IT, ITES, and general corporate samples (Kamboj and A, 2025; Kappal and Mishra, 2024; Raj and Gogoi, 2024; Verma and Garg, 2024; Bashir et al., 2025; Goswami and Jena, 2024). Italy appears in three studies, each examining a different facet of the new-normal transition (Menshikova et al., 2025, on employee satisfaction clusters; Giraldi and Rossi, 2025, on smart working and sustainability in Italian SMEs; Russo et al., 2024, on older teleworkers in Milan). The United States, United Kingdom, and China each appear in two studies, most notably in Motte-Baumvol and Porcher's (2025) tri-country comparison of telework and residential relocation and Shahid et al.'s (2025) comparative study of Indian and Chinese banks. Single-country studies also cover Norway (Norouziasas et al., 2024), the United Arab Emirates (Parahoo et al., 2024), Jordan (Al-Twal et al., 2025), South Korea (Yang, 2024; Jo, 2025), Japan (Lan and Feng, 2025), and France jointly with the UK and US (Motte-Baumvol and Porcher, 2025).

This distribution reveals two contextual gaps of practical significance for a researcher based in India working on tourism, HRM, and technology adoption. First, despite India's prominence as a single-country context, nearly all Indian studies in this corpus are drawn from IT and ITES samples; work-life balance in Indian academia, healthcare, tourism and hospitality, or public-sector employment during the hybrid/RTO transition remains almost entirely unstudied within this corpus. Second, cross-cultural comparative work remains rare, with Allen et al. (2024) as the principal exception; most studies are single-country, single-sector snapshots that cannot speak to whether the mechanisms identified generalize across cultural or institutional settings.

4.3 Characteristics (C)

Coding the corpus for antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes reveals a reasonably consistent nomological structure even across studies that do not cite one another. Four broad clusters of antecedents recur. Job and task characteristics, including autonomy, monitoring intensity, workload, and work design, are treated as antecedents in Knight et al.'s (2025) latent-profile analysis of hybrid work design, Harlianto et al.'s (2024) study of workplace technology and job autonomy in Indonesian startups, and George et al.'s (2025) Remote Work Autonomy matrix. Organizational and leadership factors, particularly perceived organizational support, line-manager sensemaking, and inclusive or empowering leadership, appear as antecedents in Hasle et al. (2025), Jo (2025), Rurkkhum and Detnakarin (2024), and Hincapie and Costa's (2024) work on inclusive leadership in hybrid teams. Technological and spatial factors, including ICT use, the built environment, and access to remote working centers, are treated as antecedents in Yang et al. (2025), Lan and Feng (2025), and Bashir et al.'s (2025) work on knowledge hiding under work-from-anywhere arrangements. Individual and family factors, including gender, generational identity, caregiving responsibilities, and personality traits such as proactive personality and mindfulness, appear across Allen et al. (2024), Osorio and Madero (2025), Russo et al. (2024) on older workers' sandwich-generation caregiving, Chu and Chou (2024), and Deshpande et al. (2025).

Mediating mechanisms cluster tightly around three constructs. Work-family or work-home conflict and spillover is the most common mediator, appearing in Rivkin et al. (2024), Walz et al. (2024), Junça Silva

(2025), Kamboj and A (2025), and Goswami and Jena's (2024) work-to-life conflict pathway linking remote abusive supervision to life satisfaction. Emotional exhaustion and cognitive depletion form a second mediating cluster, evident in Chu and Chou (2024), Deshpande et al. (2025), and Rivkin et al.'s (2024) cognitive-depletion pathway. Psychological withdrawal, loneliness, and belonging form a third cluster, addressed directly by Walz et al. (2024) on workplace loneliness, Urrila et al. (2025) on belonging in hybrid settings, Rurkkhum and Detnakarin (2024) on withdrawal behavior, and Kappal and Mishra (2024) on executive isolation among Indian CXOs.

Moderators are less consistently theorized but recur around leadership effectiveness (Taşkan et al., 2024; Chouhan and Shukla, 2025), individual differences such as proactive personality (Chu and Chou, 2024) and mindfulness (Deshpande et al., 2025), autonomy (George et al., 2025), gender egalitarianism at the cultural level (Allen et al., 2024), and organizational support (Walz et al., 2024). Outcomes cluster into four families: well-being and mental health (the most frequently studied outcome, appearing in over a third of empirical studies, including Junça Silva, 2025; Tortumlu and Uzun, 2024; Axtell et al., 2025; and Eng et al., 2024); engagement and performance (Raj and Gogoi, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Kemp et al., 2025); turnover and retention intentions (Kamboj and A, 2025; George et al., 2025; Stewart et al., 2025); and broader productivity or organizational outcomes (Jiang et al., 2024; Yang, 2024; Harlianto et al., 2024; Giraldi and Rossi, 2025).

One characteristic worth flagging as an emerging and somewhat unusual variable is the extension of work-family conflict to non-human family members, as in Junça Silva's (2025) treatment of "work-[pet]family conflict," reflecting a broader trend in the corpus toward more granular, idiosyncratic conceptualizations of what counts as the "life" side of work-life balance, alongside more conventional treatments of childcare and eldercare (Russo et al., 2024).

4.4 Methodology (M)

Methodologically, the corpus is dominated by quantitative survey-based designs analyzed through regression, structural equation modeling, or PLS-SEM, accounting for approximately 38 percent of studies (Figure 6). Representative examples include Chu and Chou's (2024) two-wave panel survey of 213 US employees, Verma and Garg's (2024) SEM-AMOS analysis of 546 Indian respondents, and Jo's (2025) PLS-SEM analysis of 3,825 South Korean public servants, the largest single quantitative sample in the corpus. Qualitative designs, including semi-structured interviews, ethnography, and the Gioia method, form the second largest category at roughly a quarter of studies, including Pauli and Dudek's (2024) interviews with 19 young HRM professionals, Reunamäki's (2025) reflection on organizational hybrid ethnography as a method, Kuknor et al.'s (2025) ethnographic account of pandemic-era WFH, and Reshma et al.'s (2025) Gioia-method study of technology and culture in remote work.

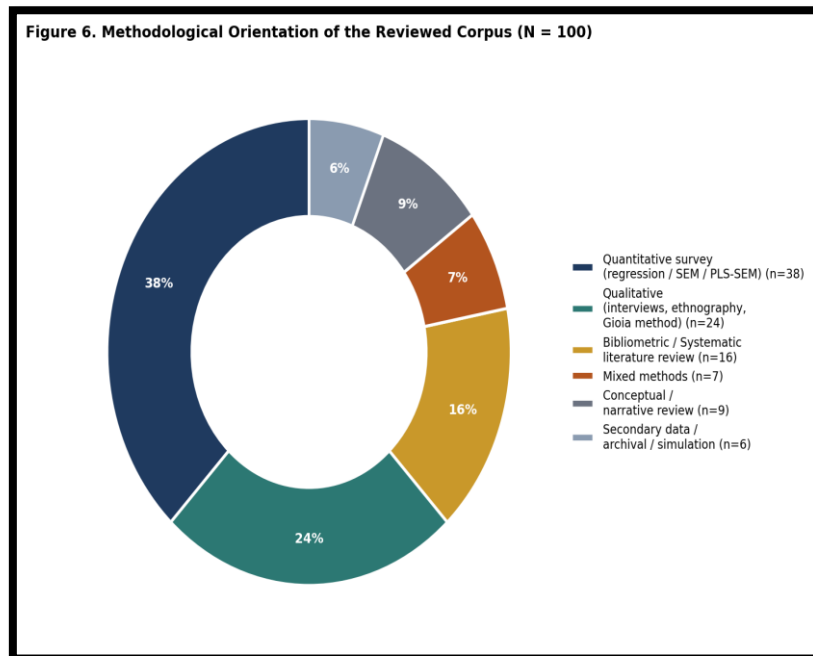


Figure 6. Methodological orientation of the reviewed corpus (N = 100).

Bibliometric and systematic literature reviews make up a substantial secondary stream, roughly one-sixth of the corpus, including Ribeiro et al.'s (2024) bibliometric analysis of remote worker well-being, Úbeda-García et al.'s (2025) SciMAT-based review of AI and HRM, Bhardwaj et al.'s (2025) integrative review of HRM digitalization, Saini's (2025) PRISMA-based review of employee engagement and organizational commitment, and Kachhap and Singh's (2024) review of quiet quitting. This is a notably high proportion of reviews-of-reviews for a two-year publication window, suggesting the field is still in a stage of consolidating its own boundaries even as new primary studies continue to appear, a pattern also visible in Broccardo et al.'s (2025) systematic review specifically of remote work, organizational control, and environmental impact.

Mixed-methods designs remain comparatively rare, present in Choe et al.'s (2025) three-study workation research combining interviews, text mining, and survey data, and in Jo's (2025) integration of PLS-SEM with qualitative interviews. Longitudinal and multi-wave designs, while still a minority, are more common than is typical in organizational behavior research generally, appearing in van Zoonen et al. (2025), Urrila et al. (2025), Karlsson et al. (2024), and Hasle et al.'s (2025) two-timepoint interview study, likely reflecting the natural before/after structure that the pandemic-to-hybrid transition offers researchers. Experience-sampling and diary methods remain a small niche, represented chiefly by Rivkin et al. (2024). A small cluster of studies uses simulation, secondary archival, or machine-learning approaches distinct from conventional survey or interview methods, including Norouzasias et al.'s (2024) building-simulation study of office energy performance and Ylinen and Ranta's (2025) machine-learning analysis of employee social media reviews.

Cross-sectional designs remain the norm even among quantitative studies, which limits causal inference throughout the corpus and is discussed further as a methodological gap in Section 6.

5. Integrated Conceptual Framework

Figure 7 synthesizes the TCCM analysis into a single integrated framework. Four clusters of antecedents (job and task characteristics, organizational and leadership factors, technological and spatial factors, and individual and family factors) feed into work-life or work-family balance in hybrid and RTO settings through three recurring mediating mechanisms: work-family/work-home conflict and spillover, emotional exhaustion and cognitive depletion, and psychological withdrawal, loneliness, and belonging. This relationship is shaped by a consistent set of moderators, including leadership effectiveness, autonomy, mindfulness, gender egalitarianism, proactive personality, and organizational support, each of which has been shown in at least one study in the corpus to strengthen or weaken the antecedent-to-mediator or mediator-to-outcome path. The resulting state of work-life balance in turn predicts four families of outcomes: well-being and mental health, engagement and performance, turnover and retention intentions, and broader productivity and organizational outcomes.

This framework is offered as a heuristic synthesis rather than a tested structural model; no single study in the corpus examines the full chain from antecedents through mediators to outcomes simultaneously, which is itself among the most actionable gaps this review identifies. The framework does, however, make explicit an assumption that runs implicitly through much of the corpus: that hybrid and RTO arrangements do not affect well-being, engagement, or turnover directly, but almost always through the intervening experience of conflict, exhaustion, or disconnection. This has a direct practical implication taken up in Section 7, namely that interventions aimed only at the antecedent level (offering more flexibility, building remote working centers, redesigning offices) are unlikely to succeed unless they also address the mediating psychological experience.

6. Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda

The TCCM analysis points to a set of gaps that are best organized, in keeping with the framework used throughout this review, by theory, context, characteristics, and methodology.

6.1 Theoretical Gaps

The corpus is theoretically concentrated in resource-based and fit-based traditions. Identity-based theories, temporal boundary theories that treat time itself (rather than only physical location) as a managed resource, and theories of organizational justice or fairness, which would seem directly relevant to the perceived arbitrariness of many RTO mandates, are essentially absent. Demerouti's (2025) call to more precisely differentiate COR theory from the JD-R model, rather than treating them as interchangeable, also remains largely unanswered by the empirical studies in this corpus.

6.2 Contextual Gaps

Healthcare, academia, public administration, and tourism/hospitality (outside the workation niche) remain thin relative to IT and knowledge work. Single-country, single-sector designs dominate, and genuinely

comparative cross-cultural work is rare outside Allen et al. (2024). Within the Indian context specifically, coverage is almost entirely confined to IT and ITES employees, leaving academic, healthcare, and public-sector work-life balance during the hybrid/RTO transition largely unexamined.

6.3 Methodological Gaps

Cross-sectional designs dominate even among well-powered quantitative studies, limiting causal claims about the direction of relationships between hybrid arrangements, mediating mechanisms, and outcomes. Longitudinal and multi-wave designs remain a minority despite the natural pre/post structure the pandemic-to-hybrid transition offers. No study in the corpus combines a full antecedent-mediator-moderator-outcome model in a single design; most test two or three links in the chain shown in Figure 7 rather than the complete pathway.

6.4 TCCM-Structured Future Research Agenda

TCCM Dimension	Identified Gap	Proposed Future Research Question
Theory	Overreliance on resource-based (COR, JD-R) and fit-based theories; identity and fairness perspectives underused	How does organizational justice perception of RTO mandates (procedural and distributive) shape employees' work-life balance outcomes, relative to resource-based mechanisms?
Theory	COR and JD-R often used interchangeably without conceptual differentiation	Do COR-theoretic and JD-R-theoretic mechanisms produce empirically distinguishable predictions for hybrid work outcomes, and can both be tested within a single model?
Context	Healthcare, academia, and public-sector employees underrepresented	How does work-life balance in hybrid arrangements differ between knowledge/IT workers and healthcare or academic professionals, whose work is less location-flexible by nature?
Context	Indian studies concentrated almost exclusively in IT/ITES	What are the antecedents and outcomes of work-life balance among Indian academic and public-sector employees navigating hybrid or RTO transitions?
Context	Cross-cultural comparative designs rare	How do national cultural dimensions (e.g., gender egalitarianism, power distance) moderate the relationship

TCCM Dimension	Identified Gap	Proposed Future Research Question
		between RTO mandates and employee turnover intentions across countries?
Characteristics	No study models the full antecedent-mediator-moderator-outcome chain	Can a single integrated model empirically link job/organizational antecedents, work-family conflict and exhaustion mediators, leadership/autonomy moderators, and well-being/turnover outcomes?
Characteristics	Family-side variables remain narrowly defined (conventional caregiving, with isolated extensions such as pet-family conflict)	How do diverse and evolving family structures (multigenerational households, single-parent households, chosen family) shape work-life balance experiences under hybrid arrangements?
Methodology	Cross-sectional designs dominate	What do longitudinal, multi-wave designs reveal about how employee work-life balance trajectories change over successive phases of RTO implementation?
Methodology	Employee voice on RTO mandates rarely captured through qualitative or mixed methods at scale	What does large-scale qualitative or mixed-methods research (e.g., combining text-mining of employee reviews with survey data) reveal about employee sensemaking of RTO mandates?

Table 2. TCCM-structured future research agenda.

7. Theoretical and Practical Implications

7.1 Theoretical Implications

This review contributes an integrated conceptual framework that consolidates a fragmented, multi-disciplinary literature under a common structure, making explicit the mediating role of work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and psychological withdrawal that runs implicitly through most of the corpus. It also surfaces a theoretical narrowing that would be difficult to see from within any single study: the field's heavy reliance on resource-based and fit-based theories has left justice, identity, and temporal-boundary perspectives comparatively untested, despite their apparent relevance to a debate (RTO mandates) that is, at its core, about perceived fairness and autonomy.

7.2 The practical and managerial implications are discussed.

The framework provides a diagnostic tool for HR practitioners and organizational leaders: interventions that focus solely on the antecedent level of the work-family conflict, exhaustion, or disconnection experience that is, hybrid schedules, redesign of offices, or a remote working center are unlikely to positively impact well-being or turnover unless they also lower the mediating level of these experiences. A few studies in the corpus suggest actionable levers: leadership effectiveness and line-manager sensemaking capacity (Taşkan et al., 2024; Hasle et al., 2025) as something that can be directly trained in organizations; autonomy over remote-work scheduling, even if the total amount of remote days can't be expanded (George et al., 2025; Knight et al., 2025); and structured onboarding and socialization practices for new employees to remote and hybrid work (Chue et al., 2024; Karlsson et al., 2024). Newman and Ford (2025) provides an alternative to uniform quotas in the office, but it is an approach based on job analysis, which considers each task instead of each role for its location-dependence, thus offering a more defensible approach than the blanket approach of uniform quotas for implementing RTO mandates, specifically.

8. Limitations

This review has a few limitations, like all single-database bibliometric TCCM reviews. First, the corpus is drawn only from ScienceDirect; that is, ScienceDirect has good coverage of the relevant journals, but some management/HRM journals are indexed primarily in Scopus or Web of Science, so adding the search from these databases to ScienceDirect will give even more confidence in the completeness of the corpus. Second, it has been decided to focus the publication window on the post-pandemic hybrid/RTO phase particularly, but one must also consult the remote-work literature from the initial 2020-2023 period, and this should not be done in place of this review. Third, the coding of TCCM was essentially based on the title, abstract and key words of these articles, and not performed through full-text review of all 100 articles, as would be standard practice for large-corpus bibliometric reviews, which may result in some nuance in secondary or unstated theoretical framing of the articles being missed.

9. Conclusion

The shift from emergency remote to hybrid and back to office has created a burgeoning but fragmented literature on work-life balance, with fragmented discussions in organizational behavior, HRM and urban studies literature, and even within tourism journals, which seldom directly reference each other. When applying the TCCM framework to 100 articles that were published in 2024 and 2025, the field was found to be theoretically rooted in resource and fit theories, empirically focused in knowledge work and IT contexts with a marked single-country emphasis that was India, methodologically driven by mostly cross-sectional quantitative surveys with a significant secondary stream of bibliometric reviews, and with the relationship between hybrid/RTO arrangements and well-being, engagement, and turnover outcomes being mediated by work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and psychological withdrawal. The integrated framework and future research roadmap provided here should provide a structured launching

point for future research on a workplace debate that appears poised to remain unresolved for the foreseeable future for both scholars and HR practitioners.

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