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[Flexing the Boundaries: How Remote Work Enhances Engagement and Well-being through Work-Life Balance]

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of working from home has led to changes in the workplace, but exactly how it influences individuals can depend on many factors. Job Demand–Resources (JD-R) is used as the foundation and this research investigates how remote work impacts employee engagement and well-being via work-life balance and also observes the moderating effects of flexible hours. For this study, information from 215 freelancers in Punjab, Pakistan, was used, gathered at three different times. PROCESS Model 7 indicated that remote work leads to better engagement and a happier mood only by improving workers' work-life balance, with no immediate direct effect, indicating that this connection is fully mediated. Moreover, having flexible work hours seemed to boost the benefits of remote work on the work-life balance. They show in the remote work literature that access to resources from psychology can help explain why people perform differently and reveal the value of having greater flexibility in work hours or schedules. The study presents ideas that platform-based employers, HR managers and policy makers can use to help improve freelancer well-being and productivity while using online platforms.

Keywords: *Remote work, Employee involvement, Wellness, Work-life harmony, Changeable hours, JD-R concepts and Freelancers.*

Introduction

Technological development and organizational practices have profoundly transformed the conventional work places and remote working has become a major work practice in most parts of the world. With the advent of the COVID-19, remote work has become a structural aspect in various organizations; it has also changed the way that employees feel autonomous, flexible, and in control of their jobs (Wang et al., 2022; Galanti et al., 2023). Remote work has been associated with great improvements in productivity, job satisfaction, but recorded with challenges such as role ambiguity, technostress, and other social interactions many sidedly affected especially when not properly managed (Saks, 2022). Consiglio et al., 2023).

This research is based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) that points out that employee results are influenced by the amount of job demands and job resources. Job demands are physical, social or organizational aspects of job, which require continuous effort; job resources are aspects assisting at accomplishing work aims, diminishing demands or personal development. Remote work is a construct that would operate in this model in a two-dimensional manner – it could be a job resource in terms of autonomy and flexibility, or a job demand if it increases the amount of workload, isolation, or interference between work and life (Van Zoonen et al., 2022; Timms et al., 2023).

Probably the most important aspects of the outcomes impacted by the remote work include employee engagement and employees' well-being. Engagement is that positive fulfilling state of Vigor and dedication toward one's job (Schaufeli et al., 2002), while the well-being is the psychological, emotional and social wellness (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Previous research has revealed that remote work has positive effects on these

correlates, given, there is clear communication, autonomy, and clarity in jobs (Smith & Kumar, 2022; Duxbury & Halinski, 2023). The opposite is true, though, when the boundaries are not clear, and the support from managers is not realized, as these effects are conditional (Consiglio et al., 2023).

This research further suggests the work-life balance (WLB) as being a mediating mechanism in such a relationship. WLB refers to the balancing of work and non-work roles, so as to minimize conflicts and maximize enrichment between the roles (Allen et al., 2023). JD-R theory indicates that when remote work improves WLB by empowering workers not to work in some of their time or spaces, then it triggers the motivational path to serve in increasing engagement and well-being. On the other hand, remote work without adequate boundaries and support may worsen WLB hence diminishing its effects (Schall 2022; Gajendran et al., 2022).

Further, flexible working hours are presented as a moderator that determines the level of the remote work–WLB relationship. Flexible scheduling would lead to improved time management and better family integration aspects and reduced role conflict (Chung & van der Lippe, 2022). It is also the case that if the employees have the choice to select their working hours, they will be more likely to translate the spatial benefits of remote work into increase in WLB (Pagard, 2024). Without it, any possible advantages of remote employment may not be realized or even end up back-firing.

Even though considerable academic attention has been paid to the remote work, most studies concentrated on the general impacts of remote work on job satisfaction, productivity and turnover intentions and much fewer explored the underlying psychological mechanisms through which remote work influences engagement and well-being (Olsen et al., 2023; Saks, 2022). Moreover, the absence of literature which combines mediation and moderation particularly in non-Western societies is scant. The peculiar culture, technology and organization that exist in Pakistan provides a representative context within which these dynamics can be tested empirically.

Thus, this study will attempt to provide contribution to literature by formulation and empirical testing of a moderated mediation model based on JD-R theory in which remote work will predict employee engagement and well-being through work-life balance and flexible work hours as a moderator. It is expected that findings would provide theoretical understanding of how remote work functions in JD-R and organizational practice for those organizations that pursue supporting their employees in changing hybrid and remote work frameworks.

Literature

Underpinning Theory

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory whereby originally conceptualised by Demerouti et al. (2001) states that there is a primary impact of job demands and job resources in shaping employee well-being and engagement. Job demands refer to the part of a job, which calls for continuous efforts (e.g. workload, emotional demands); job resources on the other hand includes elements that are able to reduce the demands and promote personal growth (e.g. autonomy, social support). Remote work is a demand;

remotely work is a resource depending on its structure. Properly organized, remote work eliminates stressors of commute and office nuisances, promotes autonomy and flexibility and stimulates motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Remote Work and Employee Engagement

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory is a powerful lens to view from what angle remote work influences the level of employees' engagement. Based on Bakker and Demerouti (2017), the autonomy, flexibility and task control are the job resources that increase intrinsic motivation which then leads to engagement. Working remotely, should it be organized properly, is a resource of the job, which puts the employees in charge of the environment of their work, thus, providing more engagement (Bakker & Demerouti 2017).

However, remote work also may have the aspects of job demands such as communication barrier, social isolation, and no immediate feedback. According to the JD-R theory, when these needs are not compensated by sufficient resources (managerial support, digital communication tools), engagement might suffer (Saks, 2022). As such, the duality of remote work as a resource and as a possibility for the demand is the reason for paying attention to the contextual factors such as organizational support, self-regulation, and job design. A recent study by Galanti et al. (2023) concludes that remote work has high-level effects on employees' engagement only if autonomy and digital competency are utilized, confirming the resource-motivation path of JD-R. Another large-scale study in the Journal of Managerial Psychology (Smith & Kumar, 2022) showed that employees working remotely who had clarity about the tasks and managerial support showed greater dedication and vigour, which are key components of employees' engagement. On the other hand, another research by Tran et al. (2023) revealed a negative relation between poorly managed remote work marked by indistinct expectations and minimal interpersonal interaction and engagement as a result of high job demands and feelings of isolation.

H1: *Remote work positively correlated with the employee engagement.*

Remote Work and Employee Wellbeing

Based on the JD-R theory, employees' well-being depends on the balance of job demands (e.g., emotional workload, ambiguity), and job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support, flexible work conditions). Remote work is significant change in the dynamics. On the one hand, it eliminates demands with respect to commuting, distractions in the office, and strict schedule. On the other side, it increases job resources such as autonomy, temporal flexibility and environmental control, all of which are all positively associated with psychological well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). But the JD-R framework also cautions that if remote work is used badly – i.e., with low expectations, feedback, or digital support– it could become a bad demand, causing stress, isolation, and burnout (Van Zoonen et al., 2022). That is, depending on balancing of demands and resources within the remote setup, remote work may either improve or deteriorate well-being. A study that was conducted in 2023 using Duxbury & Halinski in Journal of Occupational Health Psychology found that Remote workers with high autonomy and flexible schedules experienced less stress and had more emotional wellbeing than their onsite counterparts. Wang et al (2022) concluded that working from home had a positive

impact on mental well-being but only in case when expectations with regard to communications were clear and when a work life balance was respected. Consiglio et al., (2023) on the other hand, discovered that employees who worked in remote locations with little managerial support while having high workloads experienced an increased technostress and fatigue level, which proved detrimental to their well-being. Such research highlights JD-R's health-impairment process. when job requirements outstrip resources then wellbeing of the workers is diminishing.

H2: Remote work is positively related to Employee Well-being.

Mediating Role of Work-Life Balance

Under the umbrella of JD-R model, work-life balance (WLB) is rising to a personal or contextual resource that may promote the motivational and health-protective processes of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Mobile work affects WLB through the temporal and spatial flexibility, which enables the employees to balance their professional and personal obligations. When WLB is better, it leads to higher level of energy, less work-family conflict and better focus that then led to increased engagement and psychological well-being (Schall, 2022). The mediating mechanism works the following way: telecommuting brings autonomy and flexibility, hence improved WLB. A better WLB improves satisfaction and commitment (a resource) and decreases emotional exhaustion (a demand), which in turn improves both the engagement and the well-being. This concurs with Spillover Theory, which theorizes that people's experiences in a given domain (e.g. flexible remote work) can spillover and have positive impacts on outcomes in another domain (e.g., home life), which feed into job performance and mental health (Chung et al., 2022). Research that was conducted by Allen et al. (2023) in Human Resource Management Journal revealed that WLB strongly mediated the link between remote work and engagement of employees, particularly those who controlled their schedule. Similarly, Gajendran et al. (2022) reported that improved WLB owing to the remote work had direct impacts of heightened metrics of well-being, such as anxiety and burnout symptoms. However, boundary-setting behaviours to remote work were cautioned by the study carried out by Vaziri et al. (2023) , which warned that without the behaviours, remote work may blur the personal-professional lines, neutralizing the positive effects of WLB.

H3a: Work Life Balance mediates the relationship of Remote Work and Employee Engagement

H3b: Work Life Balance mediates the relationship of Remote Work and Employee Well Being

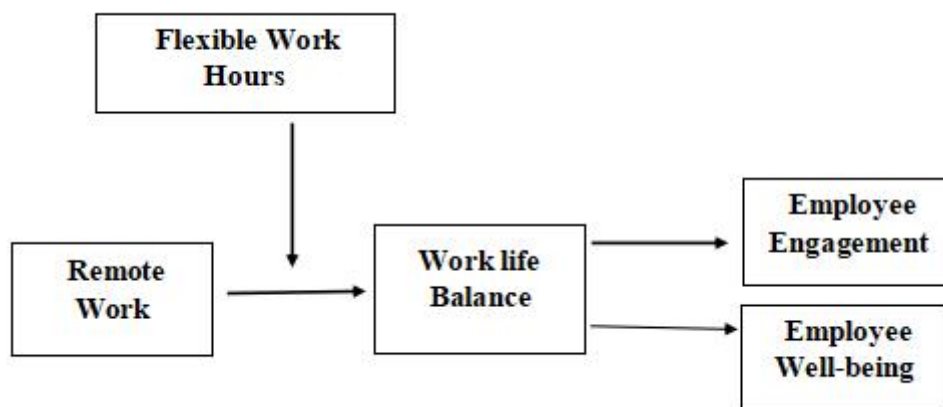
Moderating Sign of Flexible Work Hours

In the JD-R framework, flexible working hours are a core-job resource that may affect the impact of other work resource – for example remote work – on personal outcomes such as work-life balance (WLB). Although remote work has spatial flexibility, temporal flexibility, or the opportunity to decide when to work, is what usually dictates whether employees will be able to integrate personal and workplace roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Having flexible work hours at a high level, employees can schedule activities for family responsibility or personal needs, therefore amplifying the advantages of remote work on WLB. Conversely, when the employees are remote but bound by strict time frames, they may still be affected by the heightened level of role conflict and time

pressure, thereby negating WLB advantages of the remote configurations (Chung & van der Lippe, 2022). Such a moderation effect corresponds to the JD-R theory's hypothesis about buffer, which states that job resources (such as flexible hours) moderate the effects of other job characteristics (such as remote work) on the well-being and performance-related outcomes of employees. Pagard (2024), in a study conducted in 2023, revealed that in a flexible schedule, remote work enhanced the positive impact on WLB especially amongst caregivers and dual-earner households. Chung and van der Lippe (2022) found flexible hours as a moderator in the remote work-WLB relation whereby employees with flexible start/end times reported significantly higher WLB than those employees with fixed remote schedules. A survey carried out by Eurofound (2023) revealed the remote workers with high scheduling control had less time-based conflict, better emotional detachment from work at the end of the day, and better satisfaction WLB. These conclusions support the idea that temporal control and not just location independence is very important to maximize the work-life benefits of remote work.

H4: Flexible work hours moderate the relationship between remote work and work-life balance so that this relationship is stronger when flexible work hours are at a high level.

Theoretical Framework



Authors Own Work

Methodology

To find out how working remotely influenced the engagement and well-being of freelancers in Punjab, Pakistan, a quantitative survey with a time gap was used. The research team gathered data on the participants three times, spaced three weeks apart to avoid common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The sample consisted of people registered full-time as freelancers on Upwork and Fiverr. A purposive sampling method was used to give out the questionnaires on online freelancing and community boards. We analyzed 215 valid and matched observations from the three waves. During Time 1 (T₁), I gathered information on remote work, varying work hours and the employees' profiles. Time 2 (T₂) consisted of measuring work-life balance, while engagement and well-being were examined at Time 3 (T₃). SPSS 26 and Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Macro (Model 7) were used to analyze the data. I controlled for age, gender, experience and marital status in the study. The hypothesis was tested using 5,000 samples and a confidence interval set at 95%.

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Measures

They all measured the constructs using selected scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Remote Work: The 5-item Remote Work scale by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) was used to measure the extent of non-office work among freelancers (for example, by asking them whether they perform work from home as a choice).

Flexible Work Hours: Following Moen et al. (2011), Flexible Work Hours were measured using 3 items that checked how much employees can manage when they start and end their work each day.

Work Life Balance: The Work-Life Balance subscale was based on a set of 4 items, adapted from Fisher et al. (2009), that measured if the participant was content with the balance they maintained in their life.

Employee Engagement: Vigor, dedication and absorption were assessed in Employee Engagement using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Schaufeli et al (2006).

Employee Well Being: We used a 5-item scale from Danna and Griffin (1999) dedicated to psychological well-being to gauge employee's emotional and mental states (for example: "I feel mentally healthy at my workplace.)

In the study, age, gender, marital status and how many years a freelancer had been working were used as control variables. All scales were reliable, as Cronbach's alpha surpassed 0.70.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Normality

Descriptive statistics for all study variables, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis, are presented in Table 1. All variables were approximately normally distributed, with skewness and kurtosis values within acceptable limits (± 1.94). The mean score for remote work was 3.76 (SD = 0.68), indicating a high level of location-flexible work. Work-life balance and engagement also reflected moderate to high levels, suggesting that freelancers experience both autonomy and alignment in work-personal domains.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Normality (N = 215)

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Remote Work	1.80	5.00	3.76	0.68	-0.38	-0.52
Flexible Work Hours	2.00	5.00	3.89	0.71	-0.45	-0.29
Work-Life Balance	1.60	5.00	3.61	0.75	-0.34	-0.47
Employee Engagement	2.00	5.00	3.83	0.77	-0.31	-0.45
Employee Well-being	1.80	5.00	3.69	0.73	-0.28	-0.41

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlations between the study variables are shown in Table 2. Remote work was significantly and positively correlated with work-life balance ($r = 0.54$, $p < .01$), employee engagement ($r = 0.45$, $p < .01$), and well-being ($r = 0.38$, $p < .01$). Work-life balance was strongly related to both engagement ($r = 0.58$, $p < .01$) and well-being ($r = 0.52$, $p < .01$). These correlations support the hypothesized associations.

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Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Remote Work	1				
2. Flex Work Hours	0.42**	1			
3. Work-Life Balance	0.54**	0.49**	1		
4. Engagement	0.45**	0.39**	0.58**	1	
5. Well-being	0.38**	0.36**	0.52**	0.60**	1

Note: **p < .01

Hypothesis Testing

PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2018) was used to test moderated mediation. Table 3 and Table 4 show regression results for the direct, indirect, and interaction effects.

Direct effects of Remote Work on Engagement and Well-being

Remote work had a **non-significant direct effect** on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 1.45$, $p > .05$) and well-being ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 1.22$, $p > .05$), after controlling for the mediator. These results indicate that the direct influence of remote work on these outcomes is **fully mediated** through work-life balance.

Mediation through Work-Life Balance

Remote work had a significant positive effect on work-life balance ($\beta = 0.52$, $t = 7.62$, $p < .001$). In turn, work-life balance positively predicted both engagement ($\beta = 0.58$, $t = 9.21$, $p < .001$) and well-being ($\beta = 0.54$, $t = 8.76$, $p < .001$), supporting full mediation.

Table 3. Mediation and Moderated Mediation Effects

DV	Predictor	β	t	p	R ²	F
Work-Life Balance	Remote Work	0.52	7.62	<.001	.42	50.24
	Flex Hours	0.21	3.05	.002		
	RW × Flex	0.18	2.44	.015		
Engagement	Work-Life Balance	0.58	9.21	<.001	.49	69.81
	Remote Work (direct)	0.10	1.45	.148		
Well-being	Work-Life Balance	0.54	8.76	<.001	.46	63.14
	Remote Work (direct)	0.08	1.22	.224		

Bootstrapped Indirect Effects (Moderated Mediation)

Bootstrapping results revealed that the indirect effects of remote work on both engagement and well-being through work-life balance were significant. Moreover, the interaction between remote work and flexible work hours significantly predicted work-life balance, supporting moderated mediation.

Table 4. Bootstrap Confidence Intervals for Indirect Effects (N = 5,000)

Path	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI	Significant
RW → WLB → Engagement	0.30	0.05	0.21	0.41	Yes
RW → WLB → Well-being	0.28	0.06	0.17	0.40	Yes

Discussion

The objective of this study was to find out how remote work connects to freelancers' engagement in Punjab and how it affects their well-being, supported by assigning work-life balance as a mediator and flexible work hours as a moderator, based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory. All hypotheses were analyzed using the PROCESS Model 7 and the data indicated which factors and limitations led to favorable results for

workers.

The first and second hypotheses i.e Remote work directly impacts employees' engagement and well-being explained that working from home improves employees' engagement and well-being. While a positive connection was found when looking at the bivariate statistics, the effects disappeared once work-life balance was introduced. Accordingly, direct engagement or well-being is not increased by remote work but rather through a middle factor. The JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) states that job resources can only enhance results when they boost a person's motivation or help them manage their job stresses. Similar to earlier studies, the author suggests that to promote engagement and psychological wellbeing with remote work, it should be experienced through greater personal control and a good work-life balance (Saks, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). It is also in agreement with Duxbury and Halinski (2023), as their study found the positive aspects of working remotely depend on how individuals view their ability to handle several duties.

H3a and H3b suggested that the relationship between work-at-home and engagement/well-being is mediated by work-life balance. It was shown that working remotely helped employees with work-life balance and this improvement predicted that they would be engaged and feel better. The impact on learning was only seen indirectly, making it a fully mediated result. The data confirms that having control and flexibility (autonomy and flexibility) in the workplace effectively supports employees' mental health which then highly impacts performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This is in agreement with Schall (2022), who noted that having a better sense of balance makes remote workers feel more involved and well-being oriented. They also drew attention to how boundary control allows remote work flexibility to boost employees' psychological wellbeing. These results are particularly important for freelancers in Pakistan. Since there are few set rules in freelancing, having the ability to manage boundaries is key. Since freelancers have freedom to schedule their work anytime, they must rely on themselves to ensure they do not exceed their limits.

According to H4, working from anywhere could have a bigger effect on work-life balance if people are given flexible hours for completing their tasks. Therefore, the hypothesis proved to be correct. Combining working from home with flexible hours increased work-life balance more than just allowing for the option to work from home. This is likewise the key point made by Chung and van der Lippe (2022), who found that what matters most for alignment is being able to plan when to work, rather than where to work. If freelancers work when they are most productive or see their family, they are more likely to enjoy their job rather than find it annoying. In this case, flexible hours as a job resource support the JD-R theory by lowering the negative outcomes of potential demands such as conflicts arising from job and social roles or high workloads. Because many freelancers in Pakistan work with various clients and in different time zones, having flexible job schedules provides them with more independence. As it becomes easier for them to be dependent, young people also improve their balance and better engage with the world emotionally.

The group research proves that working remotely isn't enough to boost engagement or quality of life, unless it helps maintain a healthy psychological state. By ensuring work-life

balance, remote work brings positive results and flexible work hours improve it even more. The study offers a new approach to the JD-R theory, providing a model that uses both a mediator and a moderator inside freelance work which was not much studied in previous research (Van Zoonen et al., 2022; Timms et al., 2023). As a result, the study confirms the JD-R theory's applicability in working on one's own time, remotely or via digital solutions. Engagement and well-being are influenced by the flexible values and culture of an organization, as well as by the inner state of employees.

Theoretical, Managerial, and Practical Implications

By studying the freelance context, this research adds to the JD-R theory by discovering that a particular process takes place in this growing job sector. While JD-R was previously considered for strictly structured companies, this research extends its usefulness to workers with non-traditional, digital and independent jobs. Incorporating work-life balance as a psychological mediator and flexible work hours as a contextual moderator, the study completed the motivational pathway JD-R predicts for freelancers.

It also responds to recent requests from scholars to examine the ways in which various aspects explain when and how remote work has significant outcomes (Saks, 2022). Merging remote work, balance and flexibility into a single model offers a flexible approach that can be applied to other gig and knowledge jobs. By conducting this study in South Asia, the researchers confirmed JD-R's applicability to various cultures.

Managers and policy developers can learn a lot from the study. Such groups should realize that simply having remote jobs is not enough. So, if you're successful with remote work, it's often thanks to having flexible hours and clear workplace boundaries. Choosing tools that permit freelancers to arrange their schedules, automate jobs and get guidelines for work-life balance can improve their work performance as well as their mental state. Any organization choosing to hire remote freelancers should set policies that allow them independence and make it possible to work at their own pace.

In addition, platforms could add features that help with well-being to sustain and support their freelance employees. Where fiduciary agencies are not well-developed such actions from online platforms could benefit freelancers working in Pakistan.

Future Direction

There are certain issues with how the study was conducted. Reporting data comes with the potential for some forms of bias, but a design using data from three surveys was chosen to lower the risk of such bias. In addition, although the case is rich in context (freelancers in Pakistan's Punjab), it means the results may not be applied to other work areas or places. The model could also be compared on various platforms, in different countries or in situations where freelancers and full-time employees coexist.

One can also study digital overload, technostress, emotional intelligence and client boundary control, as they could be used as additional moderators. These designs can also deliver additional knowledge about the series of events leading to remote work outcomes and how long these benefits can last.

Conclusion

The research looked at the connections between freelancers working remotely, their engagement at work, well-being and how work-balance and flexible hours influenced these relationships. The research backed by JD-R theory found that remote work only

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helps if it does not negatively affect employees' mental health. It is also worth noting that working on flexible hours helps employees achieve balance which leads to improved employee outcomes.

As freelance employees miss the influence of established firms, the way jobs are structured and the freedom they have become important for their motivation and health. The research provides new ideas for JD-R and outlines ways for improving remote work in digital markets, especially in countries such as Pakistan. Since today's and tomorrow's work is becoming more computerized and flexible, it's crucial to study how humans manage these changes, both to increase productivity and to ensure no one suffers.

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