# DOES AGE IMPACT WORK-LIFE BALANCE? A GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON REMOTE WORK IN POLISH PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on a cross-sectional survey of 165 unit heads in Polish public institutions, this study examines whether age (as a generational cohort) shapes managers' work-life balance under remote work in Polish public institutions. A one-way ANOVA found no cohort differences across Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y. The main finding is that balance depends less on a manager's age and more on how remote work is organized. Practices such as clear rules for availability, support for informal connections online, and sensible workload planning appear more helpful than age-targeted programs. The study contributes evidence that good remote-work design – not generational tailoring – is key to healthier work-life boundaries. Future studies should track changes over time and compare the public and private sectors to address the limitations of this research, including small, younger-cohort representation and the cross-sectional design.

**Keywords:** age, work-life balance, remote work, generational perspective, leadership, Polish public institutions

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of work-life balance has become a critical focus in the evolving workplace, especially as the shift to remote work accelerates. The increasing significance of work-life balance in the modern workforce highlights its impact on employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity, making it a critical area of focus for organizations (Aruldoss et al., 2022; Jakubczak & Gotowska, 2015; Pietrzyk & Szczepańska, 2022). While remote work offers significant benefits such as increased flexibility and the elimination of commutes (Kam et al., 2025; Weikle, 2018), it also presents challenges, including blurred boundaries between work and personal life and the risk of social isolation (Siqueira et al., 2019).

As employees from various generations come together, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, their unique experiences and expectations (Strauss, 1991; Strauss

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& Howe, 1997) can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts if not managed effectively. By recognizing and valuing the distinct needs of each generation, organizations can create cohesive environments that enhance collaboration and drive success in the era of remote work.

Due to technological advances and changing employee expectations, the diversity of generational values and communication styles affects the work-life balance. Each generation owns unique perspectives and expectations (Twenge, 2017) regarding work-life balance, and understanding these dynamics is essential for organizations seeking to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment. Managing a multigenerational workforce presents distinct challenges organizations must navigate to foster a harmonious and productive environment.

Examining how distinct generational cohorts shape expectations and behaviours in the workplace regarding the balance between professional commitments and personal life is vital. In particular, Lynda Gratton (2011) wrote in her book that the evolution of work-life balance from Baby Boomers, who traditionally prioritised job security and loyalty, to Generation X, which introduced a desire for flexibility, and then to Generation Y and Generation Z, who demand an integrated approach to work and personal life, reflecting changing societal norms and technological advancements. Millennials, for example, consider work-life balance a key factor in job selection, willing to change jobs if their expectations are not met, signalling a notable change from the priorities of older generations. In contrast, the rise of Generation Z further complicates the narrative, as this cohort emphasises social responsibility and mental well-being, thus reshaping workplace dynamics and expectations once again.

Over time, the generational composition of the workforce in public institutions has evolved, resulting in increased diversity among employees. Concurrently, the adoption of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, has transformed traditional work practices. Although remote work is not a novel concept, its prevalence increased rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic, compelling many public and private organizations to adapt swiftly. Polish public institutions are among those grappling with the challenges of effectively integrating remote work into their operations. Maintaining a balance between work and personal life is critical for managing time and energy to prevent either aspect from being overlooked. This study examines the impact of remote work on the work-life balance of managers and explores whether generational characteristics influence differences in work-life balance during remote work.

## THE CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### Work-life balance

Work-life balance reflects the ability to harmonize professional responsibilities with personal life priorities (Bella, 2023). This concept involves not only individual perceptions of balance but also how people strive to achieve equilibrium amidst varying circumstances (Clark, 2000). Numerous factors, including work demands (Buruck et al., 2020), demographic shifts (Verma et al., 2024), and technological advancements (Nam, 2014; Drv Mohana Sundari et al., 2024), shape work-life balance. Particularly, work demands related to long working hours, extensive travel, and workload intensity, while demographic shifts are increased workforce participation by women, particularly married women. Technological advancements represent growing opportunities for remote work, virtual office setups, and flexible schedules.

Work-life balance does not require equal emphasis on all responsibilities at all times. Rather, it is a fluid process guided by situational demands. Preferences for balance evolve with personal and professional life stages. For example, a single individual may prioritize career advancement, while a married employee may emphasize family commitments. Retirees and freshers have distinctly different expectations from their work-life dynamic.

Extensive research highlights the complexity of work-life balance and its determinants. First of all,

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it is necessary to mention organizational initiatives. Policies like flexible hours, parental leave, and family care support positively influence employee satisfaction and productivity (Kopelman et al., 2006; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). For instance, Indian companies have focused on gender equality, childcare, health awareness, and stress management (Rajadhyaksha, 2012). Furthermore, employee outcomes are important to be considered when studying work-life balance. Indeed, work-life balance directly impacts job satisfaction, employee behavior, productivity, and attrition/retention rates (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Lobel & Kossek, 1996). Married employees often link work-life balance to overall job satisfaction and performance (Reddy et al., 2010).

The foundational elements of work-life balance are achievement and enjoyment. While achievement is accomplishing desired goals through effort and skill, enjoyment is experiencing satisfaction, pride, and psychological well-being. Both elements must coexist to create meaningful fulfillment; one without the other renders the balance incomplete.

Work-life balance is not a static goal but an evolving journey. It recognizes that work and personal life are complementary rather than competing aspects. Regular reassessment of individual needs and passions is essential to maintain equilibrium as circumstances change over time. Studies emphasize the need for organizations to foster a culture that supports work-life balance. Baral and Bhargava (2011) stated that Indian organizations should implement integrated work-life balance programs to enhance employee commitment and productivity. While Das and Akhilesh (2012) found that work-life balance varies across age, gender, and occupational backgrounds, Valk and Srinivasan (2011) figured out that factors like family influence, professional identity, societal support, and organizational policies significantly shape work-life balance.

Work-life balance is a multifaceted concept influenced by interrelated variables such as salary, age, and personal circumstances. Achieving work-life balance requires creating conducive conditions that address both work and personal life demands. As our

needs and priorities evolve, maintaining a dynamic and flexible approach to work-life balance is key to personal satisfaction and professional success.

## Generational Theory

Generational theory provides valuable insights into the distinct characteristics, preferences, and behaviors of different generational cohorts, with significant implications in fields such as marketing, education, and consumer behavior analysis. This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of generational differences, facilitating targeted approaches that resonate with specific age groups. Generations are defined as age groups shaped by shared geographical, social, and historical contexts, as well as common life experiences (Mannheim, 1952). These shared experiences contribute to the development of collective values, thoughts, and beliefs (Pendergast, 2009). Interest in generations and age-related phenomena, particularly in the workplace, has grown significantly in the past two decades (Rudolph & Zacher, 2022). The increasing focus on generational research is partly attributed to demographic shifts, such as aging populations, and economic transformations that affect labor demand and supply. These changes have resulted in a workforce where representatives of diverse generational cohorts coexist, each bringing unique values, attitudes, and preferences (Hertel & Zacher, 2018).

There are two primary research trends that emerge in the study of generations. Firstly, it can be mentioned Intra-generational Analysis. This explores the shared characteristics and specificities within a single generational cohort. Another trend is Inter-generational comparisons which analyze and explain differences among generational groups.

Generational studies are closely linked to the concept of age, which can be understood in multiple dimensions. For example, chronological age is based on an individual's date of birth. While functional age reflects physical health and cognitive abilities, organizational age is determined by tenure in an organization, life phase age is defined by family

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status or life stage, and subjective age is based on an individual's self-perception of age (Rudolph & Zacher, 2022).

According to the Dimock (2019), generational cohorts include Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. Each cohort exhibits unique values and preferences that influence their interactions and responses to societal, workplace, and marketing dynamics (Schewe & Meredith, 2004). For example, while Baby Boomers value job security and traditional workplace structures, Generation X prioritizes flexibility and time management, Generation Y emphasize meaningful engagement and fluid work-life balance, and Generation Z advocates for innovative work arrangements, emphasizing mental health and digital integration (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

Workplace policies (Smite et al., 2023) and technological advancements (Keshwani & Patel, 2023) have significantly influenced generational perspectives on work-life balance. Younger generations, such as Generation Y and Generation Z, often favor remote work and flexible schedules, reflecting a desire for greater integration between work and personal life. Conversely, older generations, such as Baby Boomers, may prefer conventional workplace structures, leading to potential generational conflicts. These differences present challenges and opportunities for organizations, which must adopt adaptive strategies to accommodate varying expectations. Promoting collaboration among generational groups can foster innovation, improve employee satisfaction, and enhance productivity.

While generational theory provides a useful framework, it is not without criticism. For example, sociologist Norman Ryder argues that oversimplified generational models, such as those proposed by Strauss and Howe, fail to account for variables such as race, socioeconomic status, and regional differences. This critique underscores the importance of integrating a broader range of factors into generational analysis to capture the complexities of societal change.

## Relationship between Generation/Age and Work-life balance

Generational diversity in the workforce necessitates policies that address varying needs and expectations (Roodin & Mendelson, 2013; Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019). Organizations must focus on creating inclusive cultures, supporting mental health, and promoting employee well-being to mitigate generational conflicts (Macovei & Martinescu-Bădălan, 2022). By embracing the strengths of different cohorts, organizations can attract and retain talent across the age spectrum, fostering workplace harmony and driving long-term success (Bailey & Owens, 2020). Generational theory offers a robust framework for understanding the interplay of age, societal change, and workforce dynamics. While each generation brings unique perspectives and priorities, effective management of generational diversity can enhance collaboration and innovation. A deeper understanding of these complexities is crucial for organizations aiming to adapt to evolving workforce trends and maximize their potential in a multigenerational environment.

The composition of the workforce has undergone significant transformation as new generations have entered the labor market, leading to increasingly diverse generational profiles within public institutions. At the same time, the adoption of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, has redefined traditional working methods (Ojha, 2024). While remote work is not a new concept, its rapid proliferation during the COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations, including Polish public institutions, to adapt to this shift at an unprecedented pace. These changes present unique challenges, particularly for public institutions striving to implement remote work effectively. One critical issue emerging from this transformation is the impact of remote work on work-life balance—a fundamental factor in maintaining productivity and well-being. Work-life balance enables individuals to allocate time and energy effectively across professional and personal domains, ensuring neither is compromised.

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Generational differences play a pivotal role in shaping work-life balance preferences and experiences. For example, younger generations may prioritize flexibility and remote work opportunities, while older generations might lean toward traditional work structures. These varying priorities and expectations can influence how employees perceive and manage work-life balance, particularly in the context of remote work. Despite its importance, there is limited understanding of how remote work affects work-life balance across generational cohorts, particularly within public institutions. This gap in knowledge underscores the necessity of investigating the interplay between generational characteristics and work-life balance in the evolving landscape of flexible work methods. This study aims to explore these dynamics by examining the impact of remote work on the work-life balance of managers and investigating whether generational differences influence these outcomes. Insights from this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how organizations can support diverse generational needs, improve work-life balance, and enhance overall organizational performance.

**Methods and materials**

Methodological issues

The study incorporates the work-life balance scale developed by Felstead and Henseke (2017) and is supported by the authors' methodology. The literature presents varying perspectives on the categorization of generational cohorts. Currently, it is widely acknowledged that there are four generations in work life globally. While different sources may use different names, the following classifications are commonly recognized in the literature. They are used by the study: Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y (1981–1995), and Generation Z (1996 and onwards) (Kam, 2019; 2021; 2023b; Mücevher, 2015; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005).

This study aims to assess how remote work affects the work-life balance of managers in Polish public institutions and to determine whether there are differences in work-life balance levels among different generation characteristics during remote work. The following hypotheses were chosen by the study goal.

**Hypothesis 1:** Remote work does not negatively affect the work-life balance of managers in Polish public institutions

**Hypothesis 2**: There is a statistically significant difference in work-life balance levels among different generation characteristics during remote work

Sample characteristics, data collection tools, and techniques

In the study, data were collected using a questionnaire that asked managers to evaluate their work-life balance during remote work. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included questions aimed at determining the participants' demographic characteristics. Among the demographic characteristics, the age section was used to determine which generation the employees belonged. The second section included the work-life balance scale.

The study covers public institutions that met the following conditions were selected for the survey:
– team working as a mode of delivering outcomes,
– innovation potential in services,
– highly able to use remote work,
– a complex range of tasks is provided by the employees.

Due to the substantive scope of the survey, the direct respondent was the head of the units. The head of the units evaluated their remote operations within survey questions. The total general population was 217 units. Ultimately, 165 units (76%) participated in the survey. To sum up, the study sample consists of 165 managers who work in Polish public institutions.

Among the one hundred sixty-five managers, seventy-five are in the 60–78 age range (Baby Boomers), eighty-five are in the 44–59 age range (Generation X), and five are in the 29–43 age range (Generation Y). On the other hand, the marital status of the managers is married, with one hundred forty-six (88.5%), and single, with nineteen (11.5%).

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## Reliability of the research instruments

Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) assesses reliability by comparing the amount of shared variance, or covariance, among the items in an instrument to the overall variance. A reliable instrument will exhibit high covariance among its items relative to the total variance. Cronbach's alpha is equivalent to the average of all possible split-half reliabilities (Collins, 2007). According to Rószkiewicz (2020) and Yıldız and Uzunsakal (2018), an instrument is considered reliable when its Cronbach's alpha value exceeds 0.60. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha value was evaluated to determine the reliability level of the work-life balance scale. The results showed that the reliability level for the work-life balance scale was 0.800. This value demonstrates that the work-life balance scale is sufficiently reliable. On the other hand, exploratory factor analysis was also adopted to identify the structure of the work-life balance scale.

Factor analysis is the overarching term encompassing various multivariate statistical methods that aim to delineate the underlying structure of a data matrix and can assume significant roles in applying diverse statistical techniques beyond their fundamental functions (Alpar, 2011). In order to utilize exploratory factor analysis, Principal Component Analysis (Pearson, 1901) was applied as an estimation method, and the Varimax Rotation Method (Kaiser, 1958) was adopted.

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was examined using the KMO coefficient and the Bartlett Sphericity test (Bartlett, 1954). The KMO value is 0.634. The results of the Bartlett Sphericity test are also significant ($\chi 2 = 209.711$, $p < 0.001$). Upon reviewing the outcomes of both tests, it was deemed appropriate to conduct factor analysis on the data related to the work-life balance scale. In this regard, Principal Component Analysis (Pearson, 1901) was applied as an estimation method, and the Varimax Rotation Method (Kaiser, 1958) was adopted.

A total of 3 expressions related to the one-dimensional construction in the study were subjected to factor analysis (Table 1). The analysis revealed the existence of one dimension with an eigenvalue exceeding 1. This dimension accounts for a total variance of 71.83%. To summarize, the analysis result underlines that the research instrument of the study is statistically reliable.

**Table 1.** Results of the exploratory factor analysis related to work-life balance

| Corresponding items | Work-life balance |
| --- | --- |
| Work-life balance achievement | 0.914 |
| Personal time | 0.877 |
| Time management efficiency | 0.742 |
| Total variance explained | 71.83% |

*Source*: own elaboration.

## Research results

The study's hypotheses will be evaluated in sequence. The measurement of work-life balance consists of items related to work-life balance achievement, personal time, and time management efficiency. First, the dataset characteristics were analyzed using skewness and kurtosis to evaluate the data adequately. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) and George (2011) indicate that if skewness and kurtosis's results are between +1.5 and -1.5, it can be concluded that data has normally been distributed.

Table 2 shows that the skewness and kurtosis scores of the related variables are between +1.5 and -1.5. Therefore, parametric analyses will be adopted.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of skewness and kurtosis's scores

| Corresponding item | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Work-life balance achievement | 0.10 | -1.18 |
| Personal time | 0.06 | -1.36 |
| Time management efficiency | 0.43 | -0.96 |
| **Work-life balance** | **0.08** | **-0.90** |

*Source*: own elaboration.

**Table 3.** Evaluation of work-life balance

| Corresponding items | Mean | Std dev. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Work-life balance achievement | 2.38 (47.6%) | 1.71 |
| Personal time | 2.50 (50.0%) | 1.79 |
| Time management efficiency | 1.93 (38.6%) | 1.66 |
| **Work-life balance** | **2.27 (45.4%)** | **1.43** |

*Source*: own elaboration, n=165.

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**Table 4.** The relationships between work-life balance and generations Y, X and Baby Boomers characteristics-one way ANOVA test analysis results

| Generation type | N | Mean | SD | Source of variance | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Generation Y | 5 | 2.06 | 2.01 | Between groups | 3.27 | 2 | 1.63 | 0.80 | 0.45 |
| Generation X | 85 | 2.14 | 1.40 | Within groups | 332.04 | 162 | 2.05 | | |
| Baby Boomers | 75 | 2.42 | 1.42 | - | - | - | - | | |
| Total | 165 | 2.27 | 1.43 | - | - | - | - | | |

Note: The F-statistic and corresponding p-values remain consistent across all generational cohorts
*Source:* own elaboration.

Table 3 displays the mean values for the evaluation of hypothesis 1.

According to the findings, the mean work-life balance score is 2.27 (45.4%) out of 5.00 (100%). This score indicates that remote work does not negatively affect the work-life balance of managers in Polish public institutions. In other words, the results show that remote work neither negatively impacts nor positively contributes to managers' work-life balance. As a result, hypothesis 1, which states that remote work does not negatively affect the work-life balance of managers in Polish public institutions, has been confirmed. Table 4 below evaluates hypothesis 2.

The relationships between *work-life balance* and the characteristics of Generation Y, X, and Baby Boomers were subsequently examined with a one-way ANOVA test. The results are displayed in Table 4.

When the data obtained were examined, it was concluded that there is no significant difference in *work-life balance* levels regarding Generations Y, X, and Baby Boomers' characteristics (F=0.80, p>0.05).

As a result, there is no basis to support hypothesis 2, which states that there is a statistically significant difference in work-life balance levels among different generation characteristics during remote work.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a result, this study evaluated the impact of remote work on managers' work-life balance and examines whether generational differences influence these outcomes. The findings indicate that remote work neither significantly enhances nor diminishes managers' work-life balance. In other words, despite expectations, remote work does not provide a notable advantage in improving managers' ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities. A key factor behind this result may be the reduction in social interactions during remote work. Moving forward, organizations must adopt proactive strategies to foster socialization in remote environments. Public institutions, in particular, should prioritize initiatives that enhance virtual engagement and managerial networking to mitigate potential isolation in remote work settings.

Secondly, generational theory suggests that individuals born and raised in different historical, social, cultural, and political contexts develop distinct values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, which in turn influence workplace behavior (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lepeyko & Blyznyuk, 2016). Based on this premise, it would be expected that work-life balance experiences differ across generations in remote work settings. However, the study results challenge this assumption, revealing no statistically significant differences in work-life balance between Generation X, Generation Y, and Baby Boomers (Kam, 2019; 2023b; Kam & Trippner-Hrabi; 2021). This unexpected outcome suggests that factors beyond generational characteristics – such as organizational policies, job roles, and personal adaptability – may play a more substantial role in shaping work-life balance in remote environments. Future research should explore whether emerging generations, such as Generation Z, exhibit different patterns and how evolving workplace technologies and cultural shifts may influence generational perspectives on remote work.

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While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, generational research often lacks a robust scientific foundation, with classifications frequently based on broad generalizations rather than nuanced empirical distinctions. Second, existing generational frameworks may not fully capture the complexities of real-world workforce dynamics. Finally, economic, cultural, and political conditions during the study period may have exerted similar influences on individuals across different generations, potentially masking underlying differences.

Looking ahead, future studies should assess the long-term challenges of remote work on work-life balance within public institutions and propose innovative strategies for addressing these issues. Additionally, expanding research to compare the private and public sectors using similar methodologies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of remote work's implications across different organizational contexts. As workforce structures continue to evolve, future studies should also examine how technological advancements, shifting job expectations, and changing social norms shape the work-life balance experiences of emerging generational cohorts.

### Acknowledgment

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