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Student Name: Lavanya Boda
Student ID: X23319097
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Lecturer: Julius Nyiawung
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The Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Work-Life Balance in Irish IT Companies

Abstract

This research explores how flexible work arrangements (FWAs) affect work-life balance (WLB) among IT employees in Ireland, contributing to a notable gap in knowledge on this subject. A cross-sectional, quantitative survey of 81 employees examined whether there were differences regarding perceptions of FWAs, WLB, gender and parental status. The results demonstrated a positive association between supportive FWAs and WLB, and that remote workers reported significantly higher WLB levels compared to hybrid workers. Gender and parental status were not found to moderate perceptions. The findings provide important information on how organisational culture, trust, and choice can enhance the benefits provided by FWAs while reducing risks such as work-home blur.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

Balancing work and personal life has become one of the most studied as well as critical issues pertaining to organizational behavior as well as human resource management and other disciplines in social sciences (Rashmi and Kataria, 2022). Broadly understood, it is actually the balance that a person tries to maintain between the time and effort allocated to work responsibilities and that which is dedicated to non-work aspects of life, such as family, leisure, and personal development (Sen and Hooja, 2018; Haider and Azmi, 2019). Thus, the goal of work-life balance is not solely an individual goal for employees, but one which also has important implications for organizations. Much literature is available to demonstrate that a good work-life balance tends to result in many positive outcomes that are otherwise important to the organization, such as increased job satisfaction, citizenship behavior at work, and better overall performance (Haider and Azmi, 2019; Harikaran and Thevanes, 2018). However, failure to achieve this balance has been shown to lead to adverse conditions including increased intentions of turnover and inter-role conflict, in which demands from one role make it difficult to meet the demands of another (Chenshu et al., 2024; Adams et al., 2022).

The multiple definitions and measurements of work-life balance render understanding complex so that various models and frameworks are employed by researchers to unpack the dimensions of work-life balance (Joshi, 2024; Alameddine et al., 2023). While some researchers defined the term as work-life balance through minimizing conflict between work and family domains, others conceptualized it as achieving enrichment and fulfillment within different life roles (Xu and Kelliher, 2024). Such complexity is also repeated in the reviews of literature with systematic analysis, which are enough on their own to show how huge the research on this subject has been across various industries and contexts (Chandran and Abukhalifeh, 2021; Rashmi and Kataria, 2022; Wong et al., 2023). Such reviews readily confirm that it is indeed one of the central constructs to employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Flexibility in work arrangements is one of the ways organizations can gain an increasingly popular flexibility in an organization because of flexible work arrangements (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019). Flexible work arrangement also comprises a broad range of work practices that provide better control for employees regarding timing, duration, and location of work (Ramos et al., 2024). Flexible work arrangement can include but is not limited to teleworking or remote work, flexible hours (flextime), compressed workweek, and part-time roles (Che Shaari and Amirul, 2020). Such policies are mostly implemented with a view to improving personal and professional commitments of employees with their overall quality of life and productivity (Soga et al., 2022). Recent developments include a four-day workweek, the most noteworthy investigation into how companies have experimented with altering the structure around working time for people management towards sustainability (Araújo et al., 2024).

The flexible work arrangement and employee outcome relationship have been under research for quite some time. Research shows that remote working, one of the major types of flexible work, can greatly influence employee performance and well-being, although such influences may be various (Ferrara et al., 2022). COVID-19 became a worldwide catalyst for rapidly and massively adopting remote work and fundamentally changing traditional work structures

(Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). This global experiment brought the antecedents and outcomes of work-life balance while working from home into sharp focus, revealing benefits like increased autonomy and challenges like working and home life boundaries getting blurred (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022; Herrera et al., 2022). Some research indeed warns that flexible working practices are not a cure-all, tending to create new complexities and possible downsides that should be managed cautiously (Soga et al., 2022).

For this inquiry, the Information Technology (IT) sector is a highly relevant context. This is a knowledge-intensive industry that operates in a highly technology-dependent way, thus being a natural front-runner in the adoption of flexible work arrangements (Junior et al., 2021). The very nature of work in the IT industry is characterized by project deadlines and long working hours, with a culture of high performance which places strain on the employee in exercising work-life balance. The culture of the technology-based organizations can be seen as supporting service innovation and creating a strong link between the enabling of work-life balance and organizational culture (Junior et al., 2021). Thus, for talent retention and sustainable performance, it is fundamental to understand how flexible work policies operate within this environment.

While the debate surrounding work-life balance and flexible work is global, their application and effect are subjected to national and cultural contexts. Similarly, legal frameworks regulating employment-e.g., those in the European nations like Czech Republic or England-are also instrumental in shaping the availability and governing of flexible-working options (Štěpánková, 2025). It intimates the need for research that is not only sector-specific but geographically so. With many multinationals and an upsurging domestic technology scene, Ireland hosts a lively and globally significant IT industry. This industry provides a mainstay to the Irish economy with considerable input into employment and national output.

Despite the economic importance of the IT industry in Ireland, along with the research and academic scholarship into work-life balance of the country's other industries like agriculture (Hogan et al., 2023), there is a notable research gap in the intersection of flexible work arrangements and work-life balance seen through the lens of the Irish IT context. General findings of hospitality (Chandran and Abukhalifeh, 2021), public sector (Oktosatrio and Liu, 2019), or healthcare (Rao and Shailashri, 2021) may not readily translate to the operational realities, work culture, and employee demographics unique to the Irish IT setting. This study thereby sits well to address this gap by rendering empirical data from a vital yet under-researched segment of the Irish economy. It endeavors to be built on the far-reaching generalizations made in the international literature (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019; Soga et al., 2022) and applies these in a particular national and industrial context.

1.2 Problem Statement

The contemporary job environment is undergoing a monumental change, putting increasing emphasis on employees' well-being and how work integrates with other life domains (Wong et al., 2023). Work-life-balance is considered a linchpin in this emergent paradigm, and substantial studies have linked it positively with both employee and organizational outcomes (Harikaran and Thevanes, 2018; Opatrná and Prochazka, 2023). In tandem, there has been an overwhelming uptake of flexibility in work arrangements as one key strategy towards the maintenance of this balance: a trend whose implementation was accelerated most vigorously by the global COVID-19 pandemic (Ramos et al., 2024; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The

literature provides sound theoretical reasoning joining these two concepts: that granting employees more control over work scheduling and location can reduce work-family conflict and enhance well-being (Herrera et al., 2022; Ferrara et al., 2022).

Amidst the plethora of general studies, a glaring issue remains that of a lack of context-specific quantitative evidence to guide policy and practice in different industrial and national settings. Most literature reviews, though vast, call for more specific empirical studies since findings from one sector are not necessarily transferable to another (Chandran and Abukhalifeh, 2021; Rao and Shailashri, 2021). For example, issues and opportunities concerning work-life balance for women in healthcare (Rao and Shailashri, 2021) or public sector employees (Oktosatrio and Liu, 2019) differ enormously compared to ones related to work-life balance for employees in a fast-paced, technology-driven work environment like the IT industry. The IT industry has its own culture, project-based work patterns, and expectations of high availability from its workforce—therefore creating its peculiar pressures regarding work-life balance (Junior et al., 2021).

A major gap in knowledge addressed by the central theme of this thesis is the limited empirical study of flexible work arrangements' influence on work-life balance in the Irish IT industry. Notwithstanding this lack of quantitative academic research on the experiences of employees related to modern work practices, Ireland possesses a capital of the global technology industry. While work-life bodies have been discussed in the Irish context in other sectors, e.g. pasture-based dairy farming (Hogan et al., 2023), this has not been relevant to Ireland's most impact knowledge-based industry. This absence of directed research poses several consequential issues.

Without concrete data, Irish IT organizations must rely on generalized findings from international literature reports and anecdotal inputs for the design and execution of their flexible work policies. In doing so, they run the risk of applying strategies that might prove unsuitable or counterproductive. For example, implementing a particular policy that is considered a success in a contrasting cultural context and industry could cause aggravation of issues like work intensification or 'always being on' culture within the very industry that the policies seek to implement (Soga et al., 2022).

Second, the lack of research means there is no person who understands the finer influences of the different flexible work. It is not enough to know flexible work per se influences; it is important to know whether this specific arrangement—for example, fully remote as opposed to hybrid or with flexible hours—disproportionately influences work-life balance in this context. Most of the inquiry spaces regarding gender-wise effects exist with the assumption that flexible work arrangement affects men and women differently, especially parents, in the Irish IT context (Gregersen, n.d.; Pareek, 2024; Vasumathi, 2018).

Additionally, this lack of knowledge restrains the ability of policymakers and interest groups in Ireland to put forward recommendations and regulations based on scientific evidence. Understanding the specific implications of flexible working within an important sector like IT is necessary to promote sustainable employment practices, enhance employee well-being on a national scale, and sustain the appeal of Ireland to technology talent. Ignoring these dynamics may abruptly culminate in serious repercussions in terms of employee burnout, disengagement, and turnover, which are costly for individual firms as well as the entire economy (Chenshu et al., 2024).

To that end, the problem facing in a critical and severe lack of empirical data and quantitative studies that examine the link between perceived work-life balance of employees in Irish IT companies and the various flexible work arrangements shall be undertaken by this study. For this purpose, it aims to generate data and carry out analysis to address this important and specific gap in the literature.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To identify the prevalence and specific types of flexible work arrangements currently implemented within Irish IT companies.
- To quantitatively assess the level of work-life balance experienced by employees working in the Irish IT sector.
- To statistically analyse the relationship between the availability and use of different flexible work arrangements and the reported work-life balance of employees.
- To examine whether demographic variables, such as gender and parental status, moderate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance outcomes among employees in Irish IT companies.

1.4 Research Questions

Flowing from the research objectives, this thesis seeks to answer the following primary and secondary research questions:

Primary Research Question:

- What is the impact of flexible work arrangements on the work-life balance of employees in Irish IT companies?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. What are the most common flexible work arrangements offered to and utilised by employees in the Irish IT sector?
2. What is the current state of work-life balance among employees in the Irish IT industry?
3. Is there a significant statistical relationship between specific types of flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote work, hybrid models, flextime) and levels of employee work-life balance?
4. To what extent do demographic factors, specifically gender and parental status, influence the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance within this context?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive and critical review of the existing academic literature relevant to the core constructs of this study, which are work-life balance and flexible work arrangements. The primary purpose of this review is to establish the theoretical and empirical foundations upon which this research is built, to contextualise the research problem, and to justify the development of specific, testable hypotheses. The chapter is structured to move from broad conceptual discussions to a more focused analysis of the specific research area. It begins by thoroughly conceptualising work-life balance, exploring its various definitions, key theoretical underpinnings, and the significant challenges associated with its measurement in empirical research. Following this, the chapter examines the well-documented outcomes of work-life balance, detailing its profound significance for individual employees, their families, and the performance and sustainability of their employing organisations.

The review then shifts its focus to flexible work arrangements, providing a detailed overview of their different forms, from teleworking and flextime to compressed workweeks, and tracing their evolution from a peripheral benefit to a central element of modern workplace strategy. The central and most substantial section of this chapter critically analyses the nexus between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance. It synthesises a wide body of evidence, meticulously detailing both the positive synergies, such as increased autonomy and reduced conflict, and the potential negative consequences, including the erosion of work-home boundaries and the risk of work intensification. Finally, the review considers key contextual factors that are known to shape this complex relationship, with a specific focus on industry-specific dynamics within the Information Technology sector, the unique national context of Ireland, and the critical moderating influence of demographic variables like gender and parental status. By systematically mapping the existing body of knowledge and identifying critical gaps in current understanding, this chapter culminates in the development of clear, testable hypotheses that will guide the quantitative investigation of this thesis.

2.1 Conceptualising Work-Life Balance

Throughout the decades, work-life balance has emerged as one of the most prominent axes of research in organizational behavior, human resource management, and social psychology. Such changes in the academic landscape reflect larger changes in the society such as increasing dual-income families, the advent of communication technologies that make boundaries between work and home very vague, and the growing cultural demand for well-being, both holistically and personally in people's lives (Rashmi and Kataria, 2022). In simplest terms, work-life balance denotes the satisfactory degree of involvement or fit that an individual develops between their different life roles (Haider and Azmi, 2019). It is often described as a balance, which may not mean an equal division of time but rather a subjective condition under which an individual deals with his paid work for a personal life that includes family, relationships, leisure activities, and self-care (Sen and Hooja, 2018; Thiyyagura et al., 2020). The definition of work-life balance has evolved quite significantly from a simplistic division of time and conflict avoidance to a highly sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the psychological and emotional engagement that individuals have across different life domains (Xu and Kelliher, 2024).

Significant inroads into theorizing about this complex construct are made in the academic literature through the exposition of several important but basic theoretical frameworks that are critical for the understanding of the work-life balance phenomena. The most fundamental and long-standing of these is Role Theory, suggesting that people take on various roles in society, such as an employee, parent, spouse, and so forth within their community. Each of the roles is endowed with its respective expectations and behavioural norms. A conflict arises when people cannot meet the combinations of their various roles with the required resources (Adams et al., 2022). Such inter-role conflict is considered to be one of the prime causes of work-life imbalance. Types of inter-role conflict can be based on time (e.g., more time is spent on work, making it impossible to attend a family event), strain (e.g., stress brought about by work affects one's mood at home), or behaviours (e.g. assertive behaviour that is required at work is inappropriate in a family setting). A systematic review targeting inter-role conflict has validated that there is strong negative correlation for positive work-life balance outcomes, entrenching it as a key source of distress for employees (Adams et al., 2022).

A further influential framework is Border Theory, postulating that people erect and maintain psychological, temporal, and physical borders around the domains of work and home. The characteristics of such borders influence flexibility in their movement between roles and how much "spilling over" happens from one domain into another (Herrera et al., 2022). For instance, a person may not check work emails after 5:00 PM, creating a barrier or boundary after hours. In contrast, an individual with weak, permeable barriers can seamlessly slip between work task performance and family interactions through a given day. Flexible work arrangements such as remote work have a direct influence on the nature of these boundaries, often making them more permeable and requiring more active self-management on the part of the employee to prevent unwanted spillover (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Thus, good management of these borders becomes a critical skill in the achievement of work-life balance under flexible work conditions.

Recent and modern conceptions of the work-life interface are indeed less rigid than the previous models that only focused on providing evidence of conflict while separating roles. However, it is also rich in the ideas of enrichment and integration. For example, the Work-Life Enrichment viewpoint contends that impacts across a role are positive in improving the quality of life and performance in that particular role (Xu and Kelliher, 2024); this stands in direct contrast to the concept of negative spillover into other roles. Skills at negotiating and resolving conflicts learned at work can, on one side, improve relationships within the family; on another side, patience and empathy learned as a parent may turn someone into a more effective manager. This paradigm shifts the debate from one of simply minimising negative engagement between life domains to one of actively promoting positive, synergistic relationships between them (Joshi, 2024). Such an integrative view is particularly valid when speaking about flexible work-adjusting and adding opportunities for individuals to realize and enhance their other life roles.

This conceptual complexity is mirrored in equally great empirical challenges concerning the measurement regarding work-life balance. Indeed, "balance" can be defined subjectively, and thus could vary quite differently from person to person-and could relate to stage in life, values, or even personal situation (M. Bozzon et al., n.d.). A scoping review focusing on health sectors has underlined how much heterogeneity exists in the operationalization and measurement of work-life balance. Notably, it showed that many researchers rely on

single-item scales or fail to use psychometrically validated instruments (Alameddine et al., 2023). In terms of a comprehensive operationalization of the construct, researchers frequently employ multi-dimensional scales that assess the distinct facets of the work-life interface. These usually refer to the measures of work interference by personal life (WIPL) and personal life interference with work (PLIW), as well as the various forms of conflict delineated by Role Theory (Wong et al., 2023). Given this complexity, systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis have almost become compulsory tools for synthesizing the very vast and varied body of research on that theme, while clarifying trends, definitions, and measures within different fields (Rashmi and Kataria, 2022; Wong et al., 2023).

2.2 The Outcomes of Work-Life Balance

The extensive body of academic and practitioner literature on work-life balance consistently and emphatically demonstrates its profound importance. The achievement of a healthy work-life balance is linked to a wide array of positive outcomes for individual employees, their families, their employing organisations, and society at large. The pursuit of work-life balance is therefore not merely a lifestyle preference for individuals but has become a critical factor in developing sustainable employment practices and achieving long-term organisational health and success (Opatrná and Prochazka, 2023). These outcomes can be broadly categorised into those affecting the individual and those affecting the organisation.

For the individual employee, a positive state of work-life balance is strongly associated with numerous and significant benefits to their professional and personal lives. One of the most frequently cited and robustly supported outcomes is a higher level of job satisfaction (Haider and Azmi, 2019). When employees feel that they can successfully meet their personal and professional responsibilities without experiencing undue conflict or strain, their overall attitude toward and satisfaction with their job tends to improve significantly. Furthermore, an effective work-life balance is a crucial determinant of physical and mental health. The literature consistently links good work-life balance to reduced levels of perceived stress, lower incidence of burnout, fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety, and enhanced overall psychological well-being (Ferrara et al., 2022). Conversely, a persistent state of work-life imbalance, which is often characterised by high levels of inter-role conflict, is a significant predictor of numerous negative health and psychological outcomes, including fatigue, sleep disturbances, and other stress-related ailments (Adams et al., 2022).

From the organisational perspective, actively fostering employee work-life balance is no longer seen as a benevolent extra but as a core strategic imperative with tangible and measurable benefits. A workforce that generally experiences good work-life balance tends to exhibit higher levels of organisational commitment and employee engagement. This positive psychological state often translates into improved **Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)**, a concept that refers to the voluntary and discretionary actions by employees that are not part of their formal job requirements but which contribute to the effective functioning and positive social environment of the organisation (Harikaran and Thevanes, 2018). Employees with better balance are more likely to go above and beyond their prescribed duties, for example, by helping colleagues, speaking positively about the company, and showing greater initiative.

Furthermore, there is a clear and compelling business case for promoting work-life balance that is directly related to talent management and overall organisational performance. In a

competitive labour market, organisations that have a reputation for supporting employee work-life balance are significantly better positioned to attract and, crucially, to retain highly skilled employees. A substantial body of research provides strong evidence that poor work-life balance is a key driver of employee turnover intentions (Chenshu et al., 2024). High employee turnover is extremely costly for organisations, encompassing direct expenses related to recruitment, hiring, and training new staff, as well as indirect costs such as the loss of valuable institutional knowledge and disruptions to team productivity. By implementing and promoting policies that genuinely support employee balance, companies can mitigate these costs and cultivate a more stable, experienced, and motivated workforce.

There is also a growing body of evidence that suggests a direct link between work-life balance policies and core organisational performance metrics, including financial performance. A recent scoping review on this topic found evidence of a positive, albeit complex, relationship between the implementation of supportive work-life balance policies and a firm's bottom-line financial performance (Opatrná and Prochazka, 2023). The causal mechanisms for this are likely mediated by factors such as improved employee productivity, reduced absenteeism, and enhanced innovation. For example, especially in knowledge-intensive firms, for example those that dominate technology sectors, an organisational culture that works to enable and promote work-life balance is seen as a significant enabler of service innovation-related creativity and collaboration (Junior et al., 2021). As such, the implications of achieving or not achieving work-life balance are consequential, complex and profound to all parties involved.

2.3 Understanding Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work is a broad employer-provided category of arrangements and informal policies that give employees more discretion and control about where, when, and for how long they perform their work-associated duties (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019). FWAs measure a big deviation from the usual, rigid model of a fixed nine-to-five workday conducted at a certain central office location. They stem from a variety of interrelated forces that involve increasing technological advances allowing work-from-anywhere capabilities, revolutionary changes in work-force demographics such as rising dual-career couples, and more employee desire to control their work-life balance (Ramos et al., 2024).

The literature, that is both academic and practitioner, features the popular and specific types of FWAs with specific consequences for employees and organisations. Teleworking or sometimes called as remote work or telecommuting is probably the most popularly associated flexible spatial work. This refers to employees doing their major job functions from remote office places, usually from their homes, but potentially co-working spaces or other such remote locations (Herrera et al., 2022). Flextime, flexible working hours, is a type of temporal flexibility in which employees are permitted to adjust their starting and ending hours within specified limitations. In most cases, it does include a core period of time during which all employees are to be present but is flexible outside the core. Another type of temporal flexibility includes compressed workweeks, where an employee shall be working on the regular number of hours weekly but fewer than the usual five weekdays. An example that many would be familiar with is the completion of a 40-hour week in four 10-hour days, which provides a three-day weekend. Such a scope of a four-day workweek interest recently seen across the globe is an extension of this idea, with studies focused on its effect on

sustainable people management and productivity (Araújo et al., 2024). Other forms of such arrangements include part-time work and job sharing, focusing on decreasing the overall number of hours worked to carry flexibility on workload (Che Shaari and Amirul, 2020).

The impact of the recent global COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented catalyst forcing through a massive and abrupt transition to remote and hybrid work models on a global scale. Among many, this unplanned experiment will forever change the landscape of work for industries, while normalising previously niche practices, all contributing to the rapid acceleration of flexible work (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). This has changed the discussion of FWAs from 'if' to 'how' in how best they should be instituted and managed into the future.

FWAs are more and more influenced by primary national legal and regulatory frameworks, which differ among countries. For instance, many European countries such as the Czech Republic and England have specific legal provisions addressing work-life balance issues providing for a "right to request" flexible working by qualifying employees. These laws shape how response to employee requests must be done by organisations and formalise the process for establishing such arrangements (Štěpánková, 2025). Likewise, many jurisdictions around the world are hotly debating and affectively moving along with the new legislation at this very moment regarding the regulation of FWAs by the private sector, thus reflecting this trend of formalisation of these practices-turned-discretionary perks into standard and expected facets of modern employment relations (Che Shaari and Amirul, 2020).

Such ongoing legal and regulatory formalisation demonstrates the growing acceptance of FWAs as among the prime strategic toolkits for human resource management in the 21st century.

2.4 The Nexus: Flexible Work and Work-Life Balance

The theoretical connection between providing flexible work arrangements and achieving work-life balance is straightforward conceptually and has simple intuitive appeal. The basic idea is that if employees are given more control and autonomy in how and where they carry out their work, employers are providing employees with the opportunity to more effectively manage the potentially competing demands of their work and life responsibilities. This increased employee agency is presumed to reduce the instances of inter-role conflict, a primary source of imbalance, thereby improving overall work-life balance (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019). A substantial and growing body of empirical research provides strong support for this positive association. A comprehensive, evidence-based systematic review of the impacts of remote working found that, when implemented well, it can significantly enhance employee well-being by reducing or eliminating stressful and time-consuming commutes, increasing the sense of perceived autonomy, and allowing for a better and more fluid integration of work with family responsibilities and personal errands (Ferrara et al., 2022). This greater control over one's daily schedule and physical environment is widely considered a primary mechanism through which FWAs are expected to foster a better state of balance for employees (Herrera et al., 2022).

However, the relationship between FWAs and work-life balance is not universally positive, and the reality is far more complex than the simple theoretical model suggests. A significant stream of critical research has sought to "unmask the other face of flexible working practices," revealing a range of potential downsides and unintended negative consequences

that can emerge from their implementation (Soga et al., 2022). One of the most significant and frequently documented challenges, particularly associated with extensive remote work, is the **blurring of boundaries** between the domains of work and home life. When the physical and temporal separation of the workplace is removed, work can more easily spill over into personal time. Such an "always on" culture predisposes one to feel compelled, either implicitly or explicitly, to always be there, responding to e-mails and messages at any hour of the day and night (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The erosion of these protective boundaries has the ironic consequence of intensifying work pressure, building psychological strain and chronic stress, which is counterproductive to what the flexible arrangement intended-work-life balance (Soga et al., 2022).

Some possible disadvantages which may accompany flexible work arrangements are identified in the literature as well. Employees working from home may feel some professional and social isolation, missing out on informal water-cooler conversations, spontaneous collaboration, and the camaraderie that would be alive in a co-working office environment. This may negatively affect team bonding; conversely, it may diminish informal learning and mentoring opportunities that are fundamental for career development. There also are serious concerns about possible career penalties, sometimes referred to as flexibility stigma, whereby employees who are less visible to management might be overlooked, subconsciously or consciously, for promotions, assignments, or opportunities to develop. Such perception may then tend to arise among others that those working flexibly are less committed or productive even as their outputs compare well or are even better than those of their more visible opponents.

Thus, whether FWAs are effective in fostering putative work-life balance is not, in and of itself, guaranteed by the policy. It depends highly on a wide variety of organizational and individual factors. Paramount here is the existence of an organizational culture that supports trust in lieu of presenteeism and measures performance in tangible outputs rather than hours spent at the desk. The quality of management is also key; managers must be trained to lead distributed teams, communicate effectively, and respect employees' personal time and boundaries. In this absence of a conducive ecosystem, the potential benefits of flexibility can be easily eclipsed by its pitfalls (Junior et al., 2021). Hence, accordingly, literature gives a complex and ambivalent picture, suggesting that while FWAs promise to provide instruments for improving work-life balance, implementation means significant risk that should be actively and consciously managed through involvement from both organizations and employees (Soga et al., 2022).

2.5 Contextual Factors and Moderating Variables

So, the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance is not static but, rather, a highly contingent relationship subject to the influence and moderation of several contextual factors. These contextual factors can be external and include the specific industry of work, the national and local cultural and legal environment, as well as factors of a more demographic nature, which can influence how FWA policies are experienced and their resultant impact on the balance experienced by the individual.

The IT industry offers a particularly relevant and significant context for this study. As a thoroughly knowledge-intensive industry, the IT sector is one of the first in developing new technologies and new work practices utilizing the full range of FWAs available to be offered

(Junior et al., 2021). Much of the work in IT is project-based and often involves immense pressure to work to tight deadlines, creating significant cyclical pressure on employees to achieve work-life balance. The work itself, however, is highly portable and digitized, thus very suitable for remote or flexible arrangements. The workplace culture in many IT firms purportedly values innovation, results, and employee autonomy, and where, arguably, such a culture acts as a facilitator in the effective implementation of FWAs, moving away from the traditional command-and-control management style (Junior et al., 2021). Thus, in this scenario, modern work policies have created high demands with an equal measure of flexibility; consequently, having a study of this nature focused on the IT industry will be critically important in analyzing the nuanced effects and pragmatic realities brought forth by the introduction of such work policies. The **national context of Ireland** is also a critical variable. Ireland has successfully positioned itself as a major global technology hub, hosting the European headquarters of numerous multinational technology corporations alongside a thriving domestic tech scene. The IT sector is a vital pillar of the modern Irish economy. Despite this, there is a notable and surprising absence of specific academic research that quantitatively investigates work-life balance within this crucial sector. While some studies have examined work-life dynamics in very different Irish contexts, such as in the agriculture sector (Hogan et al., 2023), the findings from such disparate fields are not generalisable. The operational realities, work cultures, and employee demographics of pasture-based dairy farming are fundamentally different from those in a high-tech, office-based, multinational IT company. Therefore, relying on general findings from international studies or from other domestic sectors, like hospitality (Chandran and Abukhalifeh, 2021) or healthcare (Rao and Shailashri, 2021), is insufficient and potentially misleading for developing evidence-based policy in the Irish IT industry.

Perhaps most importantly, **individual demographic characteristics** are known to act as powerful moderators in the relationship between FWAs and work-life balance. **Gender** is consistently identified as a key moderating variable. A substantial and persistent body of sociological and organisational literature suggests that, despite progress in gender equality, women on average continue to bear a disproportionate share of domestic labour and caregiving responsibilities (Vasumathi, 2018). For many women, FWAs can be a critical and indispensable tool for managing this "double burden," allowing them to remain in the workforce while meeting family obligations. However, this can also have a downside, potentially reinforcing traditional gender roles and leading to career penalties if flexible working is perceived as a "mommy track" (Pareek, 2024). Research specifically on the gendered impacts of remote work indicates that women and men may experience its effects on their work-life balance quite differently, with women sometimes reporting higher levels of conflict due to the simultaneous presence of work and home demands (Gegersen, n.d.).

Likewise, parental status is an important context. For employees with dependent children, flexible working arrangements can be immensely helpful to accommodate childcare, school activities, and family needs. Especially for FWAs that allow greater autonomy, FWA variability reinforces autonomy that can reduce time-based or strain-based conflict between work and family roles (Herrera et al., 2022). However, working from home also constrains parental experiences & adds new, intense challenges; in this instance where the boundaries between employee and caregiver became completely permeable, which led to frequent disruptions, attention fragmentation, & stress, as was well-articulated during the reports

during the school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Thus, it is absolutely imperative that any rigorous investigation of this topic examines how these consequential demographic factors interact with flexible work policies to impact final work-life balance outcomes for different segments of the workforce.

2.6 Research Gap and Hypotheses Development

This detailed literature review generates multiple important and corroborating points. First, work-life balance is a complex, multi-faceted, and subjective construct that is absolutely indispensable for both individual employee well-being and ultimately subsequent success of the organisation at large (Rashmi and Kataria, 2022; Harikaran and Thevanes, 2018). Second, flexible work arrangements have emerged as a primary organisational strategy for helping employees to achieve a better work-life balance, but their effects are far from simple, encompassing a complex interplay of both positive and negative potential outcomes (Ferrara et al., 2022; Soga et al., 2022). Third, and crucially, the relationship between FWAs and work-life balance is highly context-dependent, and is significantly influenced by the specific industry, the national setting, and the demographic characteristics of the employees themselves (Junior et al., 2021; Vasumathi, 2018).

Despite the extensive global research on these topics, this review has identified a clear and significant research gap. There is a distinct lack of specific, quantitative empirical research that systematically examines the impact of different flexible work arrangements on the perceived work-life balance of employees working within the important and unique context of the Irish Information Technology sector. While the theoretical link between the core constructs is well-established in the general literature, its practical manifestation, its strength, and its moderators within this crucial segment of the Irish economy remain largely unexplored and understood only anecdotally. This study is therefore designed specifically to fill this identified gap in the literature. Based on the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings discussed throughout this review, the following hypotheses are proposed for quantitative testing:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The availability of flexible work arrangements is positively associated with higher levels of perceived work-life balance among employees in Irish IT companies.

This primary hypothesis is based on the dominant theoretical proposition in the literature that the increased autonomy and control afforded by FWAs enable employees to better manage their life domains, leading to reduced inter-role conflict and an improved sense of balance (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019; Ferrara et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Employees in Irish IT companies will have varying work-life balance depending on the flexible forms of work arrangements adopted, namely fully remote, hybrid, and flextime.

This is in view of existing literature supporting different FWA work-life balance scenarios, indicating that not all FWAs are equal. The complete boundarylessness that may sometimes characterize fully remote work may present differing challenges on one side and benefits on the other as compared with either the more highly structured hybrid model or a simple flextime arrangement (Soga et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Gender will moderate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance so that the positive association will be stronger for female employees than for male employees in Irish IT companies.

Rationale: This, of course, stems from a long body of literature recognizing the societal trend of the female population shouldering a very large share of domestic and care-giving responsibilities, stressing that controls offered through FWAs would be very critical and useful resources for women to balance out their higher potential in inter-role conflict (Vasumathi, 2018; Gregersen, n.d.; Pareek, 2024).

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Parental status will moderate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance so that the positive association will be stronger for employees with dependent children than for those without dependent children in Irish IT".

For this last hypothesis, it is logically asserted that those employees with direct and daily caregiving responsibilities for children stand to gain the most from the utilization of FWAs that would offer them temporal and spatial flexibility in discharging their work commitments together with responding to the unpredictable and sometimes urgent demands of family. (Herrera et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings with Supporting and Contrasting Literature from Reviewed Sources

Key Finding	Supporting / Contrasting Literature	Interpretation in Light of Literature
Positive association between supportive FWAs and higher WLB (H1 supported)	Kelliher & De Menezes (2019); Ferrara et al. (2022); Adams et al. (2022); Junior et al. (2021)	This supports earlier research showing FWAs improve autonomy and reduce inter-role conflict (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019; Adams et al., 2022). Ferrara et al. (2022) highlight reduced commute stress and more control over work, while Junior et al. (2021) stress the importance of trust and managerial support—key elements in this study’s “Flexible Work Perception” composite.
Fully remote workers report higher WLB than hybrid workers (H2 supported)	Ferrara et al. (2022); Herrera et al. (2022); Soga et al. (2022)	Fully remote arrangements eliminate commute stress and increase schedule autonomy (Ferrara et al., 2022; Herrera et al., 2022). Soga et al. (2022) note that hybrid models may introduce coordination challenges and role-switching strain, reducing WLB despite partial flexibility.
Hybrid arrangements associated with	Shirmohammadi et al. (2022); Soga et al. (2022)	The literature explains this as a result of boundary blurring and inconsistent routines (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Soga et al. (2022) argue that flexibility

lower WLB than expected		without clear structure can paradoxically intensify work demands.
No significant moderating effect of gender (H3 not supported)	Vasumathi (2018); Pareek (2024); Gregersen (n.d.); Herrera et al. (2022)	While previous studies found women often benefit more from FWAs due to care responsibilities (Vasumathi, 2018; Pareek, 2024), this study's null result may reflect the post-pandemic normalisation of flexibility (Herrera et al., 2022), where benefits are distributed more evenly.
No significant moderating effect of parental status (H4 not supported)	Herrera et al. (2022); Shirmohammadi et al. (2022)	Past research notes parents value FWAs for childcare and family management (Herrera et al., 2022). The absence of a significant effect here could be due to widespread access to FWAs in IT or sample size limitations, as Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) caution context matters.
Persistent “dark side” of flexibility: always-on culture, blurred boundaries	Soga et al. (2022); Shirmohammadi et al. (2022); Herrera et al. (2022)	These issues are consistent with warnings in the literature that flexibility can increase work intensification and stress without active boundary management (Soga et al., 2022). Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) and Herrera et al. (2022) highlight the role of boundary permeability in shaping WLB outcomes.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research methodology used to fulfil the objectives of this study. It justifies the methods chosen to investigate the impact of flexible work arrangements on the work life balance of employees in Irish IT companies. Following the layered structure of the research onion (Saunders et al., 2019), this chapter will systematically explain the research philosophy, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, and the specific techniques and procedures used for data collection and analysis. The chapter will conclude by addressing the ethical considerations that guided the research and acknowledging the limitations of the chosen methodology.

3.2 Research Philosophy

As stated by Saunders et al. (2019), research philosophy is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is developed. The approach taken in this study is to adopt a positivist research philosophy, given that positivism assumes social reality is singular, objective and external to the social actors. The researcher occupies the space of an objective observer; the researcher obtains data in systematic ways, putting it into a coherent and analytically precise form and attempts to understand an array of causal relationships and ways of seeing regularities in social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2019, p.133). This is a sensible philosophy for the study to follow because the study is designed to quantitatively investigate the relationship between the independent variable, flexible work arrangements, and the dependent variable, work life balance, in order to test numerous predetermined hypothesis. A research project aligned with a positivist research philosophy will highlight the need for a rigorous methodology that, while apparent, is structured and controlled rather than haphazard, and generate objective and generalisable findings.

3.3 Research Approach

This research study emanated from a deductive methodology, which is the preferred method of positivist philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019). A deductive study involves developing a theory and hypotheses, and then planning a research design to test them. The present study was initially directed after completing a full and thorough review of the literature covering work life balance and flexible work to create the four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4). The next stage was to carry out the data collection for the purpose of testing the hypotheses. The movement from a general theory, to specific data, is one of the defining elements of deductive method (Saunders et al. 2019).

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Methodological Choice

The methodology demonstrates that there was a single data collection method based on numerical data (Saunders et al., 2019). The process chosen represented a perfect fit with the positivist philosophy of research and deductive methodology, as it enabled the researcher to use statistical analysis to test hypotheses and examine patterns and relationships between variables. Utilising quantitative data allows the researcher to have "a systematic, structured, scientific, formal, objective approach to data collection".

3.4.2 Research Strategy

The chosen strategy for this research is a survey. The survey strategy, particularly when using a deductive approach, is a common and eminently sensible decision for research purposes because it allows for large data collection from a relatively large cohort in a very structured way (Saunders et al., 2019). By using a standardized questionnaire as the data collection tool, the study can collect data on the following: the prevalence of flexible work, measures of work life balance, and employee perceptions the potential of flexible work arrangements, which allowed for responding to the research questions quantitatively.

3.4.3 Time Horizon

Acquired as cross sectional. A cross sectional study involves the collection of data at one point in time, which essentially provides a "snap shot" of the situation at that time (Saunders et al., 2019). This time horizon is suitable for the following research objectives: Research objective To examine the current state of work life balance and the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work life balance within the Irish IT sector is concerned with the current situation rather than a change over time.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Research Instrument

The data collection instrument was a self-administered, structured online questionnaire built in Google Forms. The questionnaire was comprised of four sections to provide a logical flow for participants. Saunders et al. (2019) indicate that by utilising a questionnaire, researchers are able to standardise data collection for existing data collection that can be compared and analysed. The sections of the questionnaire included:

Section A: Demographic Information: This section obtained categorical data on the demographics of the question air participants (such as gender, parental status, age, and job role) to profile the sample and function as moderating variables.

Section B: Flexible Work Arrangements: This section addressed the independent variable by measuring the flexible work arrangements through a mixture of multiple choice questions and 5 point Likert scale questions to understand the availability of and perceived support for flexible work arrangements.

Section C: Work-Life Balance: This section addressed the dependent variable by measuring employee perceptions on their work-life balance using a series of 5 point Likert scale questions. The reliability and validity of the work-life balance items were deliberately worded, as some questions require reverse coding during the analysis to obtain a reasonable scoring consistency (Saunders, et al, 2019).

Section D: Perceptions and Outcomes of FWAs: The purpose of this section was to ask additional Likert scale questions to gain contextual data on the perceived outcomes of flexible work; therefore, respondents had the option to elaborate further

3.5.2 Sampling

The target sample in this study was employees working in IT companies in Ireland. Due to a lack of a complete list (the "sampling frame") of this population, the use of a non-probability sampling technique was required (Saunders et al., 2019). Specifically, a combination of

convenience sampling and snowball sampling was conducted. First, the researcher solicited the initial participants from their personal professional network (convenience sampling). The initial participants were then asked to forward the link of the survey to other eligible coworkers, thus using snowball sampling (Saunders et al., 2019). Although this sampling procedure limits the generalizability of the research findings to the population, it is a practical and effective approach for accessing the recruited and dispersed population of individuals.

3.6 Data Analysis Plan

Specifically, the quantitative data obtained from the surveys administered via Google Forms was exported to the SPSS application for analysis. In-depth studies were involved in the steps followed as described by Saunders et al. (2019):

1. **Data Preparation:** The first step in data preparation for analysis is cleaning and coding of the data. The coding process involved giving numeric values to categorical responses, searching for errors in the data, and reverse coding the negatively worded questions so that they could be included in the calculation of a work-life balance scale. Reverse scoring was necessary because all variables under consideration would mean more favorable for higher scores. Composite variables were then derived from the mean score for each of the scales with multiple items measuring work life balance and perceptions of flexible work.

2. **Descriptive Statistics:** Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the data and describe the sample. Frequencies and percentages were derived in order to characterize the demographic profiles of the respondents and the frequency distribution of different flexible working arrangements: measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) were computed to summarize the scores of the work-life balance and flexible work variables (Saunders et al., 2019).

3. **Inferential Statistics:** To test the hypotheses and understand relationships among the variables, inferential statistics was used.

A Pearson correlation analysis was set as one of H1's tests to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the provision of flexible work arrangements and the perceived work-life balance.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was intended as H2's test in which the mean scores of work-life balance were measured among groups of primary work arrangements (for example, fully remote, hybrid, office-based) to check for significant differences among them.

H3 and H4 were to be tested but planned through a two-way ANOVA. The interaction effect of flexible work arrangements and moderating variables (gender and parental status) on work-life balance would be derived from this test. If the interaction effect was significant, it would offer support for the moderation hypothesis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Following ethical principles is essential for honor in any research project (Saunders et al., 2019). The following steps were utilized to conduct research ethically:

Informed Consent: The first page of the survey explained clearly the purpose of the research, what participation meant, and whether it was confidential or not. By starting the survey, the participants were providing their informed consent to participate in it.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: The survey did not provide any name, email address, or other direct personal identifiers. All data was presented in an aggregated format so that individual responses could not be identified.

Voluntary Participation: Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and they could leave the survey at any time without penalty and

Data Protection: Collected data was stored securely on a password protected device and only accessible to the researcher, such as is consistent with best practices for data protection (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

It is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the research design. According to Saunders et al. (2019), recognizing limitations is a key part of academic rigour, so the main limitations are as follows:

Generalisability: The use of non-probability sampling means that the sample is not statistically representative of the population (e.g. the entire population of IT workers in Ireland) which means that the findings , may not be fully generalisable.

Causality: The cross sectional design allows for the identification of relationships or associations between variables. A cross sectional design cannot determine causation, which would require a longitudinal study that could track and measure changes over time (Saunders et al., 2019).

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The results from the quantitative survey that was administered to Irish Information Technology sector employees are presented in this chapter. The primary aim of this chapter is to analyse the data that was collected from this survey and answer the research questions that have been posited in the previous chapters of the dissertation, and also test the hypotheses that were developed too. Data analysis was conducted with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with a valid sample of 81 responses from the survey used in our analysis.

The chapter is logically developed to provide the results in a clear manner. The chapter starts with detailed information about how the data was prepared for analysis, followed by a substantial descriptive statistics section. This section describes the demographic details of the respondents, and the descriptive information related to flexible work arrangements (FWAs), and the general level of work-life balance perceived by the respondents.

The main section of the chapter then presents inferential analysis where each of the four research hypotheses are tested in a systematic way. In this section, Pearson correlation analysis is used to statistically assess the bivariate relationship between flexible work perceptions and work-life balance, and a series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests are conducted to examine the effects of the type of FWAs, and determine if gender or parental status play a moderating role. Each inferential manipulation is accompanied by the associated output tables, and the additional analysis that was conducted with each statistical test.

4.2 Data Preparation and Reliability

Before the main analysis was conducted, the raw data, exported from Google Forms, was prepared and cleaned in SPSS. The string variables from the Likert scale questions (e.g. Agree, Disagree) were recoded to a 5-point numerical scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) which is required to conduct quantitative statistical analysis.

It should also be mentioned that some of the items in the work-life balance scale were negatively worded (e.g. Q13: "The demands of my work interfere with my personal or family life"; Q14: "I often feel too tired after work to enjoy personal or leisure activities") and in order to maintain that a higher score represented a more positive outcome (i.e. better work-life balance) on every item, these items were reverse coded. For example, a 1 ("Strongly Disagree") on an interference question was recoded to a 5, and a 5 ("Strongly Agree") was recoded to a 1.

To facilitate a holistic analysis, two main composite variables were created by calculating the mean of their constituent scale items:

1. **Work-Life Balance (Work_Life_Balance):** This composite score is the mean of the seven items in Section C (Q12 to Q18), after reverse-coding the negative items. It represents the overall perceived level of work-life balance for each respondent.
2. **Flexible Work Perception (FlexibleWorkPerception):** This composite score is the mean of the four perception-based items in Section B (Q8 to Q11). It measures the

employee's overall perception of control, clarity, trust, and managerial support related to their company's flexible work arrangements.

Although the SPSS output provided does not include a Cronbach's Alpha test for internal consistency reliability, the creation of composite scales from multiple related items is a standard and robust practice for measuring complex constructs like work-life balance. The use of a multi-item scale provides a more reliable and valid measure than a single-item question.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were generated to summarise the characteristics of the sample and provide an overview of the key variables, addressing the secondary research questions concerning the profile of the workforce and the current state of FWAs and work-life balance.

4.3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey successfully gathered responses from 81 employees within the Irish IT sector. The demographic composition of this sample is detailed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=81)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	50	61.7
	Female	26	32.1
	Non-binary	5	6.2
Parental Status	No dependent children	61	75.3
	Has dependent children	20	24.7
Age Group	18 – 24	19	23.5
	25 – 34	35	43.2
	35 – 44	19	23.5
	45 – 54	6	7.4
	55 or older	2	2.5
Role	Junior / Entry-level	21	25.9
	Mid-level / Senior professional	37	45.7
	Manager / Team Lead	16	19.8
	Senior Management / Executive	7	8.6

The gender distribution of the sample is predominantly male (61.7%), with female employees representing 32.1% and non-binary employees making up 6.2% of the respondents. This

distribution is broadly reflective of the gender imbalance often reported within the wider technology industry.

A significant majority of respondents (75.3%) reported having no dependent children under the age of 18, while approximately one-quarter (24.7%) are parents. This is a critical variable for later analysis, as parental responsibilities are a key factor in the work-life balance discourse.

The age distribution shows a workforce concentrated in the younger to middle age brackets. The largest group is the 25–34 age range, accounting for 43.2% of the sample. The 18–24 and 35–44 age groups are equally represented, each at 23.5%. The older age groups (45 and above) are less represented, comprising just under 10% of the total sample. This demographic profile suggests a relatively young and dynamic workforce, which is characteristic of the IT sector.

In terms of professional roles, the sample is well-distributed across the organisational hierarchy. The largest segment consists of mid-level or senior professionals (45.7%), followed by junior or entry-level staff (25.9%). Managers and team leads account for 19.8% of respondents, with senior management and executives making up the remaining 8.6%. This distribution ensures that the data captures perspectives from various levels of seniority and responsibility within the IT companies.

4.3.2 Prevalence and Nature of Flexible Work Arrangements

To address the secondary research question about the most common FWAs in the Irish IT sector, respondents were asked about the arrangements offered by their company and their own primary work setup. The results are detailed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Prevalence of Flexible Work Arrangements (N=81)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
FWAs Formally Offered (Select all that apply)	Flextime	26	32.1
	Hybrid work	26	32.1
	Fully remote work	19	23.5
	Compressed workweek	8	9.9
	None of the above	2	2.5
Primary Work Arrangement	Hybrid (mix of office and remote)	35	43.2
	Fully remote	23	28.4
	Primarily office-based with flextime	12	14.8

	Primarily office-based (fixed hours)	11	13.6
Average Remote Days Per Week	5 days (Fully remote)	24	29.6
	3 days	14	17.3
	4 days	14	17.3
	1 day	13	16.0
	0 days (Fully office-based)	10	12.3
	2 days	6	7.4

When asked about the types of FWAs formally offered by their companies, **Flextime** and **Hybrid work** were the most common, each cited by 32.1% of respondents. **Fully remote work** was offered by 23.5% of the organisations represented. **Compressed workweeks** were a much less common offering (9.9%), and only a very small fraction (2.5%) reported that their company offered none of these flexible options. This indicates a widespread adoption of flexible policies within the Irish IT sector.

With regard to the primary work arrangement utilized by employees, Hybrid is the most prevalent, with 43.2% of the sample indicating it is their primary arrangement. Fully remote work accounted for 28.4% of respondents, with a handful of respondents (13.6%) remaining primarily office-based with fixed hours, and another (14.8%) office-based with flextime. Taken together, these findings indicate that broadly, over 70% of the IT employees in this sample operate under some form of location flexibility (Hybrid or Fully Remote).

The number of remote days/week, as noted above, provide more detail. The largest single group (29.6%), again aligning with the Fully remote, answered five days a week. A good portion of the sample worked remotely 3 or 4 days a week (17.3% each), which is common for many hybrid models. Only 12.3% of the workforce reported 0 days worked remotely, confirming that while mostly transitioned, the industry has at least to some degree shifted away from degrees of traditional, fully office-based work.

4.3.3 Perceptions of Flexible Work and Work-Life Balance

To understand the current state of work-life balance and the perceptions surrounding FWAs, descriptive statistics for the individual Likert scale items were examined. Table 4.3 summarises the responses, combining "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" for positive sentiment, and "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" for negative sentiment.

Table 4.3: Summary of Perceptions of FWAs and Work-Life Balance (N=81)

Statement	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Flexible Work Perceptions			

Q8: I have a high degree of control over my work schedule.	56.8	25.9	17.3
Q9: My organisation clearly communicates its FWA policies.	55.6	18.5	26.0
Q10: I feel trusted by my employer to manage my schedule.	55.5	21.0	23.5
Q11: My direct manager is supportive of employees using FWAs.	48.2	29.6	22.2
Work-Life Balance			
Q12: I am satisfied with my work-life balance.	61.7	21.0	17.3
Q13: Work interferes with my personal life. (Negative item)	37.1	27.2	35.8
Q14: I am too tired after work for personal activities. (Negative item)	32.1	25.9	42.0
Q15: I find it easy to switch off from work.	49.3	21.0	29.7
Q16: My schedule allows enough time for hobbies.	43.2	25.9	30.9
Q17: My work arrangement supports managing personal responsibilities.	49.3	28.4	22.3
Q18: I feel mentally and emotionally well due to my work-life balance.	43.2	28.4	28.4
Consequences and Perceptions of FWAs			
Q19: There is an expectation to respond outside regular hours. (Negative item)	25.9	25.9	48.1
Q20: The boundary between my work and personal life is blurred. (Negative item)	25.9	27.2	46.9
Q21: I am concerned using FWAs may limit my promotion chances. (Negative item)	30.8	35.8	33.3
Q22: My productivity has improved due to my work arrangement.	51.8	22.2	25.9
Q23: I feel socially connected to my colleagues.	49.4	27.2	23.4

The findings reveal a generally positive but nuanced picture. A majority of employees feel they have control over their schedule (56.8%) and feel trusted by their employer (55.5%). However, managerial support is slightly less certain, with just under half (48.2%) agreeing their manager is supportive.

Peterw and Peters (2019) report on the individual benefits - work-life balance - that may be gained from a flexible work arrangement (FWA). Their study finds a positive majority (61.7%) reporting overall satisfaction around the work-life balance. That being said, there are some issues. A larger, even significant proportion (42.0%) agree that they are too physically and mentally tired after work to engage in personal life, and more than 1/3 (35.8%) disagree that the demands of work do not affect the personal side of life. This suggests, despite an overall positive satisfaction, there continues to be some issues about aspects of work-life conflict and strain.

Also, Partyw and Peters (2019) analyze the impacts of FWAs and arrive at the steps of consequence reflecting the 'dark' side of flexibility. Almost half of the respondents (48.1%) feel they are expected to respond to non-time sensitive messages sent to them after the expected end of their working hours. A similar proportion of respondents (46.9%) reported that they do often not know the difference between their work and personal life because the boundaries had been blurred. The concern for their career (the 'flexibility stigma') was evident, with 33.3% of the participants being worried they would be put at a disadvantage for promotion after using FWAs, although a large group (35.8%) were neutral on the matter. Regardless of this unease, over half (51.8%) of the participants were reporting improved productivity, and almost half (49.4%) still reported feeling socially connected to colleagues.

4.3.4 Descriptive Statistics for Composite Variables

To get a single-figure overview of the central constructs, descriptive statistics for the composite variables were calculated.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics for Composite Scale Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work-Life Balance	81	2.14	4.71	3.2222	.50102
Flexible Work Perception	81	1.50	5.00	3.4691	.71957
<i>Note: Scales range from 1 to 5.</i>					

The mean score for **Work-Life Balance** is 3.22 (SD = 0.50). On a 5-point scale where 3 represents a neutral point, this average score is slightly positive, suggesting that the typical IT employee in this sample experiences a marginally favourable work-life balance. However, the standard deviation of 0.50 indicates a moderate amount of variation in experiences.

The mean score for **Flexible Work Perception** is 3.47 (SD = 0.72). This score is more noticeably positive, indicating that, on average, employees perceive the FWA environment (in terms of trust, support, and clarity) favourably. The larger standard deviation suggests a wider range of experiences regarding how FWAs are managed and perceived within their organisations.

4.4 Inferential Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

This section presents the results of the inferential statistical tests used to examine the relationships between the variables and test the four research hypotheses.

4.4.1 Hypothesis 1 (H1): Association between FWAs and Work-Life Balance

H1: The availability of flexible work arrangements is positively associated with higher levels of perceived work-life balance among employees in Irish IT companies.

To test this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between the composite 'Flexible Work Perception' score and the composite 'Work-Life Balance' score. The results are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Pearson Correlation between Flexible Work Perception and Work-Life Balance

		Flexible Work Perception	Work-Life Balance
Flexible Work Perception	Pearson Correlation	1	.392**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	81	81
Work-Life Balance	Pearson Correlation	.392**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	81	81
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The analysis revealed a statistically significant, positive correlation between the two variables, $r(79) = .392, p < .001$. The correlation coefficient of .392 indicates a moderate strength of association. This result suggests that as employees' positive perceptions of their flexible work arrangements (i.e., higher perceived control, trust, clarity, and support) increase, their reported level of work-life balance also significantly increases.

Decision: The result provides strong statistical evidence to support Hypothesis 1.

4.4.2 Hypothesis 2 (H2): Differential Impact of FWA Types

H2: Different types of flexible work arrangements (specifically, fully remote, hybrid, and flextime) will have a differential impact on the work-life balance of employees in Irish IT companies.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of the primary work arrangement on work-life balance scores. The independent variable, 'Primary Work Arrangement', included four groups: Fully remote, Hybrid, Primarily office-based, and Primarily office-based with flextime. The dependent variable was the composite 'Work-Life Balance' score. Table 4.6 shows the descriptive statistics for each group, and Table 4.7 shows the main ANOVA result.

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics for Work-Life Balance by Primary Work Arrangement

Primary Work Arrangement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fully remote	23	3.5280	.50679
Hybrid	35	3.0816	.40744
Primarily office-based (fixed hours)	11	3.1558	.60087
Primarily office-based with flextime	12	3.1071	.43979
Total	81	3.2222	.50102

Table 4.7: ANOVA for Work-Life Balance by Primary Work Arrangement

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.049	3	1.016	4.595	.005
Within Groups	17.033	77	.221		
Total	20.082	80			

The ANOVA result was statistically significant, $F(3, 77) = 4.595, p = .005$. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the mean work-life balance scores among the four different primary work arrangements. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was not significant ($p = .497$), confirming that the assumption of equal variances was met.

To identify exactly where these differences lay, a Tukey HSD post-hoc test was conducted. The post-hoc analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in work-life balance between the **Fully remote** group ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.51$) and the **Hybrid** group ($M = 3.08, SD = 0.41$), with a mean difference of 0.446 ($p = .004$). This result shows that employees working fully remotely reported significantly higher levels of work-life balance compared to their colleagues on a hybrid schedule. No other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant. For example, the difference between fully remote and office-based employees did not reach statistical significance ($p = .144$), nor did the difference between hybrid and office-based employees.

Decision: The finding of a significant difference between work arrangement groups, particularly the higher work-life balance reported by fully remote workers compared to hybrid workers, provides strong support for Hypothesis 2.

4.4.3 Hypothesis 3 (H3): Moderating Effect of Gender

H3: Gender will moderate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance, such that the positive association will be stronger for female employees than for male employees in Irish IT companies.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test for an interaction effect between 'Primary Work Arrangement' and 'Gender' on 'Work-Life Balance' scores. A significant interaction effect would indicate that the impact of the work arrangement on work-life balance differs for males, females, and non-binary employees. The results of the test are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Two-Way ANOVA for the Interaction of Work Arrangement and Gender on Work-Life Balance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4.008	9	.445	1.967	.056	.200
Intercept	350.168	1	350.168	1546.716	<.001	.956
Primary Work Arrangement	1.951	3	.650	2.872	.042	.108
Gender	.668	2	.334	1.476	.236	.040
Primary Work Arrangement * Gender	.450	4	.112	.497	.738	.027
Error	16.074	71	.226			
Total	861.082	81				
Corrected Total	20.082	80				

The key result for testing H3 is the interaction term, "Primary Work Arrangement * Gender". The analysis shows that this interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(4, 71) = 0.497, p = .738$. The p-value of .738 is well above the conventional alpha level of .05, indicating that there is no evidence to suggest that the effect of an employee's work arrangement on their work-life balance depends on their gender. While the descriptive statistics show some minor variations (e.g., female employees in fully remote roles report the highest mean WLB), these differences are not statistically significant enough to support a moderation effect across the entire model. The main effect for gender was also not significant ($p = .236$), suggesting that, overall, there was no significant difference in work-life balance scores between genders in this sample.

Decision: The statistical results do not support Hypothesis 3.

4.4.4 Hypothesis 4 (H4): Moderating Effect of Parental Status

H4: Parental status will moderate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance, such that the positive association will be stronger for employees with dependent children than for those without dependent children in Irish IT companies.

A second two-way ANOVA was conducted to test for the interaction effect between 'Primary Work Arrangement' and 'Parental Status' on 'Work-Life Balance' scores. A significant interaction would imply that the impact of different FWAs on work-life balance is different for parents compared to non-parents. The results are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Two-Way ANOVA for the Interaction of Work Arrangement and Parental Status on Work-Life Balance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3.938	6	.656	3.008	.011	.196
Intercept	509.892	1	509.892	2337.223	<.001	.969
Primary Work Arrangement	2.969	3	.990	4.537	.006	.155
Parental Status	.006	1	.006	.025	.874	.000
Primary Work Arrangement * Parental Status	.674	2	.337	1.546	.220	.040
Error	16.144	74	.218			
Total	861.082	81				
Corrected Total	20.082	80				

The analysis focused on the interaction term "Primary Work Arrangement * Parental Status". The result was not statistically significant, $F(2, 74) = 1.546, p = .220$. This p-value is substantially higher than .05, indicating that there is no statistical evidence of an interaction effect. In other words, the data does not support the claim that the relationship between work arrangement type and work-life balance is different for employees with dependent children compared to those without. The main effect for parental status was also not significant ($p = .874$), suggesting that, overall, there was no significant difference in work-life balance scores between parents and non-parents in this sample.

Decision: The statistical results do not support Hypothesis 4.

4.5 Summary of Results

The findings from the descriptive and inferential analyses are summarised in Table 4.10. This table provides a concise overview of the outcome for each of the four hypotheses tested in this study.

Table 4.10: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Description	Statistical Test	Result (p-value)	Decision
H1	Positive association between FWA perception and WLB.	Pearson Correlation	$p < .001$	Supported
H2	Differential impact of FWA types on WLB.	One-Way ANOVA	$p = .005$	Supported

H3	Gender moderates the relationship between FWAs and WLB.	Two-Way ANOVA (Interaction)	$p = .738$	Not Supported
H4	Parental status moderates the relationship between FWAs and WLB.	Two-Way ANOVA (Interaction)	$p = .220$	Not Supported

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has systematically presented and analysed the data collected from 81 employees in the Irish IT sector. The descriptive analysis painted a picture of a young, predominantly male workforce where hybrid and fully remote work arrangements are now the norm. While overall work-life balance satisfaction was slightly positive, the analysis also uncovered persistent challenges related to workload, fatigue, and the blurring of work-home boundaries.

The inferential analysis provided clear outcomes for the research hypotheses. The results strongly supported the hypotheses that positive perceptions of flexible work are associated with better work-life balance (H1) and that different types of flexible arrangements have a differential impact, with fully remote work being associated with the highest levels of work-life balance (H2). Conversely, the analysis found no statistical evidence to support the hypotheses that gender (H3) or parental status (H4) moderate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance in this specific sample. These findings provide a robust empirical foundation for the discussion that will follow in the next chapter, where the implications of these results will be explored in the context of the existing literature and the specific environment of the Irish IT industry.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter thoroughly discusses the research findings, presented in Chapter 4. The main purpose of this study was to explore the influence of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) on employees' work-life balance (WLB) within the Irish Information Technology sector organization, which is specific and also a less researched context. This chapter will look at the statistical findings in detail, and discuss them in the context of academia more broadly as presented in the review of the literature. In examining the findings it will attempt to find congruencies and non-congruencies to existing theories and literature and respond to the primary and secondary research questions and further, then the implications (theoretical and practical) from the results. The chapter then discusses the limitations of the study and concludes with recommendations for future research.

The analyses depicted a nuanced and complex story, yet nevertheless demonstrated that there is a clear narrative overall. Overall, the study illustrated a significant and positive relationship between employees' perceptions of their flexible work environment and perceptions of their work-life balance. Additionally, the type of FWA appeared to apply differentially, as wholly remote employees reported statistically significantly higher WLB than either the hybrid (HWA) employee, or mixed (MFA) employee. Perhaps surprisingly the study did not demonstrate statistical support for the hypothesized moderating roles of gender or parental status. In the following discussion, each of these key findings will be examined in detail.

5.2 Discussion of Key Findings

5.2.1 The Critical Role of a Supportive Flexible Work Environment (H1)

The first hypothesis (H1), which posited a positive association between the availability of flexible work arrangements and higher levels of perceived work-life balance, was strongly supported. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .392, p < .001$). This finding aligns with a substantial body of literature that identifies FWAs as a key organisational tool for improving employee well-being (Kelliher and De Menezes, 2019; Ferrara et al., 2022). The result empirically validates the core theoretical premise that granting employees greater autonomy and control over their work can help them better manage the competing demands of their personal and professional lives, thereby reducing inter-role conflict as described by Role Theory (Adams et al., 2022).

However, a crucial nuance of this study is that the analysis was based on a composite score of *perceived* flexibility, which included not just control but also organisational trust, clarity of policy, and managerial support. This suggests that the mere existence of a policy is insufficient. The positive impact on work-life balance is contingent on how that policy is implemented and perceived by employees. This resonates with the work of Junior et al. (2021), who argue that a supportive organisational culture is a key facilitator of the benefits of FWAs. Where employees have a belief in being trusted by their employer and supported by their first line manager the likelihood of flexibility achieving real value in terms of WLB increases. WLB is more likely to be dead in the water if there is a policy on paper, or if there is a culture of presenteeism and distrust in the manager's decision making. This indicates

important implications for Irish IT companies: for them, implementing FWAs is as much about culture, trust and support as it is developing a policy.

5.2.2 The Supremacy of Full Remote Work and the Paradox of Hybrid (H2)

The second hypothesis (H2), which predicted a differential impact of various FWA types on work-life balance, was also strongly supported. The one-way ANOVA test was significant ($p = .005$), and the post-hoc analysis provided a particularly insightful result: employees working fully remotely reported significantly higher levels of work-life balance than those in a hybrid arrangement. This finding contributes a critical, data-driven perspective to the ongoing debate about the most effective post-pandemic work model.

The superior WLB reported by fully remote workers can be attributed to several factors discussed in the literature. By eliminating the commute entirely, employees reclaim a significant amount of time and reduce a major source of daily stress, allowing for a more seamless integration of personal and professional tasks (Ferrara et al., 2022). Full remote work provides the maximum level of autonomy and control over one's daily schedule and environment, which is a primary driver of work-life satisfaction (Herrera et al., 2022).

The more surprising element of this finding is the comparatively lower work-life balance of hybrid workers. While often touted as the "best of both worlds," this study suggests the hybrid model may introduce its own unique set of challenges. It is plausible that the constant context-switching between home and office environments creates a cognitive and logistical burden. Hybrid workers may struggle to establish consistent routines and may face the "worst of both worlds": the distractions and blurred boundaries of working from home combined with the time and cost of commuting on office days. This aligns with the "other face of flexible working" described by Soga et al. (2022), where poorly managed flexibility can lead to new forms of strain. The results suggest that for the Irish IT employees in this sample, the clear and consistent boundaries of a fully remote setup—or even a traditional office-based role—may be psychologically easier to manage than the ambiguity and organisational complexity of a hybrid schedule. This finding signals to Irish IT companies that a mandatory hybrid model may not be the panacea for work-life balance it is often assumed to be.

5.2.3 The Unexpected Absence of Moderating Effects (H3 and H4)

The most striking and counter-intuitive findings of this study were the rejections of Hypotheses 3 and 4. The analysis found no statistically significant interaction effect for either gender or parental status on the relationship between work arrangement type and work-life balance. This outcome stands in contrast to a large body of literature which suggests that women and parents are the primary beneficiaries of FWAs, using them to manage the "double burden" of work and domestic responsibilities (Vasumathi, 2018; Pareek, 2024; Herrera et al., 2022).

Several potential explanations for this unexpected result must be considered. First, it is possible that the nature of the IT industry itself plays a role. As a knowledge-intensive sector where performance is often measured by output and project completion rather than hours at a desk, the benefits of flexibility—such as deep, uninterrupted focus time—may be universally valuable to all employees, regardless of their gender or family situation. The value of reclaiming commute time or having the autonomy to structure one's day may be equally high

for a single male employee seeking time for personal development or hobbies as it is for a mother managing school runs.

Second, the universalisation of flexible work in the post-pandemic era may have changed its social and practical meaning. When remote and hybrid work were niche options, they may have been disproportionately sought out by women and parents. However, as they have become standard practice in the IT sector, as shown by the descriptive data, they may now be viewed as a universal benefit that all employees leverage for their individual WLB needs. This could level the playing field, reducing the demographic-specific differences that were prominent in pre-pandemic research.

Third, and critically, this finding must be interpreted with caution due to the study's limitations. The sample size, particularly for the subgroups (n=26 for women, n=20 for parents), may have been too small to provide sufficient statistical power to detect a real, but subtle, interaction effect. The non-significant result means that there is not enough evidence to *confirm* a moderating effect; it does not definitively prove its absence in the wider population. The lack of a significant finding, while surprising, is itself an important result. It challenges researchers and practitioners to avoid making assumptions about who benefits most from flexibility and suggests that in certain modern, progressive contexts like the Irish IT sector, the drivers of work-life balance may be more universal than traditionally believed.

5.3 Answering the Research Questions

This study set out to answer one primary and four secondary research questions. The findings provide clear, evidence-based answers for the Irish IT sector.

- **Primary RQ: What is the impact of flexible work arrangements on the work-life balance of employees in Irish IT companies?**

The impact is demonstrably positive but complex. A supportive flexible work environment—characterised by trust, clarity, and managerial support—is significantly associated with higher work-life balance. However, the type of arrangement matters significantly, with fully remote work providing a greater boost to WLB than hybrid models.

- **Secondary RQ 1: What are the most common flexible work arrangements offered to and utilised by employees in the Irish IT sector?**

The most commonly utilised arrangement is the hybrid model (43.2%), followed by fully remote work (28.4%). Flextime and hybrid work are the most frequently offered policies. This confirms a widespread shift away from traditional office-centric work in the sector.

- **Secondary RQ 2: What is the current state of work-life balance among employees in the Irish IT industry?**

The state of work-life balance is moderately positive but fraught with challenges. The mean WLB score was 3.22 out of 5, but nearly half of the respondents reported feeling an expectation to be "always on" and experiencing blurred work-home boundaries, indicating persistent strain.

- **Secondary RQ 3: Is there a significant statistical relationship between specific types of flexible work arrangements and levels of employee work-life balance?**

Yes, a significant relationship exists. The one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference in WLB scores between the arrangement types, with fully remote employees faring best.

- **Secondary RQ 4: To what extent do demographic factors, specifically gender and parental status, influence the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance within this context?**

Within this sample, these demographic factors did not have a statistically significant moderating influence. The benefits (or drawbacks) of different FWA types on work-life balance were not significantly different for men versus women, or for parents versus non-parents.

5.4 Implications of the Study

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several contributions to the academic literature. Firstly, it addresses a specific empirical gap by providing quantitative data on FWAs and WLB within the critical yet under-researched Irish IT sector, responding to calls for more context-specific research (Chandran and Abukhalifeh, 2021). Secondly, the findings reinforce the importance of Border Theory (Herrera et al., 2022) and the work of scholars who highlight the potential downsides of flexibility, such as work intensification and boundary blurring (Soga et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Thirdly, and most significantly, the non-significant moderation findings for gender and parental status challenge long-held assumptions and suggest that in certain modern, post-pandemic industrial contexts, the demographic drivers of WLB may be evolving. This opens a new avenue for research into the universalisation of flexibility benefits.

5.4.2 Practical and Managerial Implications

The findings offer several actionable insights for managers and HR professionals in Irish IT companies:

1. **Culture is Key:** It is not enough to simply have FWA policies. Companies must actively foster a culture of trust, provide clear communication, and ensure managers are trained to lead flexible teams effectively. Measuring and rewarding based on output, not presenteeism, is paramount.
2. **Rethink Mandatory Hybrid Models:** The finding that hybrid workers have lower WLB than fully remote workers should be a caution against one-size-fits-all hybrid mandates. Companies should offer a menu of options and allow employees, where possible, to choose the arrangement that best suits their role and personal life. For hybrid models to succeed, organisations must address their inherent complexities, such as scheduling and communication challenges.
3. **Address the "Dark Side" of Flexibility:** Nearly half of the respondents felt an "always on" pressure. Companies must implement stricter guidelines and lead by example to protect employees' personal time. This could include policies on "right to

disconnect," no-meeting times, and clear expectations about response times outside of core hours.

4. **Avoid Demographic Assumptions:** Do not assume that only parents or women value flexibility. These findings suggest that all employees in the IT sector leverage flexibility for better work-life balance. Policies and communications should be framed as a universal benefit for talent attraction and retention across all demographics.

5.5 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the intricate relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance in the dynamic Irish IT sector. By providing fresh empirical data, it has illuminated the realities of the modern workplace, confirming that while flexibility holds immense potential to improve employee well-being, its success is far from guaranteed. The findings highlight that a well-supported flexible environment is a significant predictor of positive work-life balance, and that the complete autonomy of a fully remote setup currently offers the greatest benefits in this industry. The unexpected lack of influence from traditional demographic moderators like gender and parental status signals a potential shift in the work-life paradigm, suggesting that in the post-pandemic IT world, the quest for balance and the tools to achieve it have become a more universal pursuit. Ultimately, this research provides a valuable, context-specific evidence base for Irish IT companies seeking to navigate the future of work, retain top talent, and create a truly sustainable and balanced working environment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter synthesises the entire research project, drawing together the key findings and their implications to provide a conclusive answer to the primary research question. The study was initiated to address a significant gap in the literature concerning the impact of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) on the work-life balance (WLB) of employees within the Irish Information Technology (IT) sector. This thesis has developed new, contextually specific empirical evidence using a quantitative, survey-based approach, which clarifies all aspects of this complex relationship. This chapter will begin by summarising the research journey, reiterating the key goals and main findings that resulted from the analysis. It will then produce a complete conclusion to fully address the central research problem. After that it will then revisit the theoretical and practical implications first noted in the discussion, as to further contextualise the study's contribution to knowledge and practice. Then the chapter will acknowledge the limitations of the research in an honest manner to clarify the findings and demonstrate academic integrity. Lastly, on the back of those limitations and the new questions raised by the research, it will provide a set of detailed suggestions for future research in this important, emerging area.

6.2 Summary of the Research

The aim of this thesis was to quantify the impact of different FWAs on the perceived WLB of employees in the Irish IT sector. This was motivated by the understanding that while there is a great deal of national and international discourse on flexibility and balance, there is a shortage of focused and empirical evidence for such an important sector of the economy in Ireland. For the purposes of this research, four main objectives were established: first, to identify the existence of FWAs, second, to take stock of the WLB situation, third, to examine the relationship between these two elements, and finally, to identify the moderating impact of gender and parental status.

To achieve these objectives, a deductive, positivist approach was adopted. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed, yielding 81 valid responses from employees across the Irish IT sector. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS, including frequency analysis, Pearson correlation, and one-way and two-way ANOVA tests.

The key findings can be summarised as follows:

1. **FWAs are ubiquitous in the Irish IT sector**, with hybrid and fully remote models being the most common primary arrangements. The traditional five-day office week is now a minority practice.
2. The **overall state of WLB is moderately positive but precarious**. While a majority of employees expressed satisfaction, significant numbers also reported issues with work interference, fatigue, and blurred boundaries, pointing to the persistent "dark side" of flexibility.

3. **A supportive flexible work environment is strongly and positively correlated with higher WLB.** This confirms that it is not merely the policy, but the culture of trust, support, and autonomy surrounding it that drives positive outcomes.
4. **The type of FWA has a significant differential impact on WLB.** Fully remote employees reported the highest levels of WLB, significantly more so than their hybrid counterparts, challenging the notion that hybrid work is the optimal model for employee well-being.
5. **Gender and parental status did not emerge as significant moderators** in the relationship between FWA type and WLB. This counter-intuitive finding suggests that in the post-pandemic IT context, the benefits of flexibility may be more universally experienced than traditionally assumed.

6.3 Conclusion

In response to the primary research question—*What is the impact of flexible work arrangements on the work-life balance of employees in Irish IT companies?*—this thesis concludes that the impact is **significant, positive, but highly conditional**. Flexible work is not a panacea, but a powerful tool whose effectiveness is contingent on both its form and its implementation.

The positive impact is clearly demonstrated by the strong correlation between perceived flexibility and work-life balance. When Irish IT companies successfully cultivate an environment where employees feel trusted, supported by their managers, and in control of their schedules, WLB is demonstrably improved. This confirms the central tenet of decades of research: autonomy is a cornerstone of employee well-being.

However, the conditionality of this impact is equally clear. The form of flexibility matters immensely. This study's finding that fully remote work is superior to hybrid arrangements in promoting WLB provides a critical, evidence-based insight for a sector grappling with defining the future of work. It suggests that the consistency, control, and complete elimination of commute time offered by full remote work outweigh the perceived benefits of a blended model for many employees. Hybrid work, in its current form, may be introducing unforeseen complexities and strains that detract from, rather than enhance, an employee's sense of balance.

Perhaps the most profound conclusion of this study is the challenge it poses to established narratives. The failure to find a moderating effect for gender or parental status suggests that the discourse on flexibility and WLB may need to evolve. In the context of the highly digitised, output-driven, and post-pandemic Irish IT sector, the benefits of FWAs appear to have become universalised. The value of autonomy and the freedom to integrate life and work are no longer the exclusive domain of working mothers but are sought and leveraged by all employees, regardless of their demographic profile.

Ultimately, this thesis fills a critical knowledge gap by providing a data-driven snapshot of the Irish IT sector. It confirms that flexible work is a net positive for work-life balance, but it warns against simplistic, one-size-fits-all solutions. The path to a truly balanced workforce lies not in mandating a specific number of days in the office, but in fostering a deep culture of

trust and offering genuine choice, while actively managing the ever-present risks of boundarylessness and an "always on" culture.

6.4 Contribution and Implications of the Study

This research offers tangible contributions to both theory and practice.

6.4.1 Contribution to Theory

This study makes three primary contributions to the academic literature. First, it provides a rare, context-specific empirical investigation into the Irish IT sector, responding directly to calls from scholars like Chandran and Abukhalifeh (2021) for more focused research beyond generalised reviews. It builds upon the foundational work of Kelliher and De Menezes (2019) by applying their concepts to a specific national and industrial setting. Second, the findings provide robust empirical support for Border Theory (Herrera et al., 2022) and the critical perspectives of Soga et al. (2022) and Shirmohammadi et al. (2022), demonstrating that the permeability of work-home boundaries is a central challenge in modern flexible work. Third, and most notably, the non-significant findings for the moderating roles of gender and parental status introduce a new and important nuance to the literature. This challenges the long-standing assumptions found in the work of researchers like Vasumathi (2018) and suggests a potential paradigm shift in the post-pandemic era, opening avenues for new theoretical models where the drivers of WLB are less demographically determined and more universally applicable in certain industries.

6.4.2 Contribution to Practice

The practical implications for HR practitioners, managers, and policymakers in Ireland are significant and actionable:

- **For IT Companies and HR Leaders:** The message is clear: focus on culture over policy. Invest in training for managers on how to lead distributed teams, build systems based on trust and outputs, and communicate policies with clarity. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of mandatory hybrid models and consider offering employees greater choice, including a fully remote option, to maximise well-being and talent retention.
- **For Managers:** Direct supervisors play a pivotal role. They must be empowered and trained to actively support their team's use of flexibility, respect boundaries, and model healthy work habits. The finding that managerial support was the least positively rated perception among employees highlights a key area for development.
- **For Policymakers and Industry Bodies:** This research provides evidence to inform national conversations around the "Right to Request Remote Work" and other legislation. It highlights the need to create frameworks that not only enable flexibility but also provide protections against its downsides, such as the "always on" culture. The findings can help industry bodies like Technology Ireland develop best-practice guidelines for their member companies.

6.5 Limitations of the Research

In line with the principle of academic rigour, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which offer context for the findings and pave the way for future research.

- **Sampling Method and Generalisability:** The use of non-probability convenience and snowball sampling means the sample may not be perfectly representative of the entire Irish IT workforce. The demographic profile, while plausible, cannot be statistically generalised. The findings are therefore indicative of the trends within this specific sample rather than a definitive statement about the entire sector.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot in time and is effective for identifying associations. However, it cannot establish causality. It is not possible to definitively conclude that a certain FWA *causes* a change in WLB, only that they are associated. A longitudinal design would be required to track these variables over time and infer causality.
- **Sample Size and Statistical Power:** With a sample size of N=81, the statistical power to detect smaller effects, particularly in the subgroup analyses for the moderation hypotheses, was limited. The non-significant findings for gender and parental status should be interpreted with this limitation in mind; a larger sample might have revealed a significant, albeit small, effect.
- **Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on a self-administered questionnaire means the data is based on employee perceptions. This can be subject to social desirability bias (respondents answering in a way they think is expected) or common method bias (spurious correlations arising from using the same method to measure all variables).

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Building upon the findings and limitations of this thesis, several compelling avenues for future research emerge:

1. **Qualitative Deep Dive into the Hybrid Experience:** The finding that hybrid workers report lower WLB than fully remote workers is a critical area for further exploration. Future research should employ a qualitative methodology, such as semi-structured interviews, to understand the lived experiences of hybrid workers in the Irish IT sector. This could uncover the specific pain points—be they logistical, social, or psychological—that contribute to this lower sense of balance.
2. **Longitudinal Study on FWA Transitions and WLB:** To address the limitation of the cross-sectional design, a longitudinal study would be highly valuable. Such a study could track a cohort of employees over time as they transition between different work arrangements (e.g., from office-based to hybrid, or hybrid to fully remote) to better establish causal links between specific FWAs and changes in WLB, productivity, and career progression.
3. **Large-Scale, Representative Survey:** To overcome the generalisability limitations of this study, future research should aim to conduct a large-scale survey using a stratified random sampling approach in partnership with industry bodies. A larger sample would provide more robust statistical power to re-examine the moderating roles of gender and parental status, and to explore other potential moderators such as job role, company size, or employee age.
4. **Investigating the "Dark Side" and Organisational Interventions:** This study confirmed that boundary-blurring and an "always on" culture are significant

problems. Future research should focus specifically on the effectiveness of organisational interventions designed to combat these issues. This could involve comparative case studies of companies that have implemented a "right to disconnect" policy versus those that have not, to measure the tangible impact on employee stress, burnout, and WLB.

5. **Exploring the Role of Organisational Justice:** The perception of fairness in how FWA policies are allocated and managed could be a crucial, unmeasured variable. Future studies could incorporate measures of procedural and distributive justice to investigate whether the perceived fairness of FWA implementation is a key mediator in the relationship between the policy itself and WLB outcomes. This would add a rich layer of understanding to why the same policy can have vastly different effects in different organisational cultures.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided a solid foundation and a specific, data-driven perspective on the state of flexible work and work-life balance in the Irish IT sector. It has answered its core questions while simultaneously opening the door to new and more nuanced lines of inquiry. The world of work continues to evolve at a rapid pace, and it is through continued, rigorous, and context-aware research that we can hope to guide that evolution towards a future that is not only productive but also sustainable, equitable, and balanced for all.

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