

Exploring Employees' Work-Life Harmony and Service Delivery in Mpumalanga's Municipalities, South Africa: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

The study explores the link between employees' work-life balance and service delivery in Mpumalanga's municipalities, South Africa, through an extensive review of literature. Work-life harmony is vital for employee well-being as it impacts job satisfaction, motivation, efficiency, and overall organisational outcomes. Using qualitative methods, data were collected from reputable sources such as SALGA, LGSETA, and the Auditor-General, focusing on literature published over the past decade. This approach emphasised peer-reviewed articles and relevant government reports. The findings indicate that work-life balance affects employee performance and the municipality's ability to serve communities effectively. It also shows that employees under stress find it difficult to manage work demands alongside their personal lives. We recommend that municipal leaders regularly evaluate employees' workload and implement intervention strategies like mental health programmes, consider flexible work arrangements such as remote work, provide stress management training, establish peer support networks, and revise organisational policies that place excessive pressure on employee well-being and performance. Prioritising strategies that foster a supportive and empowering work environment is essential for reducing the risks of burnout, absenteeism, and ill health caused by workload pressures.

Keywords: *Work-Life Harmony, Service Delivery, Assessment, Municipal, Employee Well-Being, Mpumalanga.*

Introduction

This study examines work-life balance and service delivery among employees in the municipalities of Mpumalanga, South Africa. Effectively managing work-life balance is vital, as it greatly affects employee wellbeing and productivity, ultimately leading to better outcomes (Powell et al., 2019; Asokan, 2021). Governments worldwide continually face the challenge of developing strategies to support employees in maintaining a work-life balance, considering its influence on workforce efficiency and the quality of service provided to residents (Kumar, 2025; Ndua & Wanyoike, 2024). Public sector employees often experience increased stress due to rising and diverse service demands from citizens, especially amid frequently inflated manifesto promises from political parties at national, provincial, and municipal levels across South Africa. These employees play a vital role in fulfilling government commitments made to citizens by political leaders. Everyday stressors characterise this global issue, such as long working hours, exposure to violent protests that threaten personal safety, and administrative pressures, including financial constraints, which hinder timely and compliant social service delivery (Mseba, 2024). The primary stressor remains the pressure from evolving public expectations regarding the quality and sustainability of service delivery.

Turner and Barker (2021) report that in the United Kingdom, the public service has developed comprehensive strategies to promote work-life balance among employees, recognising its impact on government performance. The strategies include psychological counselling, wellness programmes, and hybrid work arrangements, among others. Although these interventions have demonstrated some progress, achieving work-life harmony remains an ongoing challenge that requires constant assessment of employees' internal and external environments. The effectiveness of these interventions depends on the local context and the availability of resources (Arunashantha, 2019; Ndua & Wanyoike, 2024).

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In Africa, work-life balance differs due to high levels of underdevelopment. Where it is promoted, other factors such as HR practitioners' challenges in effectively engaging with employees and the lack of relevant intervention strategies also play a role. Some countries have made progress towards achieving a workable balance. In contrast, others have seen limited success due to restrictive government policies, low economic growth, and workplace cultures that do not support employee well-being (Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). In Kenya, interventions mainly focus on urban areas. Countries such as Rwanda, Mauritius, and Nigeria are still in the early stages, hindered by instability caused by years of conflict in Rwanda and high levels of corruption and maladministration elsewhere. South Africa is regarded as a shining example of work-life balance in Africa, thanks to its progressive labour laws and increasing investment in employee wellness strategies. Consequently, it serves as a positive benchmark for sustainable interventions designed to help employees manage their work-life balance. However, some scholars find South Africa's workplace intervention programmes highly ambitious and challenging to implement in specific public sector organisations (Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). The ongoing review of the 1998 White Paper in South Africa highlights the complex challenges posed by the lack of effective employee empowerment strategies, which have led to poor performance in municipal contexts. COGTA (2025) suggests that, for the average South African, a revised White Paper could mean improved accountability, efficiency, and a more responsive local government in service delivery to communities. Central to this expectation is the influence of work-life balance on employee performance and how well municipalities are prepared to support their workforce in managing harmony between private and work lives (COGTA, 2025; Mageni & Slabbert, 2014).

Work-life balance is essential for both employee performance and the effective delivery of municipal services. Employees who maintain a stable work-life balance tend to be more productive, engaged, motivated, and committed, which results in improved service delivery (Masuku et al., 2025). Conversely, employees who lack this balance may show signs of increased stress, burnout, and lower performance. Municipalities should prioritise strategies and interventions that support employee well-being (Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2016), enhance performance, and improve service delivery and operational efficiency (Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). The impact of work-life balance also includes greater productivity, as employees can manage both their professional and personal lives effectively, enabling them to focus and perform more efficiently. Several studies demonstrate that employees with high work-life harmony are more effective at work (Masuku et al., 2025; Kumar, 2025; COGTA, 2025; Collins, 2020; Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). The rise of hybrid and remote work models following the COVID-19 pandemic has given employees greater flexibility in their work environments. Working from home has improved harmony between employees' private and professional lives (Singh & Maurya, 2025). Since both private and work lives are equally important, implementing effective work-life balance strategies can enhance worker stability, health, and productivity (Marecki, 2024). Healthy work-life harmony also reduces absenteeism and staff turnover (Collins, 2020). When employees feel supported in balancing their work responsibilities and personal lives, they experience higher job satisfaction, increased motivation, and greater engagement in their roles (Masuku et al., 2025). A balanced private life allows employees to recharge and pursue personal interests, fostering creativity and innovation. Furthermore, work-life balance promotes overall employee health, leading to better physical and mental well-being, which is vital for sustainable individual and organisational performance.

Masuku et al. (2025) argue that work-life balance can enhance service delivery in municipal settings. Employees who are well-rested, engaged, and satisfied are more likely to provide high-quality services to communities (Sibonde & Dassah, 2021). Well-balanced employees demonstrate greater efficiency, resulting in acceptable turnaround times for service calls and overall improved performance (Hlatshwayo, 2023). Communities generally feel more satisfied with municipal services when these are delivered by employees who are effectively engaged, motivated, committed, and responsive (Sibonde & Dassah, 2021). When municipal services are delivered efficiently and sustainably, community discontent is likely to decrease (Hlatshwayo, 2023). Recognising the importance of work-life balance in government operations, the researchers of this study encourage municipalities to explore practical strategies to mitigate risks related to workload, workplace culture, management practices, and technological changes. HR practitioners must develop effective coping mechanisms for employees under stress and support them in achieving a healthy work-life balance. This study is particularly relevant in the South African context, as it aims to offer insights

into how work-life harmony influences municipal performance and their capacity to deliver effective services to communities. The study also highlights work-life theories that can inform the development of employee engagement strategies for Mpumalanga's municipalities, fostering a supportive environment that prioritises employees' well-being.

This study aims to examine the relationship between employees' work-life balance and the efficient delivery of municipal services in Mpumalanga's municipalities, analysing relevant strategies that Human Resource (HR) practitioners can implement to enhance employees' capacity to manage the challenges related to work-life balance.

The objectives of this study are to:

- Analyse the importance of work-life balance for employees' well-being, their engagement with work, motivation, commitment to remain with the organisation, and their capacity to provide effective services to communities.
- Examine the literature review on effective strategies for employee engagement.

The research questions for this study are:

- Which interventions would identify the most effective strategies to help employees manage their work-life balance?
- What are the employer's responsibilities in fostering an environment that promotes employee well-being?
- What is the relationship between employee work-life balance and the quality of municipal service delivery?

Literature Review

Work-life harmony in the workplace pertains to the connection between personal unpaid work and paid employment. Achieving this balance can help government organisations foster a productive work culture where employees' well-being needs are prioritised. Most workplaces follow guidance from relevant work-life theories that suggest models to empower employees to achieve balance and reduce risks such as absenteeism and staff turnover. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA 2025), responsible for local government in South Africa, does not have explicitly defined work-life theories to guide strategies for addressing balance challenges. Instead, their strategic frameworks and empowerment programmes for municipalities emphasise the importance of strong institutional and administrative capabilities, efficient service delivery, and community engagement, which directly influence the work environment and employee well-being (COGTA, 2015-2019).

The researchers in this study argue that although COGTA (2015-2019) does not explicitly mention 'work-life balance' in its strategic documents, its emphasis on good governance, capacity building, service delivery, and sound financial management all contribute to creating a more sustainable and positive working environment for municipal employees. This, in turn, supports their well-being and may improve their work-life balance. To strengthen the study's robustness, we examined other relevant theories to explore a broader perspective beyond COGTA's (2015-2019) reliance on its strategic framework to promote work-life balance among municipal employees. These theories include Work-Family Border Theory and the Job Demands-Resources Model.

The Work-Family Border Theory was first introduced by Clark (2000), who argued that employees act as daily border crossers between private and work lives, and that the relationship between border crossers and others at work and at home influences work-family balance. Clark's theory is subsequently supported by

authors such as Dunn (2025) and Peng et al. (2022), who emphasise how individuals manage the boundaries between their paid work and family life to achieve a balance beneficial for both responsibilities. These authors maintain that employees actively manage these boundaries rather than passively experiencing conflict, and they suggest that a supportive environment can enhance this process. We agree with these authors, who assert that it is the responsibility of municipal employees to manage their busy lives and maintain balance to prevent any one aspect from collapsing. We also support the views of COGTA, which state that municipalities as employers must ensure a favourable working environment that promotes employees' conditions and wellness. The concept of 'border crossers' positions employees as individuals responsible for effectively transitioning between work and family, highlighting the importance of understanding how these borders are constructed and maintained (Dunn, 2025).

Within the scope of this study, set in municipal environments, employees need the skills, capacity, and support to establish and uphold clear boundaries between their work and personal lives. However, we recognise the changes brought by Covid-19, where some workplaces adopted hybrid working arrangements. Many municipal employees worldwide started working from home and continue to do so (Hsu et al., 2021). Therefore, setting boundaries in this context goes beyond the physical walls of the workplace and home. It has shifted towards managing time carefully and balancing both aspects of life, alongside employees' ability to navigate work and home life in a complementary way. Employees have had to carve out workspaces within their homes while managing domestic responsibilities. In this scenario, employees must define and uphold clear boundaries between work and home, assigning specific times and tasks to each. Many aim to establish boundaries that minimise negative impacts on their work and private lives, although some still struggle to find a daily balance that works for both (Peng et al., 2022). The authority to set these boundaries rests with the employees. We note that while the theory encourages employees to control the interaction between home and work, employers should regularly evaluate the support required by both on-site employees and those whose homes serve as workplaces. For this study, the theory examines how individual municipal employees manage and balance their service delivery roles alongside family responsibilities by setting boundaries to achieve equilibrium. Community demands for improved service delivery and family expectations must coexist without hindering each other. Therefore, municipalities need employees who can effectively balance these two domains (Peng et al., 2022). In a municipal setting, work-family border theory suggests that for employees to sustain a work-home balance while maintaining boundaries, they need support from both their organisation and their families.

The Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) suggests that job characteristics can generally be classified into demands or resources, which influence employee well-being and performance through separate mechanisms (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Job demands, such as workload and time pressure, can lead to strain and burnout, while job resources, including autonomy and social support, can enhance motivation and engagement. It is vital to continuously monitor the workload of municipal employees to ensure responsibilities are evenly shared (Li et al., 2025; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Job demands refer to work aspects that require sustained effort and are linked to physical and mental costs (Scholze & Hecker, 2024). COGTA's focus on fostering a supportive work environment as a strategy to promote work-life balance aligns with this theory. The connection COGTA (2015-2019) establishes between strong institutional and administrative capacities, efficient service delivery, community involvement, capacity building of municipal staff, good governance, and regular workload assessments demonstrates concerted efforts to empower municipal employees to manage their dual roles effectively and improve performance (COGTA, 2015-2019). COGTA's comprehensive approach to work-life balance, relying on institutional strategies and frameworks to help employees manage these roles and set healthy boundaries, aligns closely with work-family border theory—especially considering the emphasis on continuous workload reviews to reduce work fatigue and burnout. This management approach supports COGTA's strategies and frameworks, which are designed to help employees maintain a work-life balance. Routine task evaluation, boundary management, handling dual roles, and workload reduction—supported by these three theories—are essential for employee well-being and achieving work-life harmony. The authors recommend an integrated approach where Mpumalanga's municipalities adopt these theories flexibly to suit their unique contexts. Each theory offers strengths that can be effectively utilised to involve employees in reaching better work-life harmony

and improved service delivery outcomes (Clark, 2000; Scholze & Hecker, 2024; Peng et al., 2022; COGTA, 2015-2019; Li et al., 2025; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

Research Methodology

The research was carried out in local government settings across Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. It used qualitative methods to examine employees' work-life balance and service delivery in the region. The purpose was to assess current HR practices in Mpumalanga's municipalities concerning work-life balance, employee well-being, performance, effective service delivery, and overall organisational success. The researchers conducted an extensive literature review by analysing government websites, peer-reviewed academic journals, and specialised databases to gather relevant information. Their review encompassed various fields, including work-life balance theories, performance, employee empowerment, border management, workload assessment, and broader research themes. The aim was to identify effective mechanisms that assist municipal employees in managing their work and home lives, understand associated challenges, and explore opportunities for empowerment and support through various strategies and frameworks. During the analysis, relevant themes, strategies, and practices were identified and assessed to generate meaningful findings from the literature. The research team sourced literature from three primary academic search engines: JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar. Multiple keywords were utilised, such as "work-life theories," "employee challenges," "organisational strategies," "organisational performance," "community needs," "municipal human resource context," and "employee support systems," along with various qualitative research terms. Ultimately, this qualitative study offers a comprehensive examination of work-life practices within local government in Mpumalanga Province, drawing on insights from diverse academic sources in the fields of employee well-being, motivation, support, and empowerment.

Selection Criteria

The selection of materials focused on articles, reports, and datasets analysing employee engagement practices, employee empowerment, well-being, and performance metrics in municipal settings. The researchers' criteria included municipal mandates related to service delivery, employee support, empowerment, motivation, financial sustainability, inter-community relations, communication, and workload assessment, covering diverse workplace environments such as remote work from traditional offices. The literature review required that all sources be no older than ten years to avoid outdated information. This research prioritised empirical studies and theoretical documents, emphasising peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and policy statements that offer reliable insights into human resource practices and their connection to employee engagement and support within local governance systems.

The research paper selected 56 out of 89 downloads that addressed theories and practices related to work-life harmony, employee engagement and empowerment in municipalities, employee well-being, work-life border management, financial viability, and qualitative research methods. Articles mainly concentrated on the private sector or exceeded the researchers' specified time limits and were therefore excluded. This qualitative study employed thematic analysis to sift through and interpret data gathered from peer-reviewed articles, municipal policies, and various academic and government reports, including the Auditor General's reports and Census data.

Limitations of Methodology and Search Criteria

The research had a notable limitation because it did not fully incorporate information about private sector practices and human leadership frameworks used in other provinces. Our study concentrated on public sector entities in Mpumalanga, but we did not evaluate successful private sector organisations or best practices from municipalities outside Mpumalanga, which may have restricted our findings. The private sector's performance-driven culture, which emphasises wealth creation, provides valuable lessons that could enhance municipal operations, particularly regarding employee support and well-being, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency. Similarly, municipalities in other provinces, despite operating in different contexts, might share adaptable practices due to their collective constitutional mandates centred on community development and service delivery. As municipalities seek self-

sufficiency—aiming to generate their own revenue streams—integrating proven private sector leadership and employee engagement strategies could improve the operational effectiveness of municipal employees in Mpumalanga.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies require both rigour and trustworthiness to validate findings, as they establish the credibility and reliability of results. The academic community has developed various methods to maintain methodological integrity, including structured checklists and flexible, guideline-based approaches for peer reviewers (Ahmed, 2024; Johnson, Adkins & Chauvin, 2020). The research identified credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as key criteria for ensuring the trustworthiness of findings. Our analysis mainly relied on peer-reviewed articles and recognised empirical research for their scholarly rigour. This included government reports, such as those from the Auditor-General and Statistics South Africa, which were assessed for reliability according to standards outlined in the South African Constitution. Each source was carefully evaluated for relevance and credibility through a consistent assessment process applied across all literature included in the study. The filtering process was transparent, ensuring clarity in the rationale for exclusion based on the researchers' predefined criteria.

Work-Life Balance: Definition and Importance

Work-life balance describes the state in which a person can effectively manage their work and personal responsibilities, ensuring that neither negatively affects the other. It involves fostering a harmonious relationship between professional duties and personal life, including family, social activities, hobbies, and personal well-being (Breyer & Bluemke; Aryateja et al., 2021). Key aspects include balancing work and personal life, managing working hours, allocating time for various tasks, and recognising how personal life influences work and vice versa (Semlali & Hassi, 2016). Work-life balance is not just about dividing time equally; it also depends on the quality of that time and how each area impacts the other. It is personalised and context-dependent, meaning what suits one employee may not suit another (Boz et al., 2016). Therefore, achieving balance involves elements such as time, engagement, and satisfaction.

- Time balance focuses on the fair distribution of time across different areas. It involves managing our allocated time for work, personal commitments, and leisure to prevent burnout and the breakdown of family life (Maharaj, 2018).
- According to Kalyan (2024), involvement balance emphasises the psychological and emotional engagement in both work and personal life. It pertains to the levels of mental and emotional commitment in each area, aiming for a healthy level of participation in both.
- Satisfaction balance relates to the overall sense of fulfilment and well-being derived from both work and personal life. It involves achieving contentment and purpose in each area without sacrificing one for the other (Maharaj, 2018).

Furthermore, work interference with personal life (WIPL) describes how demands, such as long hours, negatively impact personal life, potentially causing stress, fatigue, and less time for family, hobbies, or personal needs (Bataineh, 2019). Conversely, personal life interference with work (PLIW) explores how personal life demands affect work (Hutagalung et al., 2020). It is essential to develop intentional plans to minimise negative overlaps between these areas to prevent adverse effects on employee productivity. Municipal leaders must establish strategies and frameworks to protect the time and space dedicated to maintaining work-life balance.

Local Service Delivery in Municipalities

South Africa is divided into nine provinces. Mpumalanga Province is the second smallest, after Gauteng. Its local government structure aligns with South Africa's broader framework, comprising three district

municipalities (Gert Sibande, Ehlanzeni, and Nkangala) and seventeen local municipalities (Mkhabela et al., 2025). Each municipality has an elected council responsible for decision-making, policy approval, budgeting, and service delivery within its area (COGTA, 2021). The provincial government, as the second sphere alongside the national government, plays a role in coordinating, monitoring, and supporting these municipalities (Isabirye & Moloji, 2023). Municipalities operate under a mayoral executive system, where the mayor, elected by the council, leads with the support of an executive or mayoral committee. Day-to-day operations are managed by the municipal administration, headed by a municipal manager responsible for implementing council programmes and decisions as outlined in the Municipal Systems and Structures Acts (2000; 1998). Community involvement is encouraged through ward committees within communities. These committees assist in developing and reviewing Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), as well as performance management systems, and participate in decisions related to service provision. IDPs serve as blueprints, functioning as service delivery contracts between communities and municipalities. Failure to meet these contractual commitments often results in service delivery protests in many municipalities. Therefore, all municipalities are legally required to prepare IDPs as strategic tools to enhance service delivery and promote social and economic development (Isabirye & Moloji, 2023; COGTA, 2021).

Despite the legal frameworks discussed earlier, the local government sector in Mpumalanga Province and South Africa still faces challenges in delivering effective services and properly implementing IDPs. Areas such as financial management, monitoring, and evaluation are becoming increasingly problematic (Mkhabela et al., 2025; Isabirye & Moloji, 2023; Ngubane & Wotela, 2024). The primary service delivery challenges faced by municipalities include inadequate planning, financial mismanagement, corruption, insufficient infrastructure, limited employee capacity, and little community engagement. These issues often lead to service delivery protests across many municipalities in Mpumalanga and throughout South Africa (Mkhabela et al., 2025; Isabirye & Moloji, 2023). According to these authors, if municipalities in Mpumalanga Province can address these challenges, communities are more likely to benefit from improved service delivery.

Interconnections between Work-Life Balance and Service Delivery

A causal link exists between work-life balance and the positive impact of municipal employees on community service delivery (Ndua & Wanyoike, 2024). An effective work-life balance among staff positively influences service delivery outcomes by increasing engagement, reducing burnout, and fostering a more positive and productive work environment. When employees feel supported, valued, and able to manage both their professional and personal lives, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, which leads to higher commitment and improved performance (Masuku et al., 2025; Skosana et al., 2024). As the demand for sustainable services in municipal settings grows, achieving harmony between work and life becomes crucial for employees' health, productivity, and organisational results. Attaining work-life balance is a vital element of a healthy workplace as it results in the following:

- **Increased employee engagement and satisfaction:** in a municipal environment where staff can effectively balance their work and personal lives, they experience lower levels of stress and burnout, which can lead to greater job satisfaction and a stronger sense of commitment to their organisation and role responsibilities. This, in turn, positively influences their engagement in delivering services to communities (Masuku et al., 2025).
- **Reduced Burnout and Absenteeism:** When employees struggle to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life, it can lead to burnout, high stress levels, and decreased motivation. This may cause an increase in stress-related illnesses, absenteeism, and higher staff turnover. When municipalities support and promote work-life balance, the risk of these adverse effects can be lessened, resulting in a more stable and dependable workforce committed to high performance (Ndua & Wanyoike, 2024; Sibonde & Dassah, 2021).
- **Enhanced Performance and Productivity:** In municipalities where employees receive support and can balance their work demands with their personal lives, they are more likely to perform their duties

effectively and efficiently. This can lead to improved service delivery outcomes as employees are better prepared, more focused, and motivated to respond to and meet community needs for services (Skosana et al., 2024).

- **Enhanced Organisational Reputation:** A municipality that prioritises employee well-being and work-life balance is likely to be viewed more positively by the community and potential municipal employees. This fosters a better public perception and can attract essential skills while retaining experienced staff (Sibonde & Dassah, 2021).
- **Better Decision-Making and Problem-Solving:** Municipal employees who are not constantly stressed or distracted by work-life imbalances are better equipped to demonstrate commitment, make sound decisions, and contribute effectively to problem-solving. This balance can lead to more efficient and effective service delivery that is accepted and supported by communities (Skosana et al., 2024).

By prioritising employee work-life balance, municipalities can foster a more engaged, productive, and satisfied workforce, leading to significant improvements in service delivery outcomes (Skosana et al., 2024). Similarly, research on the impact of work-life balance shows that maintaining this equilibrium is vital for enhancing the productivity and quality of public service organisations (Masuku et al., 2025; Rony et al., 2023). A study conducted in the Emalahleni local municipality in Mpumalanga revealed that factors such as leadership support and a positive work environment—both of which promote work-life balance—significantly influence employee engagement and job satisfaction. Consequently, as highlighted in COGTA's focus on creating an enabling environment for work-life balance (2015-2019), municipal leadership plays a vital role in establishing the support systems needed for employee empowerment and wellbeing. Implementing strategies and frameworks that allow for ongoing assessment of employee workload, fair allocation of tasks and time, setting boundaries between work and home, and prioritising employee wellbeing are measures that can help create a supportive environment, thereby enhancing employee performance and productivity (Le et al., 2020).

Barriers to Achieving Work-Life Balance in Municipal Contexts

The South African municipal sector is expected to lead the development agenda as the face of government. Challenges in service delivery and the inability to provide effective community services have consistently hindered progress since South Africa transitioned to democracy (Mkhabela et al., 2025; Masuku et al., 2025). Beyond systemic issues within the municipal framework, a significant reason for poor performance is the failure of many municipalities to invest enough in employee preparedness and well-being. Supporting staff is crucial for preparing the workforce to deliver quality services to communities. Increasing demands from communities and pressure to meet service delivery targets are borne by municipal employees (Le et al., 2020). Like communities, employees have needs that must be addressed for optimal performance. Currently, the municipal environment presents various obstacles that negatively affect employees' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. The stress from managing both domestic and work responsibilities, if unmanaged, can lead to high stress levels that directly impair an employee's capacity to perform effectively. Work-life balance refers to a state of equilibrium where employees manage work obligations alongside personal responsibilities, including family, social activities, and personal interests (Isa & Indrayati, 2023; Brough et al., 2020). Achieving an exact 50/50 split between work and life is unrealistic; instead, it involves creating a situation where work and personal life are compatible and mutually supportive, reducing conflict and enhancing overall well-being. Key factors influencing this balance include the amount of time spent on work versus personal activities and the level of satisfaction and engagement in each area (Brough et al., 2020).

High job demands, limited flexibility, organisational culture, and job uncertainties are factors ingrained in the municipal work environment. These can also lead to increased employee stress, burnout, and low morale. Municipal workers often face heavy workloads and long hours, mainly due to infrastructure breakdowns and other system failures (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023). The unpredictability of their job demands makes it challenging for them to balance work with their personal life (Masuku et al., 2025). The

absence of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or adaptable scheduling, can restrict employees' ability to manage personal commitments and work effectively. Consequently, municipal policies may create obstacles to achieving work-life balance. An organisational culture that emphasises long working hours and presenteeism can hinder work-life balance, as employees may feel excessive pressure to prioritise work over their personal lives. Encouraging employees to participate in decisions regarding how their work is structured can help make their workload more manageable.

Employees' concerns about job security, particularly during economic fluctuations or changes in government policies, can increase stress and negatively impact work-life balance. Limited support and access to resources like childcare or eldercare, along with inadequate backing from supervisors or colleagues, can further undermine this balance (Beauregard, 2011). Poor skills development and a lack of opportunities to practise new competencies can lead to increased stress and demotivation, affecting work-life balance. An imbalance often results in poorer service delivery to communities. Breakdowns in communication between municipal employees and communities, as well as a lack of accountability for service provision, can create a stressful and demotivating work environment (Percyval et al., 2023; Mudzusi et al., 2024). Gawande (2024) describes the balancing act between work and life as the most delicate process that employees continually seek to maintain. Despite these challenges, maintaining this balance is essential for employees' overall well-being, yet it has become more complex due to rising service demands and technological advances that blur the boundaries between work and home (Kobayashi et al., 2025; Gawande & Shah, 2024). Budhiraja and Kant (2021) also emphasise the gender aspect of work-life balance, arguing that women face additional challenges in maintaining this balance because of social stereotypes related to family roles.

In most cultures, household responsibilities, including child-rearing, are assigned to women. Work obligations further add to an already overwhelming burden for women. Mpumalanga Province, which is predominantly rural, is home to African cultures that establish clear boundaries regarding men's and women's roles (Atoyebi et al., 2024). Women municipal employees are more likely to face heavier workloads than their male colleagues (Jenkins & Harvey, 2019; Budhiraja and Kant, 2021). Municipalities therefore have a responsibility to consider these cultural stereotypes when assessing employee workloads. Most municipal roles—especially essential services like water and sewage, public safety, and emergency services—involve on-call duties that require employees to be available outside normal working hours. These arrangements add extra pressure and stress on employees, reducing their family time and potentially negatively affecting their performance (Kobayashi et al., 2024). Strict project and programme deadlines, along with organisational targets, can intensify this pressure, forcing employees to prioritise work over family commitments (Irfan et al., 2021).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The local government environment in South Africa is established through legislation, with structures that have clearly defined roles and powers to meet the service delivery needs of communities (Municipal Structures Act, 1998). It also includes core principles, mechanisms, and processes aimed at fostering social and economic development, ensuring universal access to affordable services, and encouraging community participation in government procedures (Municipal Systems Act, 2000). For municipalities to perform these responsibilities effectively, an environment must be created that optimises the output of all essential resources for development. Human capital is one such resource, and its skills and capabilities must be harnessed to enable effective performance and service delivery to communities. Strong strategies and policy frameworks are vital to empower and protect the wellbeing of employees, allowing organisations to benefit from their commitment and performance.

Municipalities need effective measures to support employees in achieving a work-life balance, which is essential for their well-being and performance both at work and at home. To assist employees in improving this balance, organisations should consider alternative workspace arrangements such as hybrid workstations, which can provide a supportive environment for their well-being. Implementing hybrid work arrangements, promoting employee well-being, and fostering a culture that values both work and personal life can strengthen employees' commitment to their employer's sustainability, leading to better outcomes

(Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). These arrangements may include options such as flexitime, telecommuting programmes, and compressed workweeks, along with initiatives that promote both physical and mental health. Consequently, municipalities must continually assess and adapt basic employment conditions to better meet employees' needs and embrace alternative work arrangements such as working from home (Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). Effective communication and supportive management are crucial for the successful implementation and employee acceptance of these policies (Petinez et al., 2024). Telecommuting allows employees to work from home where their roles are compatible (Mageni & Slabbert, 2014). Linked to telecommuting, flexitime offers employees control over their schedules, enabling them to adjust start and end times within a specified range. In some cases, employees can condense their hours into fewer days, allowing them to manage domestic responsibilities alongside work demands.

Implications for policy

Municipalities should establish and implement human resource policies that support employees and prioritise their well-being, addressing both their work-related needs and personal life requirements. This includes flexible hours, compressed workweeks, leave policies, and support for dependent care, as discussed above (Akuamoah-Boateng, 2020). Work-life balance should be integrated into a broader organisational framework that promotes employee well-being and recognises the importance of balancing work and personal life (Opoku et al., 2023). Adequate leadership support and commitment to work-life balance policies are crucial for their successful implementation and positive impact on employees. Municipalities need to train managers and leaders and increase awareness of the importance of promoting these policies accordingly (Nguyen & Haar, 2024). They should also regularly assess and evaluate the effectiveness of their work-life policies to ensure they meet the needs of both employees and the organisation (Opoku et al., 2023).

The researchers in this study contend that work-life balance is not merely a concern for individual employees; it is a strategic component for organisations. When organisations adopt effective work-life policies and practices, employees' well-being enhances, fostering a more productive and engaged workforce, which ultimately results in improved organisational outcomes (Gawande & Shah, 2024).

Implications for Practice

Municipalities with effective work-life practices can benefit from increased employee focus and energy, ultimately leading to higher productivity levels (Opoku et al., 2023). Effective work-life practices help retain employees, reducing recruitment and training costs (Opoku et al., 2023). Investing in work-life balance can enhance organisational reputation, making it more attractive to highly skilled workers and customers (Maxwell, 2005). When implemented, a strong work-life balance can reduce absenteeism, turnover, and stress-related health issues, while also saving on productivity costs (Opoku et al., 2023). Municipalities that adopt effective and sustainable work-life balance foster a more supportive and inclusive environment, contributing to a positive organisational culture (Gawande & Shah, 2024).

Conclusion

The literature review found that organisations worldwide are adopting practical strategies to foster work environments that enhance workforce wellbeing and engagement, helping employees manage their workload while effectively balancing their personal and household lives. The study revealed that, in the United Kingdom, public service sectors have developed comprehensive strategies to promote work-life balance because of its impact on government performance. These strategies include psychological counselling, wellness programmes, and hybrid work arrangements, among others. On the African continent, the literature suggests that contextual challenges such as underdevelopment, mismanagement, instability, and corruption have overshadowed employees, essential component organisations rely on for performance and outcomes. The literature also indicates that South African labour laws aim to balance employees' interests and needs with the employer's mandate to deliver effective services, particularly within public services and municipalities.

The Job Demands-Resources Model demonstrates that job demands, such as workload and time pressure, can lead to stress and burnout among employees. Conversely, job resources, like autonomy and social support, can enhance motivation and engagement. Regularly reviewing the workload of municipal employees is vital to ensure tasks are fairly distributed. The importance of employee support remains consistent across all three theories. Municipalities should increase their investment in supporting and empowering employees to enhance their capacity and productivity. The review repeatedly emphasises that human capital is crucial in achieving organisational goals, including providing effective services to communities within municipal settings. A municipality that prioritises employee well-being and work-life balance is likely to be viewed more positively by communities and prospective municipal workers. This approach can also improve public perception, attract necessary skills, and help retain experienced staff. Empowered municipal employees, who are not continually stressed or distracted by work-life imbalances, are better able to demonstrate commitment, make sound decisions, and contribute efficiently to service delivery challenges. Achieving this balance benefits employees and results in more efficient and effective service delivery, which is valued and supported by the community.

Directions for Future Research

Future research on work-life balance should focus on personalised strategies to support employees' wellbeing, as achieving equilibrium cannot follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Each employee encounters unique challenges that require customised solutions. Additionally, there is a need to identify more sources of investment and financial backing dedicated specifically to employee support and empowerment within public services, including municipal settings. Such support should address challenges emerging from the changing workplace, driven by increasing demands for optimal performance and productivity. Future studies should also include empirical research to assess the tangible benefits of remote working and to clarify alternative supervision methods and monitoring mechanisms for management accountability.

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