

Blurring Boundaries and Work-Life Integration: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Their Effects on Productivity, Life Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment

Asa Sheila Amelia, Fauzi Ichwani

Universitas Muhammadiyah PKU Surakarta
Penulis Koresponding: asa.sheila@umpku.ac.id

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Abstract

Blurring boundaries between work and personal life has become a defining feature of contemporary work systems, intensifying through digital connectivity, flexible working arrangements, and the expansion of remote and hybrid work structures. This review synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence to examine how blurring boundaries, conceptualized as work-life integration, shape employee productivity, life satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Drawing on boundary theory, role integration frameworks, and contemporary research on digital labor, the findings demonstrate that work-life integration can enhance productivity by increasing autonomy and flexibility and reducing transition costs. However, boundary permeability may also induce technostress, work intrusion, and role overload, undermining well-being and performance. Life satisfaction improves when integration is voluntary and aligned with personal preferences, but decreases when constant connectivity disrupts recovery time or intensifies role conflict. Organizational commitment strengthens when integration practices are perceived as supportive and empowering, but weakens when blurring boundaries are associated with surveillance or exploitation. This review clarifies conceptual ambiguities, identifies the moderating conditions underlying positive and negative effects, and provides directions for future research on adaptive boundary management in digitally driven work environments.

Keywords: Digital Connectivity, Autonomy, Technostress, Work Intrusion, Role Overload

1. Introduction

The restructuring of modern work is deeply intertwined with rapid technological advances, digital connectivity, mobile platforms, and organizational flexibility. These transformations have dissolved many of the traditional boundaries that once separated work activities from personal life, creating fluid role transitions and frequent cross-domain intrusions. Unlike earlier workplace systems built upon fixed schedules, spatial separation, and rigid temporal patterns, contemporary work structures facilitate constant accessibility and continuous interaction across multiple domains. As a result, workers increasingly operate within blurred boundaries that reshape the psychological, cognitive, and emotional landscapes of daily life. Scholars highlight

that this phenomenon extends well beyond ordinary role adjustments. [Szalavetz \(2022\)](#), for example, describes how digital transformations enable professional activities to be “experienced... as blurring the boundaries and finding new paths,” illustrating that boundary erosion is both structural and experiential. Within workplace contexts, [Chien et al. \(2022\)](#) similarly emphasize that “the online blurring of boundary can have mixed influences on employees’ interrelationship and offline behaviors,” revealing the degree to which digital interactions penetrate private and social domains.

Boundary blurring also forms part of broader societal changes in digital social relations. [Harris et al. \(2024\)](#) show that the merging of domestic and occupational spaces in remote and hybrid work requires individuals to “continuously recalibrate boundaries,” resulting in shifting expectations, emotional strain, and unpredictability in daily routines. Even professional domains such as healthcare exhibit similar dynamics: digitalization “is transforming the traditional organization of care by altering routines, responsibilities and the boundaries of professional autonomy” ([Szalavetz, 2022](#)). These findings demonstrate that the dissolution of boundaries is not restricted to corporate settings but is embedded across multiple sectors shaped by digital and organizational transformation. Boundary blurring also intersects with systemic power relations. [Dibia, Ganguli, and Mitra \(2026\)](#) show that forms of legal oversight, particularly community treatment orders, operate as mechanisms of “racialised surveillance... giving the ‘watcher’ insight and control over the life and activities of the ‘watched’.” Though arising from a different institutional context, this demonstrates how blurred boundaries can redistribute authority, expand oversight, and reshape autonomy.

Likewise, [Reed-Berendt and Clough \(2024\)](#) note that legal and institutional systems historically governed marginalized groups through boundary control, citing that earlier policies placed “imbeciles and the ‘feeble-minded’... in segregated colonies or under guardianship” and even “allowed so-called ‘mental defectives’... to be sterilised,” thereby using boundary dissolution and expansion as regulatory tools. Collectively, these developments reveal that blurred boundaries are not merely an outcome of convenience or technological change; they form part of a comprehensive transformation in how individuals negotiate autonomy, identity, and work–life balance. Understanding their implications requires synthesizing interdisciplinary perspectives spanning organizational studies, digital work, law, sociology, and psychology.

Purpose of the Review is:

1. This review provides a comprehensive synthesis of theoretical and empirical research on blurring boundaries and work–life integration (WLI). Specifically, it aims to:
2. Clarify the theoretical foundations underlying boundary blurring across personal and professional domains.
3. Integrate empirical evidence on its effects on productivity, life satisfaction, and organizational commitment.
4. Identify moderators and conditions that shape beneficial or harmful integration outcomes.
5. Offer recommendations for organizational policies and future scholarship in digitally mediated work environments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Blurring Boundaries and Work–Life Integration

Boundary Theory ([Clark, 2000](#); [Ashforth et al., 2000](#)) remains the foundational perspective for understanding how individuals construct and negotiate the psychological, temporal, and spatial separations between roles. These boundaries vary in permeability, flexibility, and strength. While rigid boundaries support segmentation, highly permeable ones enable integration and fluid transitions. Work–life integration emerges when individuals blend work and nonwork roles, often facilitated by digital tools that collapse spatial constraints. Digitalization accelerates the dissolution of boundaries by enabling constant connectivity. Demonstrate in educational contexts that digital environments blur “the boundaries between formal and informal learning,” reinforcing that digital culture inherently weakens traditional demarcations. Similarly, scientific fields struggle to maintain disciplinary separations, as [Galati et al. \(2023\)](#) observe in exposomics and metabolomics research, where scholars attempt to “delineate the border between these two fields,” indicating broader conceptual challenges in separating domains.

Cross-sector fragmentation is equally evident in technical industries. [Thibault et al. \(2025\)](#) show that “renovation strategies often focus on building envelope and photovoltaic installation, while HVAC systems are scarcely studied,” suggesting weakened role clarity and fragmented responsibilities—patterns analogous to personal role blurring in the workplace. Historically, blurred boundaries within legal and institutional systems have also served as mechanisms of control. [Reed-Berendt and Clough \(2024\)](#) describe how mental capacity law evolved from a framework designed “to provide medical treatment to adults who were considered incapable of consent” to one that gradually expanded to regulate intimate and personal decisions. Their analysis shows that disabled individuals were constructed as dangerous because “disabled male sexuality was portrayed as threatening, dangerous and in need of restriction,” and their “abnormality and monstrosity is emphasized,” reinforcing boundary manipulation as a tool of governance. Further, historical legislation “allowed so-called ‘mental defectives’... to be sterilised,” demonstrating extreme forms of boundary control. These interdisciplinary insights show that blurred boundaries are pervasive—appearing in digital work, education, healthcare, policy, science, and law—reflecting a structural transformation with deep social, cognitive, and organizational implications.

2.2 Blurring Boundaries and Employee Outcomes: Productivity

Studies show that WLI can enhance productivity by increasing autonomy, enabling flexible scheduling, and reducing transition time between tasks ([Kossek & Lautsch, 2012](#)). Employees working in integrated environments may optimize their workflows, perform tasks at preferred times, and maintain continuity amid shifting responsibilities. However, digital interruptions, multitasking pressures, and uncontrolled role overlap can diminish concentration and impair performance. [Chien et al. \(2022\)](#) highlight that “employees who perceive higher online boundary blurring are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion,” which can negatively affect productivity.

2.3. Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction tends to improve when WLI is voluntary and aligns with boundary preferences. Remote and hybrid work arrangements may support work–life harmony when employees maintain control over time and space ([Allen et al., 2015](#)).

Conversely, life satisfaction decreases when integration is imposed. [Harris et al. \(2024\)](#) show that blurred domestic-work boundaries “force individuals to continuously recalibrate” roles, increasing role strain and reducing opportunities for recovery.

2.4. Organizational Commitment

Commitment strengthens when organizations provide autonomy-supportive environments and recognize diverse boundary preferences ([Klindžić & Marić, 2019](#)). However, commitment declines when integration becomes a mechanism of control, such as monitoring availability or expecting constant responsiveness. [Dibia & Ganguli-Mitra \(2026\)](#) warn that blurred boundaries can “enable further opportunities for control” when embedded within surveillance systems.

3. Research Method

3.1. Source Identification

Identification of relevant sources was conducted through a comprehensive, structured search of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, SpringerLink, Elsevier, Wiley Online Library, and Taylor & Francis. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in organizational psychology, management, sociology, digitalization studies, and interdisciplinary research relevant to work–life boundaries. The search spanned publications from 2000 to 2026 to capture the evolution of work–life integration (WLI) from early boundary theory formulations to contemporary research shaped by digital transformation and hybrid work systems. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators, such as “blurring boundaries,” “work–life integration,” “boundary permeability,” “technostress,” “digital labor,” “remote work,” “surveillance,” and “role overlap,”—was used to ensure the retrieval of diverse conceptual and empirical studies. Additionally, five uploaded PDFs were incorporated as anchor texts because they offered foundational insights into boundary dissolution across legal, institutional, scientific, and sociotechnical contexts. These anchor texts were essential for interpreting how blurring boundaries operates not only within work environments but also in broader social and regulatory systems. Reference chaining and backward snowballing techniques were further applied to identify seminal works and emerging studies that were not captured in the initial database search, thereby maximizing the inclusiveness and rigor of the evidence base.

3.2 Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met several methodological and conceptual criteria aligned with the objectives of this SLR. First, only peer-reviewed empirical or theoretical publications were considered to ensure that the synthesized evidence adhered to recognized academic standards. Second, eligible studies needed to focus on at least one core dimension of boundary dynamics, including work–life integration, digital boundary blurring, remote or hybrid work, role permeability, technostress, emotional exhaustion, digital surveillance, or

organizational commitment. Third, publications were required to be written in English to maintain consistency in interpretation and analysis. Fourth, studies must address psychological, behavioral, or organizational outcomes relevant to how blurred boundaries affect productivity, life satisfaction, work–life balance, or commitment. The inclusion criteria were intentionally broad within these parameters to capture multidisciplinary insights and allow the construction of a holistic understanding of boundary blurring across diverse contexts and populations.

3.3 Exclusion Criteria

To maintain conceptual clarity and methodological rigor, several exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were excluded if they focused primarily on technical or engineering aspects such as mechanical design, structural optimization, or computational modelling without theoretical or empirical relevance to human behavior, organizational dynamics, or digital work practices. Opinion papers, editorial essays, commentaries, or non-peer-reviewed documents lacking methodological transparency were also removed to avoid speculative or anecdotal evidence. Additionally, publications that did not address digitalization, boundary management, or role-related dynamics were excluded, such as those examining traditional workplace structures without reference to permeability or integration mechanisms. Studies unrelated to productivity, life satisfaction, well-being, or organizational commitment were also omitted to ensure that all selected literature directly contributed to answering the research questions guiding the review.

3.4 Analysis Procedure

The analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach grounded in systematic coding and conceptual integration. Each selected study was read in full and coded for key constructs, theoretical arguments, methodological designs, and empirical outcomes. The coding process involved identifying recurring themes related to drivers of boundary blurring—such as digital connectivity, flexible scheduling, and organizational expectations—as well as psychological consequences including emotional exhaustion, cognitive overload, technostress, and role conflict. Additional codes were created to capture productivity-related outcomes, variations in life satisfaction and well-being, and organizational consequences such as commitment, trust, and perceptions of support or surveillance. Themes were iteratively refined to map relationships among antecedents, mediators, and outcomes, thereby enabling the synthesis of cross-study patterns and contradictions. This iterative process facilitated the development of an integrated conceptual understanding of how boundary permeability shapes employee experiences and organizational dynamics, and how contextual features such as voluntariness, cultural norms, leadership behaviors, and digital policies moderate these effects.

4. Findings and Discussions

Blurring boundaries produces complex and context-dependent outcomes. Digitalization is a primary driver reshaping interactions, expectations, and organizational norms. [Szalavetz \(2022\)](#) demonstrates how digital systems restructure care work by “altering routines, responsibilities, and the boundaries of professional autonomy.” This restructuring places cognitive and emotional demands on employees, particularly in remote work contexts, where the boundary between personal and professional spheres becomes tenuous. The findings reveal that productivity increases when WLI is voluntary, preferences align with integration, and

technology is used to support autonomy. But when permeability is involuntary, digital technologies shift from tools of empowerment to agents of intrusion. Emotional exhaustion intensifies as digital interactions expand the temporal scope of work. [Chien et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasize that online boundary blurring exacerbates exhaustion, suggesting that digital labor introduces additional psychological burdens.

Life satisfaction similarly depends on voluntariness and control. While integration provides flexibility, constant connectivity disrupts restorative processes needed for well-being. [Harris et al. \(2024\)](#) underscore that blurred boundaries force continuous recalibration, undermining recovery and increasing strain. Organizational commitment is also shaped by the meanings attributed to integration. When organizations respect individual boundary preferences, commitment strengthens. But when integration is associated with monitoring or implicit pressure to remain perpetually available, trust erodes. [Dibia and Ganguli-Mitra \(2026\)](#) show how blurred boundaries can be exploited within broader surveillance systems, revealing parallels between digital monitoring at work and institutional forms of control.

Beyond individual outcomes, broader societal parallels emerge. Historical boundary-making practices in law and social policy reveal how boundary dissolution is intertwined with power. [Reed-Berendt and Clough \(2024\)](#) document how legal frameworks constructed disabled individuals as threats whose autonomy needed regulation. Their description that “disabled male sexuality was portrayed as threatening, dangerous and in need of restriction” demonstrates how boundary manipulation has long served governance and control. These patterns provide a critical lens to interpret digital boundary blurring today—not only as an efficiency mechanism but also as a potential vector of organizational power. Thus, boundary blurring influences work through multiple layers: psychological, organizational, technological, and sociopolitical. Its outcomes depend on alignment between individual preferences, organizational norms, and technological practices.

5. Conclusion

Blurring boundaries and work–life integration are enduring features of contemporary work environments shaped by digitalization, flexible scheduling, and shifting organizational structures. While integration may enhance autonomy, productivity, and satisfaction when voluntarily enacted, excessive or imposed permeability can undermine well-being, reduce life satisfaction, and weaken organizational commitment. The review demonstrates that the consequences of WLI depend on individual boundary preferences, organizational support, digital norms, and the degree of surveillance embedded in technological systems. Future research should investigate cross-cultural variations in boundary preferences, the ways leadership roles shape digital norms, and the long-term effects of sustained digital engagement on employee identity, autonomy, and commitment. As digitalization deepens, understanding how to manage boundaries adaptively will be essential for promoting sustainable, equitable, and healthy work environments.

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