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Work-home conflict as a challenge for contemporary working societies

Konflikt na osi praca – dom jako wyzwanie współczesnych społeczeństw pracy

Theoretical Introduction

Contemporary working societies increasingly reveal tensions between the professional and private spheres of life. The dynamic economic, technological, and cultural transformations of the past two decades have rendered the boundaries between work and home progressively less distinct. Along with the advancement of digitalisation and the widespread adoption of remote work, particularly following the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the spaces where individuals traditionally performed different roles as employees, parents, partners, and friends have become increasingly intertwined. The literature increasingly refers to this phenomenon as boundary blurring between work and private life, leading to what is commonly described as work–home conflict.

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The broader sociological context of this phenomenon is inseparably linked to the transition from the industrial model of employment to a knowledge-based economy and a twenty-four-hour service economy (the 24/7 economy). As the eminent sociologist Ulrich Beck (2002) argues in his concept of the risk society, postmodern institutions have shifted the burden of structural market contradictions onto individuals. Employees in the era of globalisation are compelled to demonstrate continuous flexibility, self-sacrifice, and permanent availability for work, which directly undermines the stability of traditional family roles. The labour market has ceased to be a physically bounded workplace and has instead become an omnipresent process permeating private life (Rosa, 2013).

This phenomenon is not new. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) already argued that work-home conflict results from the incompatibility of work and family role demands, which compete for individuals' limited resources such as time, energy, and attention. This theoretical foundation has subsequently informed numerous contemporary models of occupational stress, burnout, and well-being. It is worth noting, however, that the evolution of research paradigms has led to the emergence of a distinctly bidirectional perspective. In organisational psychology, a distinction is now commonly made between work-to-family conflict (WFC) where work interferes with family life and family-to-work conflict (FWC) where family responsibilities hinder functioning in the occupational domain (Netemeyer et al., 1996; Frone, 2003). Longitudinal studies clearly indicate that, owing to the increasingly expansive nature of contemporary organisations, WFC is diagnosed nearly three times more frequently than FWC and is associated with substantially more severe consequences for mental health (Amstad et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011).

According to the classical model proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work-home conflict may assume three primary forms:

1. Time-based conflict occurs when the time devoted to work prevents individuals from fulfilling family responsibilities (or vice versa). Overtime work, unpredictable schedules, and lengthy commutes physically consume the time required for raising children or maintaining intimate relationships.
2. Strain-based conflict is emotional and psychophysiological in nature. Stress, fatigue, anxiety, and frustration generated in one domain spill over into the other, impairing an individual's capacity to function

effectively. An employee who is mentally exhausted after a demanding day at work is likely to demonstrate reduced patience and emotional withdrawal in interactions with family members.

3. Behaviour-based conflict concerns the structural incompatibility between behavioural patterns expected in the professional and family domains. Behavioural styles rewarded in the workplace (e.g., emotional detachment, authoritarianism, rational decision-making, or assertive negotiation) may become dysfunctional and even destructive when transferred uncritically into marital or parental relationships, where empathy, unconditional acceptance, and emotional openness are essential.

Already in the 1980s, Greenhaus and Beutell observed that the contemporary labour market rewards long working hours and high employee availability, inevitably generating tensions within private life. Subsequent studies by Byron (2005) and Allen et al. (2020) confirmed that time pressure, role ambiguity, and excessive quantitative workload are among the strongest and most consistent predictors of work-home conflict. An important theoretical complement to this perspective is Stevan Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (1989), according to which individuals strive to protect, maintain, and accumulate their valuable resources, including both material and personal resources such as time, energy, social support, and self-efficacy. Work-home conflict emerges when these valuable resources are excessively depleted in one life domain at the expense of another. When work consumes excessive psychological energy and emotional resources, insufficient resources remain for interpersonal relationships, effective recovery, or childcare, thereby initiating the so-called loss spiral. Hobfoll (1989) argued that prolonged resource depletion without adequate opportunities for replenishment constitutes the principal psychological mechanism underlying stress, ultimately leading to full-scale occupational burnout. Research conducted by Grzywacz and Marks (2000) confirmed that individuals possessing greater initial resource capital, including strong family support, a high degree of decision-making autonomy, and a strong sense of control at work, experience fewer negative consequences of work-home conflict and are, in some cases, even capable of transforming experienced tensions into constructive motivation and enhanced task engagement.

An interesting and highly relevant interpretation of the work-home relationship in the era of digitalisation was proposed by Sue Campbell Clark

(2000) in her Work/Family Border Theory. According to Clark, individuals function as “travellers” who cross the boundaries between two worlds – the workplace and the home – on a daily basis, constantly negotiating the parameters of these boundaries. These boundaries are characterised by two principal dimensions: flexibility and permeability. Clark identified two fundamental strategies for managing work–family boundaries:

- Segmentation (rigid boundaries): Employees strive to maintain a clear separation between their professional and private lives. After leaving the office (or logging off their computer), they disengage completely from work-related matters. Although this strategy protects against the spillover of work-related stress into private life, it entails considerable adaptation costs in times of crisis or unexpected situations (Clark, 2000).
- Integration (flexible boundaries): Employees combine and interweave the professional and private domains throughout the day (e.g., responding to work emails while playing with their child or handling personal shopping during working hours). Integrators exhibit considerable flexibility; however, they incur substantial costs in the form of chronic attentional fragmentation, blurred role identity, and a persistent emotional sense of “being at work”. Under conditions of widespread remote and hybrid working, these boundaries become almost entirely transparent, making psychological detachment from the employee role significantly more difficult (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Contemporary psychological and sociological thought, however, has moved beyond conceptualising the work–home relationship exclusively in terms of a zero-sum game and permanent resource depletion, as assumed by Goode’s scarcity hypothesis. A major theoretical milestone was the development of the Work–Family Enrichment Theory by Greenhaus and Powell (2006). These authors demonstrated that engagement in multiple social roles may produce synergistic and revitalising effects, consistent with Marks’ expansionist hypothesis.

Work–family enrichment is defined as the process through which experiences acquired in one role improve the quality of life and performance in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The authors distinguish five categories of resources that may be transferred between the work and family domains:

1. Skills and perspectives (e.g., leadership competencies, multitasking abilities, patience, and negotiation skills);
2. Psychological resources (e.g., self-esteem, optimism, and psychological resilience);
3. Social capital (e.g., professional networks and support from colleagues);
4. Material resources (e.g., income, employee benefits, and access to technology);
5. Energy and affective resources (e.g., positive mood, vigour, and enthusiasm).

The transfer of these resources occurs through two mechanisms: the instrumental pathway, whereby a specific competence acquired at work facilitates the resolution of problems in the family domain, and the affective pathway, whereby satisfaction and pride resulting from professional success generate positive emotional states that employees bring into their family life, thereby improving the quality of family interactions. A closely related concept is work–family facilitation, which refers to situations where one system (either the organisation or the family) functions more effectively because of an individual's participation in the other domain (Wayne et al., 2007). Recognising that conflict and enrichment are not opposite ends of a single continuum but rather two independent processes that may coexist, i.e., the dual nature of the work–home interface, constitutes one of the fundamental assumptions of the contemporary Work–Life Integration (WLI) paradigm.

Research analysis

To comprehensively and multidimensionally verify the theoretical assumptions presented above, a desk research analysis was conducted. The analysis encompassed key Polish and international empirical databases, reports published by governmental and European Union institutions, as well as findings from representative quantitative and qualitative studies conducted between 2010 and 2026. The objective of this analysis was to demonstrate the macroeconomic and epidemiological scale of the phenomenon and to identify the mediating and moderating variables linking work–home conflict with the health and well-being of the working population.

Studies by Miciuła (2022) demonstrated that 56% of Poles working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced a marked intensification of the

work-home conflict, primarily determined by the lack of objective housing conditions enabling the physical segmentation of work and family roles. At the same time, 30% of respondents stated that telework improved their overall life balance by reducing commuting time and increasing flexibility in performing household responsibilities. These findings indicate that the differentiating factor is not the form of work itself but rather the individual and organizational resources available for managing role boundaries.

In the context of organizational structure, Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory (SET), further developed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), has invaluable practical applicability. The theory assumes that the employee-employer relationship is based on the universal principle of reciprocity. When employees perceive that their organization recognizes their non-work-related needs and provides genuine support, flexibility, and autonomy, a psychological mechanism of reciprocity is activated, whereby employees respond with high affective commitment, loyalty, and increased productivity. Conversely, when an organization relentlessly exploits employees' capacities, infringes upon their personal time, and demonstrates indifference toward family crises, the psychological contract is breached, leading to profound frustration, alienation, reduced effectiveness, and a dramatic increase in turnover intentions. This is confirmed by the Polish study conducted by Głogosz and Potocka (2021) in the public sector. Their findings revealed that the introduction of flexible working hours reduced the perceived work-home conflict by 17%, whereas high levels of individualized support from immediate supervisors decreased the conflict by as much as 23%. These results unequivocally demonstrate that an organizational culture grounded in trust constitutes a powerful buffer against the psychosocial costs of work.

The epidemiological dimension of role conflict in Poland leaves no doubt as to the widespread nature of this phenomenon. In her now-classic study involving a sample of 614 employees from various sectors of the economy, Lipińska-Grobelny (2014) found that 48% of respondents regularly experienced severe tensions at the work-family interface, while for 22% this conflict had become a chronic and destructive condition. The analysis of demographic variables indicated that women, particularly mothers raising preschool- and early school-aged children, constituted the most vulnerable group to the escalation of role conflict. These findings are closely associated with macrostructural and cultural determinants. The results are consistent with the CBOS report (2023), according to which women in Poland devote,

on average, twice as much time to household duties as men, regardless of their employment status. This demonstrates that the work-home conflict is not only a psychological phenomenon but also a socio-structural one, closely linked to the unequal distribution of family responsibilities.

To obtain a comprehensive picture of the dynamic changes that have occurred in recent years, these findings should be compared with the latest cross-sectional data published by Eurofound (2024). This Europe-wide survey on working conditions revealed a disturbing trend: as many as 38% of economically active Poles reported that at least several times per month they felt too exhausted after work to attend to essential household responsibilities (compared with the EU-27 average of 29%). Poland ranks among the countries with the highest levels of resource depletion.

Furthermore, in research on Poland's modern business services sector (IT and SSC/BPO), Kowalska-Janias (2025) identified a rapid increase in the syndrome of workplace telepressure. This phenomenon is defined as an obsessive internal compulsion to respond immediately to emails, instant messaging platforms (e.g., Teams and Slack), and work-related phone calls outside formal working hours. The author demonstrated that high levels of telepressure were strongly and positively correlated with time-based conflict ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$) and acted as a direct mediator between work flexibility and insomnia.

The psychological and clinical consequences of role imbalance are devastating both for individuals and for the national economy. Czerw (2020) demonstrated that the intensity of the work-home conflict is a strong independent predictor of burnout (positive correlation: $r = 0.43$) and is significantly negatively associated with overall life satisfaction ($r = -0.39$). From the perspective of organizational practice, these findings indicate that persistent role conflict generates depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, thereby undermining employee engagement and productivity, a conclusion also supported by the international synthesis conducted by Allen et al. (2020). Similarly, the landmark meta-analysis by Amstad et al. (2011), integrating the results of more than 190 independent quantitative studies, documented the substantial impact of work-family conflict (WFC) on mental health outcomes, revealing a direct, moderately strong association with clinical symptoms of depression ($r = 0.36$), anxiety disorders, and burnout ($r = 0.42$).

The latest longitudinal analyses conducted by the research team led by Kossek and Ozeki (2022) provide new insights into the economic dimension of this issue. The careers of 2,500 professionals were monitored over a five-

year period. The findings demonstrated that chronic work–family conflict is a stronger and more stable predictor of voluntary employee turnover intention than satisfaction with base salary. The costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and lost productivity resulting from the departure of a qualified employee due to role conflict exceed the costs of implementing comprehensive Wellness and Work–Life Balance programmes by nearly 300%.

In the purely somatic domain, the groundbreaking study by Hammer and colleagues (2023) provided robust medical evidence. Using objective physiological markers, including the diurnal salivary cortisol profile, monitoring of sympathetic nervous system activation, and polysomnography, the researchers demonstrated that individuals reporting persistent role conflict exhibited a flattened cortisol curve (an indicator of adrenal exhaustion) and a dramatic reduction in deep sleep (NREM) duration. As many as 52% of participants with high levels of work–family conflict met the diagnostic criteria for chronic primary insomnia, translating into an increased risk of cardiovascular events, including stroke and myocardial infarction, over the following decade.

It is worth noting that work–home conflict is not necessarily exclusively destructive in nature. As suggested by Grzywacz and Marks (2000), a moderate and temporary level of role-related tension may stimulate adaptive processes by motivating individuals to improve strategic planning, assertiveness, schedule optimisation, and self-management skills, provided that they possess renewable resources of psychological resilience and social support. The critical problem arises when these resources become structurally depleted and the work environment assumes an oppressive character.

The importance of cultural and macro-political context is highlighted by comparative studies. In highly individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States), coping with work–family conflict is generally regarded as a private matter and the responsibility of the individual through self-regulation. By contrast, in collectivist cultures (e.g., East Asian countries), the family and the broader community constitute a natural support network that absorbs and mitigates the impact of such tensions (Amstad et al., 2011).

Analyses conducted by Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2020) further demonstrate that the type of welfare state constitutes a key macro-social determinant. In social democratic countries (e.g., Sweden and Denmark), where public policies actively support partnership within the family through universal and affordable childcare services as well as mandatory paternity leave, levels of

work–family conflict are among the lowest worldwide, while life satisfaction remains among the highest. Poland represents a hybrid and transitional case. On the one hand, processes of individualisation, secularisation, and increasing professional aspirations among women continue to accelerate. On the other hand, the traditional cultural model assigning primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving duties to women remains deeply embedded.

The COVID-19 pandemic irreversibly transformed the architecture of the work environment. The widespread introduction of remote and hybrid work revealed the dual nature of digital technologies. Analyses by Miciuła (2022), together with the study by Xiao et al. (2021), demonstrated that for more than half of the working population, working from home became a psychological trap, generating a persistent sense of being permanently confined within occupational roles. More recent research by Shaholli et al. (2024) further clarifies this mechanism by identifying employees' self-regulatory capacity as a key moderating factor. Individuals characterised by low self-discipline and limited ability to establish and maintain assertive boundaries while working from home experience a substantial decline in well-being, whereas employees with high levels of autonomy are able to use flexibility to optimise their overall work–life balance.

From the research perspective of the 2024–2026 period, scientific debate has increasingly shifted towards systemic legislative solutions. Particularly important evidence has been provided by the study conducted by Borkowska (2025), which evaluated the effects of introducing the right to disconnect. Organisations that implemented the automatic shutdown of corporate email servers during nighttime hours and prohibited managerial communication on weekends reported a 28% reduction in indicators of psychosocial stress and a 19% decrease in strain-based work–home conflict.

Similarly remarkable findings emerged from analyses of international and national Four-Day Work Week Trials (2023–2025). Reducing working time to 32 hours per week while maintaining full salary resulted in a substantial improvement in employees' psychological well-being. As many as 54% of participants reported a significant reduction in work–home conflict, while sickness absence related to psychosomatic disorders decreased by an average of 35%. These findings suggest that an additional day free from work facilitates the full restoration of energetic resources, consistent with Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources model.

Comprehensive analyses by French et al. (2017) confirm that social support provided symmetrically by supervisors, co-workers, and spouses reduces the detrimental psychological effects of occupational demands by nearly one quarter. Similarly, Basińska and Wróblewska (2022) emphasise the importance of formalised work–life balance strategies, such as childcare subsidies, psychological support programmes, and managerial flexibility, which reduce indicators of work–family conflict by an average of 21%.

From a social perspective, the work–home conflict also has an equality dimension. Women are more likely than men to experience the so-called “second shift”, whereby, after completing their paid work, they perform a substantial proportion of household and caregiving responsibilities. According to CBOS (2023), 62% of women in Poland prepare meals and perform household cleaning on a daily basis, compared with only 25% of men. Such inequalities contribute to chronic feelings of fatigue and overload.

An extremely important aspect of the contemporary debate concerns changes in the legal framework. As indicated by Budrowska and Duch-Krzyszczek (2024), a milestone in reducing the structural role conflict in Poland was the full implementation of the European Union’s Work–Life Balance Directive. A key legal instrument proved to be the introduction of nine weeks of non-transferable parental leave for fathers (which is forfeited if not used by the father). The authors indicate that between 2024 and 2026, the proportion of fathers making use of this entitlement increased from only a few percent to over 45%. This development is beginning to transform the traditional model of gender roles in Poland by relieving women of the primary caregiving burden and thereby directly reducing the level of conflict between the domestic and professional spheres.

The work–home conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon whose origins cannot be reduced to individual deficits in time management. It results from social, cultural, and organizational transformations – from a new rhythm of life in which work has become not only a source of income but also an element of identity and social status. In this sense, work–life balance is not merely an individual objective but also an indicator of the quality of functioning of entire societies and organizations.

Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions drawn from Polish and international studies clearly show that measures aimed at reducing work-home conflict benefit not only individuals, but also organisations. Companies that promote a culture of trust, flexibility and genuine support for employees in the private sphere report lower turnover, higher satisfaction and better financial results. In the era of digital transformation and a global mental-health crisis, concern for work-life balance is becoming not an optional addition, but a foundation of sustainable social development.

The analysis of the theoretical approaches and empirical findings presented above clearly indicates that reducing work-home conflict requires a multi-level approach, encompassing organisational and systemic measures as well as individual strategies. It is crucial to move away from treating work-life balance as the solely private responsibility of the employee and to recognise it as a shared task of employers, public institutions and employees themselves.

First and foremost, organisations play a particularly important role, as through their culture and management practices they may either intensify or reduce tensions between the occupational and private spheres. Creating a work environment based on trust, flexibility and respect for employees' boundaries constitutes an important protective factor. Flexible forms of work organisation, such as the possibility of adjusting working time or using a hybrid model, should, however, be implemented thoughtfully – in such a way that they do not lead to a further blurring of boundaries, but genuinely support employee autonomy. It is equally important to prepare managers to recognise symptoms of overload and to build a climate conducive to open communication and the use of support. Organisations that treat employee well-being as an element of their strategy not only reduce the negative effects of work-home conflict but also increase employees' engagement and loyalty.

In this context, measures aimed at equalising opportunities for women and men in relation to domestic and caring responsibilities acquire particular importance. The development of accessible, high-quality care infrastructure, as well as the promotion of solutions conducive to flexible employment, may significantly reduce the structural sources of conflict. It is also worth emphasising the need to include psychological well-being as one of the key indicators of the quality of work and social life, which is reflected in an increasing number of public strategies across Europe.

At the same time, the role of the individual cannot be overlooked. Functioning within specific social and organisational conditions, individuals make daily decisions concerning the management of their resources. The conscious setting of boundaries between work and private life, the development of skills in managing time and energy, and the formation of assertive attitudes constitute important adaptive competences in the contemporary world of work. It is also important to use social support, both in the occupational and private environments, which – as research shows – performs a buffering function against the negative consequences of overload.

In conclusion, effective counteraction to work-home conflict requires integrated measures in which responsibility is distributed across different levels of social life. Only the co-occurrence of such measures creates a real possibility of building a lasting balance between occupational and family roles, thereby improving individuals' quality of life and the effectiveness of organisations and entire societies.

Abstract: This article addresses the issue of work-home conflict as one of the key challenges facing contemporary working societies. The aim of the study is to analyse theoretical approaches to the conflict between work and family roles and to present the findings of empirical research on its determinants and consequences. The paper discusses both classical and contemporary concepts, including the model developed by Greenhaus and Beutell, Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory, and Clark's Border Theory. The article has been expanded to include a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of secondary data, based on an extensive review of recent Polish and international literature, with particular emphasis on work-family enrichment theory, the phenomenon of facilitation, the impact of digital transformation (technostress and telepressure), and structural and legal analyses (including the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive). The importance of organisational and cultural factors in shaping work-life balance is also highlighted. Based on a review of Polish and international studies, the paper demonstrates that work-home conflict has a significant impact on psychological well-being, social relationships, and job performance. The article emphasises the need for systemic and organisational measures that support employees' work-life balance.

Keywords: work-home conflict, employees' work-life balance, work-family enrichment, organisational culture, digitalisation of work, technostress, social policy.

Streszczenie: Artykuł podejmuje problem konfliktu na osi praca–dom jako jednego z kluczowych wyzwań współczesnych społeczeństw pracy. Celem opracowania jest analiza teoretycznych ujęć konfliktu ról zawodowych i rodzinnych oraz prezentacja wyników badań empirycznych dotyczących jego uwarunkowań i konsekwencji. W tekście omówiono klasyczne i współczesne koncepcje, m.in. model Greenhausa i Beutella, teorię zachowania zasobów Hobfolla oraz teorię granic ról Clark. Wskazano także na znaczenie czynników organizacyjnych i kulturowych w kształtowaniu równowagi praca–życie. Na podstawie przeglądu badań polskich i międzynarodowych wykazano, że konflikt praca–dom ma istotny wpływ na dobrostan psychiczny, relacje społeczne oraz efektywność zawodową. Artykuł podkreśla potrzebę systemowych i organizacyjnych działań wspierających równowagę życiową pracowników.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt praca–dom, równowaga między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym pracowników, wzbogacanie relacji praca–rodzina, kultura organizacyjna, cyfryzacja pracy, technostres, polityka społeczna.

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