

Is it just about the mode of working? Avoiding work-life conflict when teleworking and working on-site: a latent profile analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore levels of work-life conflict among office workers and teleworkers, considering working-time autonomy, organisational expectations for overtime and responding outside working hours.

Design/methodology/approach – Data from the tenth European Social Survey (edition 3.0) were utilised. The sample consisted of employed individuals aged 18–65 from 19 European countries ($N = 12,212$; mean age = 43.32, 51.3% women). Latent profile analyses were performed to analyse the data.

Findings – Four profiles were revealed, characterised by varying telework intensity, working time autonomy, expectations to overwork and expectations to respond outside working hours. Moreover, there were significant between-profile differences regarding one's work-life conflict. The lowest levels of time-based work-life conflict were observed among logged-off office workers and teleworkers. In contrast, strain-based work-life conflict was lowest among time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers and the highest among time-fixed and logged-in office workers.

Originality/value – Using representative data from 19 European countries, this study highlights the importance of managing organisational expectations for working overtime, communicating outside working hours and providing autonomy over working time to avoid work-life conflict for both teleworkers and office workers.

Keywords Telework intensity, Work-life conflict,
Organisational expectations for working overtime and responding outside working hours,
Working time autonomy, Latent profile analysis

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Although teleworking rates have decreased in recent years, it remains a highly desirable arrangement for many professionals (Eurofound, 2024). Telework, or remote work, entails employees replacing part of their usual work hours, ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time, with the option to work away from a central workplace by utilising information and communication technology (ICT) to connect with others and carry out their work tasks (Allen *et al.*, 2015). While organisations embrace telework to attract and retain employees as well as reduce costs (Smite *et al.*, 2023), for employees, one of the primary motives for teleworking is the greater ease of managing competing work and family responsibilities (Deole *et al.*, 2023; Thompson *et al.*, 2021). However, existing research on the impact of telework on work-life conflict has yielded mixed results. Some studies have indicated that working from home



facilitates compatibility between work and family by allowing autonomy and schedule control (Chung and Van der Horst, 2018; Laß and Wooden, 2023). However, others have suggested that working from home may lead to greater work-family conflict due to blurred boundaries (Abendroth and Reimann, 2018).

Given that work-family conflict is associated with adverse outcomes in both professional and personal life domains (Allen *et al.*, 2000) and telework remains a preferable work arrangement among employees (Eurofound, 2024), the contradictory findings in empirical literature on work-family relationships and telework call for research that advances our understanding of how telework might affect work-life conflict to understand its advantages and possible drawbacks. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and border (Clark, 2000) and boundary (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000) theories, we have therefore conducted a study exploring differences in work-life conflict among groups of employees characterised by different levels of telework intensity, working-time autonomy, and organisational expectations regarding overtime and out-of-hours responses.

This study makes several timely contributions to the literature. First, by using a person-centred approach to identify profiles based on telework intensity, working-time autonomy, organisational expectations for overtime, and responsiveness outside working hours. While flexible hours are often linked to teleworkers, many office employees now enjoy similar flexibility (Boltz *et al.*, 2023). The rise in the use of ICT has led to both teleworkers (Booker *et al.*, 2025) and office workers (Gadeyne *et al.*, 2023) frequently staying connected and working outside regular hours. Similarly, overwork is pervasive among both office workers and teleworkers (Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė *et al.*, 2023). By examining various combinations of these factors, we show that experiences of connectivity and overwork are present regardless of working location, challenging earlier studies that assumed homogeneity among teleworkers (e.g. Herrera-Ballesteros *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, while having more scheduling autonomy, teleworkers still face significant expectations to work and respond beyond standard hours (Kao *et al.*, 2024).

Second, relying on the border theory (Clark, 2000) and boundary theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000), this study shows that time-based conflict is the most pronounced among employees who respond after hours, regardless of their scheduling autonomy or work location, whereas strain-based conflict is prevalent among time-fixed and responsive office workers, suggesting that after-hours responsiveness is a key factor in work-life conflict. These results thereby shed light on studies focussing on the relationship between teleworking and work-life conflict (Laß and Wooden, 2023; Palumbo *et al.*, 2022), ignoring the role of scheduling autonomy and responsiveness that might be characteristic of all working modes.

Finally, by using representative data from 19 European countries, our study allows for the generalisation of findings across broader work contexts. The findings of this study offer significant insights for organisations, suggesting that granting employees scheduling autonomy and managing organisational expectations regarding overwork and communication outside working hours are crucial for mitigating time-based and strain-based work-life conflict.

2. Teleworking, working time autonomy, expectations for connectivity after working hours, and work-life conflict

2.1 Teleworking intensity, working time autonomy, and expectations for connectivity after working hours

Telework “involves members of an organisation substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace—typically from home—using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks” (Allen *et al.*, 2015, p. 44). In addition to telework intensity, widely

recognised as a key metric for remote work (Gajendran *et al.*, 2024), this study also examines working-time autonomy, organisational expectations regarding overtime, and the obligation to respond outside standard working hours. Researchers (e.g. Meier *et al.*, 2024) and policymakers alike (Eurofound, 2024) have identified these factors as aspects of teleworking that can contribute to work-life conflict. We will further elaborate on each of these factors.

Working time autonomy refers to the flexibility employees have regarding their work schedules and hours. Telework, a form of spatial flexibility, is inherently linked to time flexibility, as the ability to choose one's work enables employees to have greater control over aspects such as start times and breaks (Metselaar *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, some studies (e.g. Laß and Wooden, 2022) indicate that telework intensity is associated with greater working-time autonomy, whereas others (e.g. Wöhrmann and Ebner, 2021) do not find such a relationship. Moreover, although telework is often seen as a form of flexible working arrangements, office workers can also enjoy flexible working conditions, as an increasing number of organisations are incorporating flexibility into their office design, such as offering employees the option to work part-time or have adjustable working hours (Boltz *et al.*, 2023).

Due to the intensive use of ICT, teleworkers often face expectations to remain available and work beyond their regular work hours (Park *et al.*, 2020) and perceive a need to remain available (Abendroth and Reimann, 2018). They are also deprived of the social cues inherent in workplace culture that guide the start and end of working days, as well as the timing and length of breaks (Wöhrmann and Ebner, 2021). Not surprisingly, the intensity of telework has been found to be related to boundaryless working hours and working during evenings and/or weekends (Laß and Wooden, 2022; EU-OSHA, 2021). Furthermore, telework can create a temporal mismatch between the working hours of peers and supervisors, resulting in being contacted for work-related issues during breaks and after working hours.

Notably, while the pressure to be available after working hours is typically attributed to teleworkers, the pervasive use of ICT has also led to constant connectivity among office workers (Gadeyne *et al.*, 2023). Studies have shown that availability and responsiveness to short-term work requirements during off-work time are widespread among white-collar workers in developed countries (Dettmers, 2017; Du, 2024; Nei *et al.*, 2024). Some studies (e.g. Gillet *et al.*, 2022) even show that the negative effects of expectations to respond are more pronounced among office workers than teleworkers.

All in all, it is unclear how working time autonomy and organisational expectations for working overtime and responding outside working hours might vary across different working modes. Therefore, the initial step in this study involved identifying the most common combinations of teleworking intensity (ranging from fully office-based work to daily telework), working-time autonomy, and organisational expectations regarding working overtime and responding outside working hours. To this aim, we have employed latent profile analysis, which allows researchers to derive evidence-based insights about distinct subgroups within the surveyed population, characterised by specific combinations of parameters (Collins and Lanza, 2013; Howard and Hoffman, 2018). To benefit from this exploratory approach, we formulated the following research question:

- RQ1.* Do distinct profiles of teleworking intensity, working time autonomy, and organisational expectations for working overtime and responding outside working hours exist, and how do they differ in their contents and size?

Furthermore, we were interested in profile predictors, as existing research suggests that several demographic and job characteristics may be associated with telework and its characteristics. For example, some studies indicate that female employees work from home more frequently than their male counterparts who work in the office (Morganson *et al.*, 2010; OECD, 2021). Moreover, male and female employees tend to experience working-time autonomy differently: for male employees, it allows them to meet work demands, whereas for female employees, its

utilisation is constrained by unpredictability and continuous interruptions (Tammelin *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, older employees are more likely to work on-site than their younger counterparts (Eurofound, 2020). Fønner and Roloff (2010) noted that teleworkers typically have longer tenure. Furthermore, Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė *et al.* (2024) showed that managers and employees from bigger organisations were more likely to work remotely than in the office.

To summarise, the existing research led us to suggest the following research question:

RQ2. What demographic and professional characteristics predict employees' membership in specific profiles of teleworking intensity, working time autonomy, and organisational expectations for working overtime and for responding outside working hours?

2.2 Teleworking intensity, working time autonomy, expectations for connectivity after working hours, and their implications for work-life conflict

Work-life conflict is a specific type of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and personal domains are mutually incompatible. Work can interfere with life through time-based and strain-based conflicts. The time-based conflict refers to an individual's physical or psychological impossibility to meet the demands of one's role in one domain due to the demands of one's role in the other domain, while strain-based conflict encompasses the role-produced strain in one domain affecting one's performance in another domain (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Work-life conflict in telework settings can be comprehensively understood through resource-allocation and boundary-management theories. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, as articulated by Hobfoll (1989, 2011), suggests that individuals are driven to safeguard and enhance their finite resources to mitigate stress. When resources are depleted, individuals experience increased strain, which negatively impacts their health and well-being. To sustain a sense of well-being, it is imperative that individuals achieve a balance between the expenditure and accumulation of their resources. Within this framework, time scheduling autonomy emerges as a critical factor, granting individuals greater control over their personal resources (Grawitch *et al.*, 2010).

This autonomy not only enhances individual agency but also facilitates an effective redistribution of resources across both work and family domains. Due to the time flexibility, teleworkers spend less time commuting to and from work, thereby saving time that can be spent on other activities (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2020). Respectively, more intensive teleworking and shorter commuting time were associated with lower work-life conflict (Voydanoff, 2005). Furthermore, working from home allows for better alignment of the work schedule with one's biorhythms and mental pace (Raghuram and Wiesenfeld, 2004), reducing strain-based conflict.

The control over working time may also reduce work-life conflict, as posited by the border theory (Clark, 2000) and boundary theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000). More specifically, these theories propose that individuals strive to establish and maintain physical, temporal, or psychological boundaries around the most important domains of their lives, thereby facilitating the enactment of social roles that are played out in different domains. Because these roles differ in their contents and goals, boundaries serve the function of simplifying the environment and facilitating a transition from one role to another. From this perspective, having working time autonomy enables employees to control the enactment of their various roles. For instance, employees may respond to family demands, including everyday activities such as taking children to dance classes, as well as unpredictable issues, such as attending to a sick child (see Gajendran and Harrison, 2007, for an extensive review). Several empirical studies (Delanoeije *et al.*, 2019; Laß and Wooden, 2022) as well as the most recent meta-analysis (Harrop *et al.*, 2025) demonstrate that time flexibility enables teleworkers to better manage home demands and is associated with lower work-life conflict, partly because it affords greater control over their schedules.

On the contrary, according to the border theory (Clark, 2000) and boundary theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000), expectations for overworking and responding outside working hours might lead to work-life conflict due to boundary blurring. Teleworkers are more likely to work during so-called unsocial hours, such as evenings and weekends, and as these times are usually reserved for family and social activities, it may be challenging for teleworkers to fulfil family duties and maintain family relationships, thereby creating time-based conflicts (Laß and Wooden, 2022; Michel *et al.*, 2011). Responsiveness after working hours might also hinder recovery, which is essential for regaining resources (Grant *et al.*, 2013), potentially leading to strain-based conflict (Delanoëje *et al.*, 2019). Due to the social exchange process, teleworkers often feel compelled to put in more effort in exchange for the option of working from home (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009) and feel the need to be available to signal their commitment (Abendroth and Reimann, 2018). Not surprisingly, several studies have shown that meeting work and life demands may not always be facilitated in a telework situation (Allen *et al.*, 2015; Delanoëje *et al.*, 2019) as it is often associated with longer working hours and overtime (Dockery and Bawa, 2014).

In summary, existing research indicates that teleworking can be seen as a double-edged sword for employees' personal lives. While it has the potential to harmonise work and family responsibilities, it can also lead to work-life conflict (Peters and Van der Lippe, 2007). This observation gives rise to the second research question of our study:

- RQ3. How does work-life conflict vary across the distinct groups of employees defined by different combinations (latent profiles) of telework intensity, working time autonomy, and organisational expectations for working overtime and responding outside working hours?

3. Method

3.1 Study participants

This study used data from the tenth European Social Survey (ESS). ESS is an academically driven, cross-national survey conducted in Europe every two years since 2001, through computer-assisted personal interviewing (face-to-face) using probability sampling. It provides high-quality comparative data on Europeans' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. For our analysis, we used round 10 data file edition 3.0, which was collected in 2020–2022 and contained data from 19 European Union countries, namely Bulgaria ($N = 769$), Croatia ($N = 593$), Czechia ($N = 945$), Estonia ($N = 728$), Finland ($N = 672$), France ($N = 842$), Greece ($N = 322$), Hungary ($N = 632$), Iceland ($N = 442$), Italy ($N = 844$), Lithuania ($N = 588$), Montenegro ($N = 347$), Netherlands ($N = 793$), North Macedonia ($N = 374$), Norway ($N = 811$), Portugal ($N = 639$), Slovakia ($N = 519$), Slovenia ($N = 570$), and Switzerland ($N = 773$). The final sample of this study consisted of 12,212 workers.

Six thousand two hundred sixty-five (51.3%) respondents were female. The mean age of the sample was 43.32 years ($SD = 11.99$). A total of 3302 (27%) respondents held managerial positions. The thousand thirty-four respondents (24.8%) worked in the company under ten employees, 2551 (20.9%) – 10 to 24 employees, 3162 (25.9%) – 25 to 99 employees, 1926 (15.8%) 100 to 499 employees, 1350 (11.1%) 500 or more employees, and 189 (1.5%) did not indicate the size of their establishment. The employees came from various industries, including manufacturing (16%), health care, social services and law enforcement (14%), commercial services (13%), retail, wholesale and repair (12%), education (9%), public administration and governance (7%), construction (6%), transportation, storage and distribution (6%), banking, real estate and financial services (4%), hospitality (4%), agriculture, forestry and fishery (2%), arts, entertainment, recreation and sports (3%), while 4% of the respondents did not indicate their sector. More information on the ESS data [1] can be found at www.europeansocialsurvey.org

3.2 Measures

Time-based work-life conflict was assessed with one item (“How often do you find that your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner or family?”) using a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 – never to 5 – always.

Strain-based work-life conflict was assessed with one item (“How often do you feel too tired after work to enjoy the things you would like to do at home?”) using a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 – never to 5 – always.

Telework intensity was assessed by asking respondents how often they work from home or another location of their choice during their regular working hours. This item was assessed on a 6-point response scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (every day), with the scale reversed so that higher values indicate higher telework intensity.

Working time autonomy was assessed by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they are allowed to decide their own starting and finishing times at work. This item was assessed on a 3-point response scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 3 (completely).

Organisational expectations for working overtime were assessed with one item (“How often are employees in your organisation expected to work overtime, whether at the workplace or at home?”) using a 6-point response scale ranging from 1 (every day) to 6 (never), which was reversed such that higher values reflect higher overtime expectations.

Organisational expectations for responding outside working hours were assessed with one item (“How often are employees in your organisation expected to be responsive to work communications outside working hours?”) using a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (every day) to 5 (less often), which was reversed such that higher values reflect higher telework intensity.

The detailed information on the item selection and validation procedure can be found at <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/ESS-Round-10-Core-Questionnaire-Review-Summary-of-C.pdf>

3.3 Data analyses

To address the research questions, latent profile analyses were conducted using Mplus (version 8.8). Time- and strain-based work-life conflict, working time autonomy, and telework intensity were used as indicators of latent profiles. Since these variables were measured on different scales, they were transformed so that all variables ranged from zero to a maximum of either four points (working time autonomy) or five points (all other indicators). In addition, in line with previous studies based on international samples (e.g. Bujacz *et al.*, 2020), the indicators were centred around the country mean prior to analysis to account for potential between-country differences in mean levels. A one-profile model served as the baseline, and the analyses were conducted in incremental steps, comparing larger profile models to a k–1 profile model. All models were estimated with 5,000 random starts and 200 final-stage optimisations. Following methodological recommendations (e.g. Nylund *et al.*, 2007), model comparisons were based on information criteria, entropy, and likelihood ratio tests. Lower values of the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and Sample-adjusted BIC (SaBIC) indicated better model fit. Significant statistics from the Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test (LMR-LRT) and the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT) indicated that the model with more profiles was superior to the k-1 profile model. Moreover, higher entropy values indicated greater accuracy in profile classification.

We used multinomial logistic regression (via the R3STEP command) to determine which demographic characteristics predict membership in different profiles. For all demographic variables, we included each profile in turn as a reference and estimated the odds ratio (and 95% confidence intervals) of belonging to that profile relative to the remaining profiles. A predictor was considered significant if the 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio did not include 0. Regarding the outcome analyses, the equality of means across the profiles for the outcome variables was tested using the BCH approach (see Bakk and Vermunt, 2016).

4. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the main study variables, based on the raw data, are provided in [Table 1](#).

A comparison of alternative latent profile solutions is shown in [Table 2](#). The LMR-LRT and BLRT test statistics did not indicate the optimal profile enumeration. Therefore, the decision regarding the number of profiles was based on information criteria (see the elbow plot in [Supplementary Figure A1](#)) and the interpretability of the profiles. Based on the above, a four-profile solution was deemed optimal.

As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), the most extensive profile, comprising 46.4% of the sample, was characterised by office work, low working-time autonomy, and low organisational expectations regarding overtime and responding outside working hours. It was labelled as “time-fixed and logged-off office workers”. The second profile (15.3%) was characterised by frequent teleworking, high working-time autonomy, and low organisational expectations regarding working overtime and responding outside working hours. This profile was called “time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers”. The third profile (24.8%) was similar to the first one in terms of office work and low autonomy in working time. However, employees in this profile had high expectations for working overtime and for responding outside working hours. This profile was called “time-fixed and logged-in office workers”. The fourth profile (13.5%) characterised teleworkers with high working time autonomy, high organisational expectations for working overtime, and responding outside working hours. This profile was labelled as “time-flexed and logged-in teleworkers”.

We utilised multinomial logistic regression to investigate our second research question, focussing on demographic predictors of profile membership. This statistical approach allowed us to analyse the influence of various demographic factors on the likelihood of belonging to different profiles within our dataset. Results (see [Table 3](#)) revealed that all demographic predictors were significant in at least some cases. Regarding age and gender, older employees and males were more likely to fall into profile 3 (time-fixed and logged-in office workers) than into any other profile. The managerial position was associated with higher membership odds of either profile 4 or 2, both of which are characterised by higher autonomy and telework intensity. Employees of larger organisations and members of trade unions were also more likely to fall into these profiles. Private-sector employees were more likely to belong to profile 1 (time-fixed, logged-off office workers) than to profiles 2 and 3.

[Table 4](#) provides information about time-based and strain-based work-life conflict as outcome variables. According to the results, the highest levels of time-based work-life conflict were observed in profile 3 (time-fixed and logged-in office workers) and profile 4 (time-flexed and logged-in teleworkers). In contrast, the lowest levels were characteristic of profile 1 (time-fixed and logged-off office workers) and profile 2 (time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the main study variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	6
1. Teleworking intensity	2.22	1.74					
2. Time-based work-life conflict	2.69	0.98	0.001				
3. Strain-based work-life conflict	2.98	0.89	-0.051**	0.542**			
4. Working time autonomy	1.67	0.69	0.447**	-0.039**	-0.087**		
5. Organisational expectations for working overtime	2.75	1.50	0.072**	0.206**	0.148**	0.031**	
6. Organisational expectations for responding outside working hours	2.87	1.66	0.103**	0.137**	0.089**	0.059**	0.409**

Note(s): ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Alternative profile enumerations

No. of profiles	LL	fp	SC	AIC	BIC	SaBIC	Entropy	LMR-LRT p-value	BLRT p-value
1	-89749.594	8	0.8244	179515.189	179574.470	179549.047	-	-	-
2	-84786.332	13	0.9861	169598.663	169694.996	169653.683	0.961	<0.001	<0.001
3	-83824.420	18	1.0560	167684.841	167818.224	167761.022	0.844	<0.001	<0.001
4	-81867.293	23	1.0711	163780.586	163951.020	163877.929	0.932	<0.001	<0.001
5	-81523.894	28	1.1523	163103.789	163311.274	163222.293	0.917	<0.001	<0.001
6	-81131.599	33	1.1031	162329.197	162573.733	162468.862	0.912	<0.001	<0.001
7	-80867.727	38	1.1985	161811.455	162093.041	161972.281	0.898	<0.001	<0.001
8	-80279.440	43	1.1971	160644.879	160963.517	160826.867	0.906	<0.001	<0.001*
9	-79918.633	48	1.2112	159933.265	160288.953	160136.415	0.898	<0.001	<0.001*

Note(s): LL = best log-likelihood value. fp = number of free parameters. SC = scaling correction factor for MLR. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion. BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. SaBIC = Sample-adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion. BLRT = Parametric Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test. LMR test = Lo-Mendell-Rubin Adjusted LRT test. *4 of 5 bootstrap replications failed to reproduce the best log-likelihood for the 8- and 9-class models

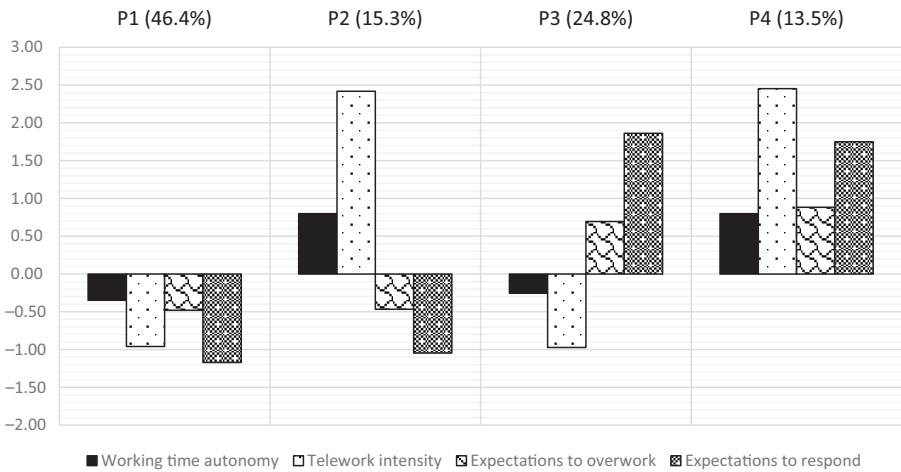


Figure 1. Latent profile analysis. Note: P1 = Time-fixed and logged-off office workers, P2 = Time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers, P3 = Time-fixed and logged-in office workers, P4 = Time-flexed and logged-in teleworkers

Table 3. Summary of results from predictor analyses

Predictor	Profiles	OR	95%CI
Age	3 vs 1	1.013	[1.009; 1.016]
	3 vs 2	1.010	[1.005; 1.014]
	3 vs 4	1.008	[1.003; 1.013]
Gender (0 = M, 1 = F)	1 vs 3	1.233	[1.129; 1.347]
	2 vs 3	1.266	[1.128; 1.421]
	4 vs 3	1.137	[1.009; 1.282]
Supervisor (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	2 vs 1	2.024	[1.802; 2.273]
	2 vs 3	1.264	[1.116; 1.431]
	3 vs 1	1.601	[1.446; 1.774]
	4 vs 1	2.544	[2.260; 2.864]
	4 vs 2	1.257	[1.095; 1.443]
Sector (0 = Public, 1 = Private)	4 vs 3	1.589	[1.400; 1.803]
	1 vs 2	1.242	[1.111; 1.389]
	1 vs 3	1.145	[1.041; 1.259]
Establishment size (0 = less than 25 employees, 1 = 25 and more employees)	2 vs 1	1.879	[1.685; 2.095]
	2 vs 3	1.765	[1.566; 1.989]
	2 vs 4	1.254	[1.093; 1.438]
	4 vs 1	1.499	[1.340; 1.677]
	4 vs 3	1.408	[1.246; 1.591]
Current member of the trade union (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	2 vs 1	1.616	[1.432; 1.824]
	2 vs 3	1.527	[1.334; 1.747]
	2 vs 4	1.228	[1.055; 1.430]
	4 vs 1	1.316	[1.154; 1.500]
4 vs 3	1.243	[1.077; 1.436]	

Note(s): OR = odds ratio. CI = confidence intervals. OR reflects the effect of the predictor on the likelihood of membership in a given profile (listed on the left side) relative to the reference profile (listed on the right side)

The results also showed that the highest strain-based work-life conflict was characteristic of profile 3 (time-fixed and logged-in office workers). Significant pairwise mean differences were observed between this profile and all remaining profiles. In contrast, the lowest scores of

Table 4. Equality tests of outcome variable mean scores across profiles

Profile Outcome	1	2	3	4	Overall difference χ^2 (df)
Time-based work-life conflict	2.589 ^{a,c,d,f}	2.612 ^{b,e}	2.855 ^{a,b,c}	2.839 ^{d,e,f}	162.467 (3)
Strain-based work-life conflict	2.952 ^{a,b,c,d}	2.857 ^{a,b,c,d}	3.107 ^{a,b,c,d}	3.019 ^{a,b,c,d}	95.832 (3)

Note(s): Profile comparisons were performed via the BCH procedure and relied on the chi-squared statistic from Wald tests. Results are based on country mean-centred scores. Shared superscript letters indicate profiles that differ from each other on a given outcome variable

P1 = Time-fixed and logged-off office workers P2 = Time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers, P3 = Time-fixed and logged-in office workers P4 = Time-flexed and logged-in teleworkers

*** $p < 0.001$

strain-based work-life conflict were reported among workers in profile 2 (time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers).

5. Discussion

Drawing on a person-centred approach and pan-European data, the current study demonstrates that work-life conflict is not associated with working mode—whether in-office or telework. Instead, it is closely associated with working time autonomy and responsiveness outside working hours that accompany these working arrangements.

First, our study revealed four profiles, the most extensive of which, occupying almost half of the sample, represents the typical office worker, characterised by office work, low working time autonomy, and low organisational expectations for working overtime and responding outside working hours. The third profile was twice as small as the first (24.8%) and was similar to the first in terms of office work and low working-time autonomy. However, employees in this profile had high expectations for working overtime and responding outside working hours. The other two profiles were characterised by frequent teleworking and high working-time autonomy, but differed in organisational expectations regarding overtime and responding outside working hours.

The combinations of working modes and their characteristics presented in these four profiles imply a few things. First, in line with other studies (Weinert *et al.*, 2015), our study shows that office workers have lower time scheduling autonomy than teleworkers. Second, both teleworkers and office workers may be exposed to expectations of overwork and communication beyond working hours, supporting the notion that due to the ubiquity of ICT information and communication technologies, employees across various work modalities—whether remote or in-person—are often expected to be available and responsive outside traditional working hours (Nie *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, despite varying levels of telecommuting, some employees do not feel the same compulsion to stay connected outside traditional hours, implying that organisational norms regarding after-hours availability and work-related communication do not universally apply to all teleworkers (Schlachter *et al.*, 2018).

Second, our findings indicated that male and older employees were more likely to be classified as office workers, with lower time-scheduling autonomy and higher expectations for working and responsiveness outside regular working hours. These results are consistent with previous data showing that age is a significant factor in telework, with older individuals having fewer opportunities to work from home (Eurofound, 2020). They also align with previous research highlighting unequal working conditions stemming from age and gender stereotypes. The enduring cultural norms that depict men as “breadwinners” and women as “caregivers” (Eagly and Wood, 2012) contribute to greater expectations that men sacrifice personal time for

work (Nyberg *et al.*, 2015; Žiedelis *et al.*, 2024). Prior studies have shown that, due to age stereotypes, older employees are generally more likely to face inferior working conditions characterised by higher demands and lower resources (Yeung *et al.*, 2021).

Results also revealed that managers, employees from larger organisations (with more than 25 employees), and trade union members had higher odds of being classified as teleworkers with time scheduling autonomy, though with varying levels of responsiveness. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that managers enjoy greater decision-making autonomy, even after controlling for gender effects (Nyberg *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, smaller organisations encounter distinct obstacles in helping their employees achieve work-life balance, as the strategies that work for larger organisations may not be easily applicable to smaller ones (Czerwińska-Lubszczyk and Byrtek, 2024). Moreover, studies underscore the beneficial effect of union membership for work-life balance (Rigby and O'Brien-Smith, 2010) and highlight the potential repercussions of dwindling union representation (Warren, 2021). Telework implementation case studies highlight the importance of social dialogue and collective bargaining in balancing the interests of organisations and employees regarding equity, voluntariness, and the frequency of remote work (Eurofound, 2025). Finally, our results showed that private sector employees were more likely to be classified into the 1st profile (office workers with low time scheduling autonomy and low expectations for working overtime) than the 2nd or 3rd profiles, confirming the existing research that public sector organisations have adapted more rapidly to telework (Janssen and Van der Voort, 2020).

Third, the results showed that the highest levels of time-based work-life conflict were observed among logged-in office and home workers, regardless of their level of time scheduling autonomy. In contrast, the lowest levels of time-based conflict were observed among office workers and teleworkers who were logged off. First and foremost, these results support the notion that time-based work-life conflict is not related to the working mode *per se*. Instead, it appears that expectations to overwork and to communicate outside working hours contributed to work-life conflict for both teleworkers and office workers. Furthermore, the results of our study show that the highest strain-based work-life conflict was observed among time-fixed and logged-in office workers. In contrast, time-flexed and logged-off teleworkers had the lowest strain-based conflict. Notably, logged-off office workers and teleworkers had lower strain-based conflict than their logged-in counterparts. These results suggest that telework may indeed be beneficial for reducing strain-based conflict, but this benefit is contingent on teleworkers having autonomy over their schedules and not being expected to remain available or to overwork outside regular hours.

The results of our study support the notion of border theory (Clark, 2000) and boundary theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000), suggesting that time-scheduling autonomy enables individuals to better attend to their own needs. While teleworkers typically develop strategies that align their boundaries with their preferences for either segmentation or integration, those with greater job autonomy and control tend to navigate this alignment more successfully (Basile and Beauregard, 2016). Conversely, individuals with limited or no control over their working hours often face greater challenges in managing the demands of both work and family roles, resulting in diminished resources and increased strain (Kossek *et al.*, 2011).

Moreover, from the perspectives of border (Clark, 2000) and boundary (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000) theories, expectations to overwork and to respond outside working hours impair the ability to establish and maintain boundaries around the most important domains of their lives, leading to boundary blurring. Discussing work-related issues and overworking can also hinder recovery and drain energy (Dettmers, 2017), thereby impairing the ability to replenish exhausted resources (Braukmann *et al.*, 2018). Employees exposed to high expectations direct more of their arguably limited resources (Hobfoll, 2011) to the work domain, leaving them with fewer resources to meet home demands and experiencing higher levels of work-life conflict. In other words, employees who feel pressured to respond and overwork remain exposed to job demands and are deprived of resources that would have otherwise been allocated to family and personal affairs (Laß and Wooden, 2022; Michel *et al.*, 2011). In

contrast, managing expectations for overwork and responding to work-related issues after hours enables a seamless transition to personal time and supports better recovery (Grant *et al.*, 2013).

All in all, the findings demonstrate that work-life conflict can be alleviated by granting employees autonomy over their work hours and managing organisational expectations regarding overwork and responses outside of working hours for both teleworkers and office workers.

5.1 Practical implications

Our study offers a number of valuable practical and societal implications. As the results show, working from home might, *per se*, have limited potential to mitigate work-life conflict, calling into question the commonly held belief that working from home allows better management of work and life demands. Instead, our study demonstrates that organisations can take certain measures to help employees maintain their work-life balance, regardless of their working location.

First, employees could benefit from being informed about the pitfalls of a disturbed work-home balance, overwork, and responding to work-related communication outside of work hours. To this end, organisations could provide training, HR practices, and workshops that have proven useful for clarifying and establishing helpful boundaries (Geraldes *et al.*, 2025).

Second, our findings indicate that work scheduling autonomy can help reduce strain-based work-life conflict. However, its benefits may be undermined in organisations with a hindering work-home culture and implicit pressure to meet work demands, leading employees to feel pressured to work harder during periods of high demand. To ensure that scheduling autonomy fosters well-being, organisations should consider workplace designs and HR policies that support it, paired with a supportive culture that discourages harmful work norms (Vahle-Hinz *et al.*, 2024), and provide clear expectations, communication, and boundaries (Gallup, 2025).

Third, organisations and management should be cautious in setting expectations regarding work and availability outside of work hours. Supervisors must be aware that their behaviour has a greater impact than organisational policy and that they serve as role models. Therefore, they should be guided to lead by example, demonstrating behaviours that support employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance (Gallup, 2021). On the contrary, supervisors who overwork, send emails, or make calls after work hours may inadvertently reinforce the collective norm of overwork and constant connectivity (Derks *et al.*, 2015).

Our results indicate that employees who feel pressured to work overtime experience increased strain and time-based conflict. Organisations, therefore, should promote healthy working hours that facilitate recovery, such as establishing clear core contact hours, allowing flexibility, avoiding long unstructured days, implementing meeting-free lunch hours, and discouraging after-hours communication. When overwork is unavoidable due to industry demands, it's essential to minimise non-autonomous overwork (Yu and Leka, 2022). Additionally, organisations should empower employees to manage their connectivity. The "right to disconnect" is gaining attention among policymakers and leaders due to rising concerns about employee health and well-being (Von Bergen and Bressler, 2019).

Finally, by showing that it is not the working location that determines the time and energy employees have for their personal lives, but rather the autonomy to schedule their working time and disconnect after working hours, our study supports the call to increase attention to occupational health and to focus on creating healthy working conditions amid technologization, climate change, and the energy transition, as these efforts are expected to benefit general public health (de Rijk *et al.*, 2025).

5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

Our study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and planning future research. First, the undoubted strength of our study is the representative

sample from 19 European countries, which allows for the generalisation of the results. Although we employed mean-centring to address potential differences in average levels across countries, the results should be interpreted with consideration of the various cultural and legal contexts. Moreover, as the ESS round 10 data were collected between 2020 and 2022, the results should be interpreted in light of the so-called enforced teleworking (Waizenegger *et al.*, 2020), which might have affected working patterns and work-life conflict. For instance, as noted by Eurofound (2021), work-life balance may have declined during the pandemic due to factors such as the widespread school closures across Europe. However, with the reopening of childcare facilities and schools, the dynamics of teleworking and work-life balance may have evolved (Eurofound, 2024). Secondly, although pan-European representative data is the undoubted strength of this study, enabling the generalisation of the results, the cross-sectional nature of the data precludes causal attributions. Although scarce, existing research (Zhang *et al.*, 2020) suggests that work-life conflict may influence the decision to telework.

Thirdly, although the European Social Survey (ESS) is recognised for its rigorous quality control measures, the use of single-item measures raises methodological concerns about the depth of the findings. To enhance the overall understanding of telework characteristics, future studies could prioritise the adoption of multi-item scales.

Finally, future studies could take into consideration personal variables or preferences, such as achievement motivation, perfectionism, conscientiousness, and segmentation preference, as they could affect preferences for telework (Bakaç *et al.*, 2023), the experience of scheduling autonomy (Doblinger and Class, 2023), overwork (Lee *et al.*, 2024), and responding to work-related communication after work (Boswell *et al.*, 2016).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, by adopting a person-centred approach, the present study offers a unique examination of the combinations of teleworking intensity, working-time autonomy, expected connectivity outside working hours, and their importance in diminishing work-life conflict.

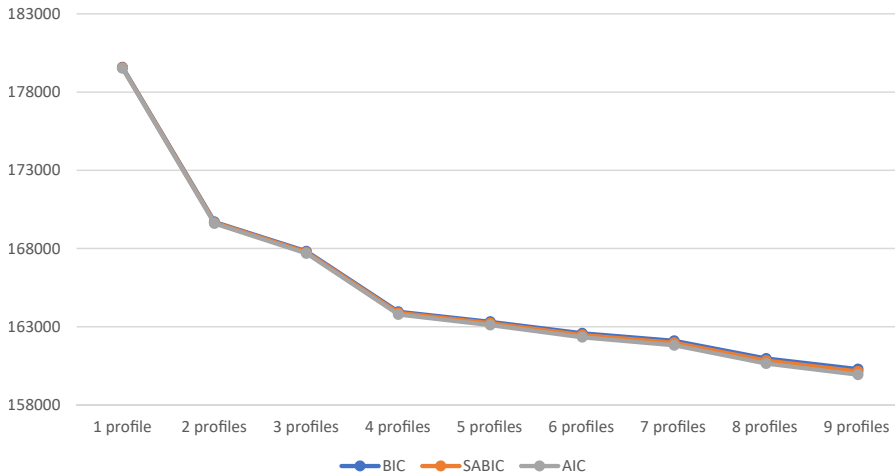


Figure A1. The elbow plot

Note

1. Since our research relied on secondary data and did not involve direct interaction with human subjects, we did not require research ethics approval. The ESS European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) adheres to the Declaration of Ethics of the International Statistical Institute (ISI). Survey agencies involved in data collection are expected to comply with this declaration, in addition to any relevant national requirements applicable to them. The ESS ERIC Research Ethics Board reviews applications for studies that are directly overseen by the ESS ERIC (<https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/research-ethics>).

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