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Digital Overload and Work–Life Balance Conflict in Hybrid Work: The Buffering Role of Role Clarity Among Indian Banking and IT Professionals

Dr.D.Gnyaneswer, Jaya Kumari

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, College of Vocational Studies, University of Delhi, India

4TH year Student, College of Vocational Studies, University of Delhi, India

ABSTRACT: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become an important organisational player due to the sudden shift towards hybrid work arrangement that simultaneously provide flexibility while contributing to digital overload. The current study examines the two key relationships of this environment, which include the effect of digital overload on the work-life balance (WLB) conflict (H1) and the extent to which role clarity buffers that conflict (H2). A quantitative, cross-sectional design grounded in a positivist approach was adopted and 156 white-collar employees in the banking and IT sectors of India were sampled to gather information. Findings show strong empirical evidence of H1: digital overload is a strong predictor of WLB conflict ($r = .694$, $p < .01$; $\beta = 0.683$, $p < .001$), which accounts for 48.2% of variance. H2 is partially confirmed: composite-level role clarity fails to achieve significance but item-level regression demonstrates that hybrid role expectations clarity (RC1) and task-priority clarity (RC4) is a significant defence against burnout, detachment difficulty, and scheduling conflict. The study aims to provide practical implications for organisations to implement technical right-to-disconnect policies, standard communication protocols, and shift role clarity efforts from tool-use training to a supervisor-managed expectation-setting.

KEYWORDS: digital overload, role clarity, work life conflict, hybrid work, technostress, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

The transition from traditional office based work to hybrid work arrangement has reimagined ICT central to professional collaboration platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack. While this shift has increased employee autonomy and flexibility, it has also created a 'digital fatigue paradox' where the same devices that allow flexibility are now exhausting employees with hyperconnectivity, information overload, and destroying psychological boundaries between work and personal life.

This paradox is evident in the banking and IT industry of India, where digital infrastructure is well-developed, and job demands are high. The constant stream of notifications, messages, and video calls blur the line between work and rest making psychological detachment from work difficult. As a result, digital overload has become a major predictor of work-life balance (WLB) conflict and psychological burnout (Ter Hoeven, Van Zoonen and Fonner, 2016; Blagojevic and Kecman, 2025).

Another factor that is equally important is the contribution of the employee role clarity: defined as the extent to which employees understand their responsibilities, priorities and expectations that has been identified as the potential resource to manage stress in the work place. In hybrid environment, where informal conversations are limited, clarity in expectations becomes even more important in reducing ambiguity and helps in improving the management of the tasks. (Mihalca et al., 2021; Shockley et al., 2021).

This paper aims to explore the interaction and connection between digital overload and WLB conflict, and to what extent role clarity offers a form of protection. It is based on primary data of 156 respondents and uses a multi-method approach to quantitative research such as Pearson correlation, multiple regression and item level stepwise regression.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Overload and WorkLife Conflict.

Digital overload occurs in many ways that are different yet connected: information noise due to high volumes of messages, technological control over the speed of work, blurred boundaries between work and personal lives, over use of work-related devices on personal space, and obsessive checking of notifications after work (Ter Hoeven et al., 2016; Karr-Wisniewski and Lu, 2010). Within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework these mechanisms consume the cognitive and emotional resources of employees and is transformed into the WLB degradation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2022).

The duality of ICT both as an efficient resource and a source of exhaustion can be understood with the 'practical paradox of technology' (Ter Hoeven et al., 2016). When the demand dimension is prominent (as is the case with high-intensity hybrid environments), one will experience a chronic hyper-vigilance that will make it even more challenging to be psychologically detached with respect to work (Tams et al., 2020; Yin et al., 2018). Lott and Abendroth (2023) also show that affective organisational commitment in the workplace has a paradoxical effect, maintaining after-hours digital engagement, which leads to a vicious cycle of overload.

Role Clarity as a Resource of Protection.

Role clarity takes centre stage in JD-R theory because it is a psychological resource that helps to mitigate the conversion of job demands into strain outcomes (Mihalca et al., 2021). Employees with knowledge of their duties, task priorities and anticipated behaviours are able to divert cognitive resources effectively, minimize decision-making overheads and avoid boundary leakage that comes with digital overload.

According to Shockley et al. (2021), one of the mechanisms that help to manage hybrid employees against the demands of after-hours communication is supervisor expectation-setting in terms of response times. Vullingsh et al. (2018) also show that ethical leadership decreases the digital burnout by clearly stating team expectations, avoiding the phenomenon of creeping responsibilities in digital work environments. Importantly, Mihalca et al. (2021) demonstrate that the most important dimension of role clarity among teleworkers is expectations-clarity and task-priority clarity and not familiarity with digital tools, in high workload situations.

The measurement implications of this difference between dimensions of clarity: The specific sub-dimensions of role clarity may not be differentially protective in a composite role clarity score. This gap is filled in the current study using item level regression.

Research Gap and Objectives

Most studies on ICT and hybrid work examine digital overload and role clarity as composite measures. But they fail to address which specific dimensions of digital overload drive work-life balance (WLB) conflict most, and which dimensions of role clarity do the most to buffer it. This study addresses this limitation by combining both composite-level analysis to capture the overall picture and item-level stepwise regression to identify the mechanisms at work

The two study objectives are:

- Objective 1: To analyse the relationship between digital overload and work-life balance conflict in hybrid work environments.
- Objective 2: To examine how employee role clarity buffers the impact of digital communication on employee wellbeing.

Hypotheses

H1: Digital overload is positively related to work-life balance conflict.

H2: Employee role clarity is negatively related to work-life balance conflict.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design & Sample

The study was a cross sectional study - quantitative, positivist in nature. A structured survey was employed to gather the primary data over 156 white-collar workers in India banking and IT sectors and data was collected through professional networks with the aid of convenience sampling. All constructs i.e. Digital overload, Role clarity and Work life Balance having five-item each, used five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). All the construct demonstrated an acceptable internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha > 0.70 that indicates a reliable measurement.

Strategy used for hypothesis testing

Both of the hypotheses were proved in three stages:

Phase 1 - Pearson bivariate correlation to evaluate the strength and direction of composite-level relationships between variables.

Phase 2 Multiple regression (DO and RC entered at the same time) to determine predictive power and predictor-predictor relationship.

Phase 3: Stepwise item-level regression, separately for each of the five outcomes of the WLB, adding DO items (H1) and RC items (H2) to determine what specific dimensions drive what outcome.

Also, the supplementary categorical evidence was added with Chi-square cross-tabulation tests. All the analyses were performed with the help of SPSS 27. The missing values were treated listwise, which meant that the effective sample size varied between 152 and 156 according to the analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation**Demographic Findings**

Table 1 presents key demographic characteristics and the proportion of respondents classified as High Digital Overload within each subgroup.

Table 1: Demographic Profile and High Digital Overload Rates

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)	High DO (%)
Age	20–25 years	76	48.7	39.5
	26–30 years	50	32.1	50.0
Gender	Male	94	60.3	37.2
	Female	62	39.7	45.2
Work Arrangement	Hybrid	92	59.0	41.3
	Fully Remote	21	13.5	66.7
	Fully Onsite	43	27.6	25.6
Daily Digital Hours	4–6 hours	60	38.5	36.7
	More than 6 hours	58	37.2	44.8

Data Source: Primary Data.

The highest high-DO rate of involved employees in entirely remote work arrangement is 66.7% with a gradient that is similar to the argument that the lack of physical workplace boundaries increases the always-on digital dynamic (Seinsche et al., 2024; Bondanini et al., 2025). Conversely, female respondents have a slightly higher high-DO rate (45.2%) as compared to male respondents (37.2%). Age does not significantly predict DO category ($\chi^2(2) = 9.581, p = .296$) which suggests that digital overload is evenly distributed across age groups in this occupation-based sample—a finding that dispels assumptions of a difference in generational resilience to technostress.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

The bivariate Pearson correlations of the composite mean scores are shown in Table 2. Digital Overload and WLB Conflict are strongly significant and correlated ($r = .694, p < .01$), which is a near large effect size and preliminary evidence in favour of H1. The hypothesised negative correlation between Role Clarity and WLB Conflict ($r = -.140$) is statistically significant but falls short of conventional significance, which argues that H2 will need to be analysed on the dimensions level. Digital Overload is not having a significant correlation with Role Clarity ($r = -.076, p = .345$).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix (Composite Mean Scores)

Variable	1. Mean_DO	2. Mean_RC	3. Mean_WLB
1. Digital Overload (DO)	1.000	-.076	.694**
2. Role Clarity (RC)	-.076	1.000	-.140
3. WLB Conflict (WLB)	.694**	-.140	1.000

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 153–156.

Multiple Regression: H1 and H2

Table 3 shows the simultaneous multiple regression of the two predictors on WLB Conflict. The model is highly significant ($F(2, 150) = 69.865, p < .001$) and explains 48.2% of variance in WLB Conflict ($R^2 = .482$, Adjusted $R^2 = .475$). There is no collinearity (Tolerance = .995, VIF = 1.005 of both predictors).

H1 is highly confirmed: Digital Overload is a very important predictor of WLB Conflict ($\beta = .683, t = 11.588, p = .000$). On the average, WLB Conflict goes up by 0.721 units when the DO composite mean goes up by one unit. Compositeness is not supported: Role Clarity does not achieve significance ($\beta = -.089, t = -1.506, p = .134$).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Predicting Work–Life Balance Conflict (H1 and H2)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	1.280	.329	—	3.896	.000
Digital Overload (Mean_DO)	.721	.062	.683	11.588	< .001
Role Clarity (Mean_RC)	-.094	.063	-.089	-1.506	.134

Note. $F(2, 150) = 69.865, p < .001$. $R^2 = .482$. Dependent variable: WLB Conflict (Mean).

Item-Level Regression — H1: Digital Overload Dimensions

In order to determine the specific processes by which digital overload is the cause of WLB conflict, stepwise regression was used on each of the five WLB items on the five DO items. The significant item-level coefficients are in Table 4.

Three DO items are found to be significant predictors of various WLB outcomes. The most common outcome of WLB in this sample ($M = 3.57$) is compulsion to check notifications after hours (DO5), which is the strongest predictor of psychological detachment difficulty (WLB4: $\beta = 0.350, p = .001$) and the predictor of burnout in the home setting (WLB2: $\beta = 0.225, p = .005$) and work communications. The predictors of interference with family responsibilities include information noise (DO2) and personal space invasion (DO4) (WLB1: $\beta = .286$ and $.333$ respectively, $p < .001$ each). Boundary blurring (DO3) due to technology contributes to the burnout at home (WLB2: $\beta = .256, p = .005$), communication disruption (WLB3), and scheduling conflict (WLB5: $\beta = .199, p = .033$). These results support H1 with a high level of dimensional specificity.

Table 4: Item-Level Regression — Digital Overload Predicting WLB Conflict Items

DO Predictor → WLB Outcome	β	t	p	Result
DO2 (Info noise) → WLB1 (Family interference)	.286	3.996	.000	Significant
DO4 (Space invasion) → WLB1 (Family interference)	.333	4.136	.000	Significant
DO5 (Notification compulsion) → WLB4 (Detachment)	.350	4.532	.000	Significant
DO3 (Boundary blurring) → WLB2 (Burnout)	.256	2.818	.005	Significant
DO5 (Notification compulsion) → WLB2 (Burnout)	.225	2.882	.005	Significant
DO3 (Boundary blurring) → WLB3 (Interruptions)	.222	2.374	.019	Significant
DO2 (Info noise) → WLB4 (Detachment)	.170	2.084	.039	Significant
DO1 (Forced pace) → WLB5 (Scheduling conflict)	.167	2.035	.044	Significant
DO3 (Boundary blurring) → WLB5 (Scheduling conflict)	.199	2.155	.033	Significant

Data Source: Primary Data. Only significant item-level coefficients reported.

Item-Level Regression — H2: Role Clarity Dimensions

The coefficients of the significant items at the item level predicting each of the WLB outcomes are shown in Table 5. Two RC dimensions are found to be particularly consistent protective factors.

Hybrid role expectations clarity (RC1) also plays an important role in avoiding interference with family duties (WLB1: $\beta = -.191$, $p = .041$), difficulty with detachment (WLB4: $\beta = -.192$, $p = .030$), and conflict in scheduling (WLB5: $\beta = -.276$, $p = .003$). Task-priority clarity (RC4) has the largest single protective factor: it has a significant negative effect on burnout at home (WLB2: $\beta = -.307$, $p = .001$), communication interruptions (WLB3: $\beta = -.190$, $p = .039$) and difficulty to detach (WLB4: $\beta = -.263$, $p = .004$). The clarity of the supervisor in misunderstandings resolution (RC5) effectively lowers the disruption of communication (WLB3: $\beta = -.196$, $p = .024$). Tool-use clarity (RC3) that is already high in this sample ($M = 4.03$) does not have any significant correlation with any WLB outcome. These results have significant support of H2 at the dimensional level.

Table 5: Item-Level Regression — Role Clarity Predicting WLB Conflict Items

RC Predictor → WLB Outcome	β	t	p	Result
RC1 (Hybrid role clarity) → WLB1 (Family interference)	-.191	-2.062	.041	Significant
RC4 (Task priority clarity) → WLB2 (Burnout)	-.307	-3.454	.001	Significant
RC2 (Info receipt) → WLB3 (Interruptions)	.288	3.374	.001	Significant
RC4 (Task priority clarity) → WLB3 (Interruptions)	-.190	-2.079	.039	Significant
RC5 (Supervisor clarity) → WLB3 (Interruptions)	-.196	-2.283	.024	Significant
RC1 (Hybrid role clarity) → WLB4 (Detachment)	-.192	-2.186	.030	Significant
RC4 (Task priority clarity) → WLB4 (Detachment)	-.263	-2.933	.004	Significant
RC1 (Hybrid role clarity) → WLB5 (Scheduling conflict)	-.276	-2.999	.003	Significant

Data Source: Primary Data. Only significant item-level coefficients reported.

Cross-Tabulation: Digital Overload and WLB Conflict.

Table 6 shows the categoric cross-tabulation of the DO and WLB scores (recoded into Low/Medium/High categories). The association is highly significant ($\chi^2(4) = 69.449$, $p < .001$, $\Phi = .667$). High DO respondents in the high WLB conflict category are 66.7 with 27.2 being medium and 0 being low. This nominal test is a strong confirmation of the regression-based result of H1.

Table 6: Cross-Tabulation — Digital Overload Category × WLB Conflict Category

DO Category	WLB Low (1)	WLB Medium (2)	WLB High (3)	Total
Low (1)	8	4	0	12
Medium (2)	6	53	22	81
High (3)	2	19	42	63
Total	16	76	64	156

Pearson Chi-Square = 69.449, $df = 4$, $p < .001$. $\Phi = .667$.

Key Findings

H1 — Digital Overload Drives WLB Conflict

The strongest predictor of work-life balance (WLB) conflict is Digital overload, explaining nearly half the total variance ($r = .694$, $\beta = .683$, $p = .001$).

- The most common overload behaviour and the biggest barrier to psychological detachment is the compulsion to check notifications after hours (DO5) is most frequently reported WLB conflict ($M = 3.57$).
- Boundary blurring (DO3) solely predicts burnout at home and scheduling conflict, that is consistent with Ter Hoeven et al.'s (2016) technology paradox.
- the main drivers of interference with family responsibilities are Information noise (DO2) and personal space invasion (DO4).

- Forced pace acceleration (DO1) matters less — this sample's digital overload is boundary-invasive and notification-driven, not pace-driven.
- Burnout ($M = 3.79$) and difficulty in detaching from work ($M = 3.57$) score higher than scheduling conflict ($M = 2.94$), meaning psychological boundary violations hurt more than structural time clashes. That distinction is important specifically for interventions.

H2 — Role Clarity as a Protective Factor

- H2 is partially supported. Composite-level analysis is unclear about the real effects by averaging meaningful dimensions with irrelevant ones.
- Expectations clarity (RC1) and task-priority clarity (RC4) are the protective factors that count — they lessen burnout, detachment difficulty, and scheduling conflict, that is consistent with Mihalca et al. (2021) and Shockley et al. (2021).
- Supervisor clarity in resolving misunderstandings (RC5) adds a further buffer against communication disruptions.
- Tool-use clarity (RC3) shows no significant WLB relationship despite scoring high — organizations investing heavily in tool training may not be sufficient for solving the problem.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The findings point to four practical steps organisations can take.
- First, implementing the right to disconnect through technical controls such as automated notification suppression, message-delay scheduling, and after-hours communication bans are more effective than awareness campaigns.
- Second, standardising which tools are used such as assign email to non-urgent tasks, Slack to async updates, and video calls to high-stakes decisions as using the same channel can create noise, which is considered main reason for digital overload.
- Third, greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing role clarity through supervisor led expectation setting and clear task prioritisation. rather than focusing solely on tool use training.
- Fourth, focus on digital wellbeing programmes on fully remote employees first. High amount of digital overload cases come from this group. Clear policies around expected response times and availability would make the biggest difference here.

V. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A few limitations are necessary to mention since this was a cross-sectional study, that can restrict the causal interpretation. The sample was collected via convenience sampling and hence limits the generalisability. Additionally reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias across questions.

Future research should focus on longitudinal or Experience-sampling designs — where participants report how they're feeling multiple times a day — would catch the kind of single day variation that a single survey is incapable to achieve. Expanding beyond banking and IT, and across countries, would increase the generalisability of the findings. Role clarity should be measured as a multidimensional construct from the outset where expectations-clarity, task-priority clarity, and tool-use clarity are related but are not categorised in the same way.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article studied 156 hybrid workers in India's banking and IT sectors. The central questions were whether digital overload makes work-life balance difficult, and whether role clarity offers any protection. Both were supported, though the second requires some more studies.

Digital overload — notification pressure, blurred boundaries, information overload — verified nearly half the variance in work-life conflict. That's not a marginal association. Role clarity was more complicated: the composite measure didn't reach significance, but when we looked at specific items, expectations-clarity and task-priority clarity did appear to buffer against burnout, detachment difficulty, and scheduling conflict. The composite probably obscures more than it reveals. For organizations, the practical implication isn't easy. Voluntary norms around disconnecting don't do much of a help. What seems to work are technical and structural constraints: enforced response windows, clear task hierarchies, manager expectations to be cleared out rather than assumed. The right-to-disconnect conversation is often treated as a culture question. This data suggests it's closer to an infrastructure one.

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