

Job insecurity, work passion, and work–life balance in diverse work arrangements



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Orientation: The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic shifted work settings, revealing gaps in current literature on how work arrangements affect employee experiences and well-being.

Research purpose: This study investigates the relationship between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious and obsessive work passion) and work–life balance flexibility-ability and flexibility-willingness in work and family across traditional, semi-remote and remote work arrangements in the South African context.

Motivation for the study: Understanding the relationships between constructs in this study benefit both employees and organisations by enabling informed decision-making and optimising work arrangements, leading to improved productivity, job security and well-being.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted with 445 participants across traditional, semi-remote and remote work groups. Structural equation modelling was employed to analyse how different work environments influenced employee experiences and outcomes.

Main findings: Significant relationships exist between job insecurity, work passion and work–life balance. Job insecurity reduces work flexibility-ability and family flexibility-willingness. Harmonious work passion generally enhances work flexibility-ability but decreases family flexibility-willingness. In contrast, obsessive work passion decreases work flexibility-willingness while enhancing family flexibility-ability and family flexibility-willingness. These effects vary across work arrangements.

Practical/managerial implications: Individuals can use insights from this study to manage their job roles effectively, while organisations can tailor work arrangements to meet diverse employee needs, fostering a more resilient workforce.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to our understanding of job insecurity, work passion and work–life balance in diverse work arrangements post-COVID-19, essential for fostering innovation and maintaining a competitive edge in the dynamic job market.

Keywords: job insecurity; work passion; harmonious work passion; obsessive work passion; work–life balance; traditional work; semi-remote work; remote work

Introduction

In the post-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic era, work environments have evolved significantly, resulting in diverse work arrangements and a complex landscape encompassing both non-flexible (traditional work) and flexible (semi-remote and remote) work arrangements. Recent studies underscore the profound implications of these evolving work arrangements for employees. For instance, traditional ‘on-site’ work remains essential in professions where flexibility is limited, or face-to-face interaction is essential. While this work mode enhances the culture of learning, social interaction and in-person collaboration (Corral, 2024), it also presents challenges such as inflexibility, longer commutes and concentration difficulties that can impact productivity (Uro et al., 2022). Furthermore, evolutionary mismatches between humans and digital work might contribute to these challenges (Van Vugt et al., 2024). In contrast, the semi-remote model or hybrid work model combines the benefits of office collaboration with the autonomy and flexibility of remote work (Ferrara et al., 2022). However, this model might raise stress levels and extend working hours because of perceived deficiencies in support (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022). Lastly, remote work – the option offering the most flexibility – allows for greater enjoyment, satisfaction and performance (Ferrara et al., 2022). Yet, remote work may bring challenges such as communication difficulties,

feelings of isolation and difficulties maintaining effective collaboration between employees (Corral, 2024).

Work arrangements significantly impact various aspects of individuals' lives, with an increasing emphasis on employee health and well-being (Shimazu et al., 2013). A significant area of interest highlighted in the literature is the effect of these work arrangements on employees' work-life balance, particularly emphasising the importance of positive and negative outcomes for employees (Demerouti et al., 2013; Mostert et al., 2011). Achieving a balanced integration of work and personal life or work-family enrichment correlates with improved psychological well-being, life satisfaction, positive affect and enhanced productivity (Sen & Hooja, 2018). Conversely, excessive work pressure and workload can lead to work-life conflict, resulting in detrimental outcomes such as depression, fatigue, stress and burnout (Mostert et al., 2011). These negative effects can blur the boundaries between personal and professional domains, leading to counterproductive behaviours as employees struggle to manage competing demands (Irawanto et al., 2021).

The literature suggests that separating or creating boundaries between work and personal roles can reduce negative consequences and increase employee satisfaction (Bulger et al., 2007). Understanding and managing these boundaries across diverse work arrangements optimise employee functioning and satisfaction (Kreiner et al., 2009). Traditional work settings typically offer control, routine and stability, but they can restrict the flexibility required for personal activities, potentially disrupting a healthy work-life balance. On the other hand, more flexible choices, such as semi-remote or remote work, can provide more autonomy, which is beneficial for work-life balance; however, if not managed effectively, this can lead to over-commitment and exhaustion (Allen et al., 2015).

The contemporary workplace features a variety of work setups, including traditional, semi-remote and remote work modes, potentially making it more challenging to establish and sustain a healthy work-life balance (Whiting, 2024). Several factors contribute to this challenge, including job insecurity, which often increases stress as individuals strive to balance their professional and personal commitments (Filho et al., 2021). Another critical factor is a passion for work. While being passionate about work can increase performance and motivation, it can also raise stress levels potentially affecting work-life balance and organisational outcomes (Bester et al., 2020). It is, therefore, essential to investigate the intricate effects of job insecurity and work passion on employees' ability to manage work-life boundaries in various work environments.

Job insecurity can occasionally boost motivation and organisational citizenship behaviour. However, it is more commonly associated with decreased motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and overall productivity (Begum et al., 2022). When employees perceive their jobs as valuable personal resources and feel insecure about them, they might

experience feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty (Sverke et al., 2006). This can cause employees to work longer hours and overextend themselves to protect their jobs (Hobfoll, 2011). This can blur the boundaries between work and personal life, affecting work-life balance, performance and overall health (Begum et al., 2022). The type of work arrangement of the employee may also influence the relationship between job insecurity and work-life balance. In traditional settings, frequent discussions of layoffs heighten job security concerns, prompting employees to work harder and worsening conflicts between personal and professional commitments (De Witte, 2005). In semi-remote or fully remote work environments, job insecurity might drive employees to show their dedication and value to the organisation because of the higher sense of trust and autonomy in these settings (Corral, 2024). As a result, the lines between work and personal life can become blurred, especially because there is no physical separation between these two domains (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022). However, detailed research on the impact of job insecurity on work-life balance across different work settings is still limited.

Work passion is a psychological construct that drives new ideas and goals, provides a sense of purpose and influences behaviour in both positive and destructive ways (Sari et al., 2023). The dualistic model of work passion categorises this phenomenon into two distinct types: harmonious and obsessive work passion (Vallerand & Rahimi, 2022). Harmonious work passion allows autonomous engagement in work, fostering positive experiences (e.g. fun and enjoyment) (Vallerand et al., 2003) while facilitating a balanced personal and professional life (Vallerand, 2015; Vallerand & Houliort, 2019). In contrast, obsessive work passion creates internal pressures, diminishing positive psychological states (e.g. guilt and anxiety) (Vallerand et al., 2003), and hinders disengagement from work after hours, often at the expense of their personal lives (Junjunan, 2021).

Work environments significantly shape employees' work passion. Traditional work environments are often characterised by structured communication and strong team cohesion, fostering harmonious work passion (Stratone et al., 2022). The stability and clear routines in this environment help individuals to maintain a healthy distinction between their work and personal lives, supporting a healthy balance. However, external pressures, amplified by more regular contact with colleagues, could increase obsessive work passion (Haq et al., 2019). This can lead to an overwhelming drive to work, which may, in turn, create conflicts between work and personal life. Conversely, semi-remote and remote work arrangements can enhance harmonious work passion (Allen et al., 2015) by offering freedom and flexibility to manage schedules around work responsibilities, thereby improving work-life balance (Allen et al., 2015). Inadvertently, obsessive work passion in these settings can lead to overwork and professional isolation (Badri et al., 2023), increasing stress and contributing to work-life conflicts (Vallerand, 2008).

By testing these relationships in a structural equation model, this study investigated the relationship between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious and obsessive work

passion) and work–life balance across traditional, semi-remote and remote work arrangements in the South African context.

Literature review

Work–life balance

Work–life balance is defined as the successful balancing of needs arising from work and other life domains (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). The study is guided by the boundary theory, which suggests that individuals have different preferences when it comes to either integrating or separating their work and personal lives (Bulger et al., 2007). The dynamic interaction between work and personal life is managed through flexible and permeable boundaries (Bulger et al., 2007). Four domains characterise this interaction:

- *Work flexibility-ability* refers to individuals' view of their actual capacity and control to manage shifts between occupational obligations and private pursuits, influenced by organisational policies, workplace culture and the supportiveness of supervisors in the organisation (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010).
- *Family flexibility-ability* reflects an assessment of control and agency in transitioning from one's personal to work-related activities, influenced by the nature of familial responsibilities and dynamics (Matthews et al., 2010).
- *Work flexibility-willingness* indicates whether individuals prefer integrating or segmenting work and personal life based on their work-oriented goals, priorities and motivations (Nippert-Eng, 1996).
- *Family flexibility-willingness* is related to an individual's willingness and motivation to balance family obligations and work requirements based on the perception of feasibility and potential benefits associated with boundary management strategies (Matthews et al., 2010).

Boundary theory

Boundary theory, originally developed by Nippert-Eng (1996), offers a way to understand how individuals navigate between different areas of their lives, like work and home. The concept of boundary negotiation, where individuals actively manage their roles, forms the foundation for research on individual-level boundary management (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

At the core of the boundary theory are key concepts such as the strength, permeability and flexibility of boundaries (Bulger et al., 2007). Permeability refers to the extent to which elements from one domain intrude into another, leading to intrusions (Bulger et al., 2007). Flexibility encompasses both the capacity to transition between domains (flexibility-ability) and the motivation to do so (flexibility-willingness) (Bulger et al., 2007). These preferences for boundary management exist on a continuum, ranging from high integration (more flexibility and permeability) to high segmentation (higher rigidity and impermeability) (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010). Boundary theory also delves into the intricate boundary-crossing processes and

role transitions (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Macro role transitions involve permanent changes where one role enters another over time, while micro transitions involve frequent switching between current roles (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Fundamentally, boundaries consist of both the placement that defines the line between realms and the transcendence that maintains those boundaries (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Conservation of Resources theory

The *Conservation of Resources (COR)* theory, formulated by Hobfoll (1998), provides a conceptual framework for understanding how individuals manage and respond to the dynamic nature of their resources. This theory suggests that individuals are motivated to conserve, protect and accumulate resources (Hobfoll, 1998). According to COR theory, psychological distress occurs when people experience a threat to their resources, the actual loss of resources or failure to gain expected resources (Hobfoll, 2011).

Conservation of Resources theory further elucidates several key principles that govern the effects of resource loss versus resource gain. Firstly, the primacy of resource loss suggests that losing resources has a more significant and immediate impact than gaining them (Hobfoll, 2011). Secondly, resource investment indicates that individuals invest resources to prevent loss, protect existing resources or acquire new ones (Hobfoll, 2011). Thirdly, resource gain cycles occur when individuals with abundant resources, unchallenged by stressors, can accumulate more resources, creating positive energy and gain spirals that lead to surpluses offsetting possible future losses (Hobfoll, 2011). Lastly, resource loss cycles occur when initial resource losses weaken an individual's resource pool, potentially leading to secondary losses like reduced self-esteem and increased stress (Hobfoll, 2011).

Job insecurity and work–life balance

Job insecurity refers to the concern about continuity of employment, defined as the subjectively perceived and undesired possibility of losing one's present job in the future (De Witte et al., 2016). Job insecurity involves the undesired threat of job loss and is characterised by feelings of powerlessness and helplessness (Sverke et al., 2006).

Although research on the relationship between job insecurity and work–life balance is scarce, job insecurity could significantly impact work–life balance. Work intensification and an unpredictable, unstable work environment can lead to substantial changes in work dynamics (Griep et al., 2015). When employees fear potential job loss, they often spend more time at work, take on heavier workloads and experience conflicts between work and family life (Begum et al., 2022). This insecurity commonly leads to fear and pressure to exceed work demands, negatively affecting their work–life balance (Yu, 2014).

Despite the limited research on the relationship between job insecurity and work–life balance, job insecurity can greatly disrupt and undermine work–life balance. Employees in unstable and uncertain work environments face significant pressure when they have job insecurity, which drives them to work longer hours and take on more work to mitigate their fears of job loss (Begum et al., 2022). This intensified workload often comes at the direct expense of family time, undermining work–life balance as individuals struggle to meet demanding work expectations (Yu, 2014). Increased stress and anxiety brought on by job uncertainty also negatively impact an employee’s general well-being by decreasing the amount of time and quality that can be spent on important personal connections and leisure activities (Minnotte & Yucel, 2018). These stressors worsen the difficulties encountered in both the professional and personal spheres by causing a decline in job satisfaction, increased psychological strain and possibly undesirable behavioural effects (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). Based on the literature, the following hypothesis was stated to look into the relationship between job insecurity and work–life balance:

H1: There is a negative relationship between job insecurity and work–life balance among employees.

Work passion and work–life balance

Work passion is a strong inclination towards a personally meaningful and highly valued activity that one deeply loves; finds intrinsically self-defining; and invests substantial time, energy and dedication (Vallerand, 2008). In the existing literature on work passion, two distinct types are usually recognised: harmonious work passion and obsessive work passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). This critical distinction between these two types of passion lies in how they are internalised and integrated into one’s sense of self and overall identity (Curran et al., 2015).

Harmonious work passion is an adaptive and beneficial form of passionate engagement where individuals align their work with their core values and personal goals (Vallerand et al., 2003). The benefits of harmonious work passion include heightened concentration, improved workflow and efficiency, increased job satisfaction, flexible task engagement and greater enjoyment and energy (Curran et al., 2015). Being harmoniously passionate not only improves an individual’s engagement but also has the potential to have a positive impact on work–life balance. Considering these insights, the following hypothesis was stated to examine the relationship between harmonious work passion and work–life balance:

H2: There is a positive relationship between harmonious work passion and work–life balance among employees.

Obsessive work passion arises when an individual becomes excessively attached to a particular activity, deeply integrating it into their behaviour without aligning it with their values and life goals (Vallerand et al., 2003). While obsessive work passion can result in high performance in the short term (Breu & Yasseri, 2023), it often leads to

maladaptive outcomes over time when used to validate self-worth (Curran et al., 2015). Individuals might be driven by an almost uncontrollable urge to engage in certain activities, such as work. Individuals with obsessive work passion frequently experience internal and external pressures, as they tend to prioritise work and see it as their main source of motivation. This leads to several maladaptive outcomes, such as higher turnover rates, increased stress and burnout, workaholism and conflicts between work and family life. Obsessive work passion can disrupt the delicate balance between personal and professional life (Vallerand et al., 2003), fostering unhealthy rigidity and inflexible persistence. In line with the literature, the following hypothesis was stated to investigate the relationship between obsessive work passion and work–life balance:

H3: There is a negative relationship between obsessive work passion and work–life balance among employees.

Job insecurity, work–life balance and work arrangements

The relationship between job insecurity and work–life balance could differ depending on employees’ work arrangements. The depletion of resources individuals experience because of job insecurity can increase stress, making it progressively harder for employees to feel stable and in control, influencing boundaries and work–life balance. In traditional work settings, accessible social support alleviates job insecurity (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). However, companies often prioritise profit maximisation through cost-cutting measures, such as layoffs, early retirement offers, downsizing and increased use of subcontracted workers (Sverke et al., 2006). These actions force remaining employees to work harder to compensate, heightening conflicts between work and personal life and eroding trust between employees and employers (De Witte, 2005).

Semi-remote and remote work arrangements are flexible work arrangements that not only offer benefits but also pose challenges. Positively, flexible arrangements improve job options and reduce regional restrictions, potentially alleviating job insecurity. Employees gain greater control over their work schedules, fostering a sense of autonomy that can mitigate feelings of job insecurity. However, these flexible arrangements may also contribute to feelings of isolation and detachment because of limited interaction with colleagues and management, potentially exacerbating job insecurity (Nemțeanu & Dabija, 2023). The increased freedom and reduced structure may cause employees to feel uncertain about their career advancement, especially in workplaces with frequent downsizing or short-term contracts (Sverke et al., 2006). Individuals may feel compelled to put more effort into their jobs to keep their jobs, which could lead to increased stress, anxiety and conflicts between work and home spheres (Begum et al., 2022). Centred around the literature, the following hypothesis was stated to examine the relationship between job insecurity, work–life balance and different types of work arrangements:

H4: The relationship between job insecurity and work–life balance will negatively vary across traditional, semi-remote and remote work arrangements.

Work passion, work–life balance and work arrangements

By understanding the positive dynamics of *harmonious work passion*, individuals can effectively manage and appreciate its impact across different work arrangements. Traditional work settings offer stability and predictability, fostering a sense of security among employees, which enhances motivation and harmonious work passion (Valackiene et al., 2021). This harmonious enthusiasm is further enhanced by the enjoyment and fulfilment derived from successfully navigating the predictable routines of traditional work, which further amplifies this harmonious work passion (Haq et al., 2019). Additionally, the clear separation of work hours from personal life in traditional environments allows individuals to disconnect after work, promoting better work–life balance and sustainable, harmonious work passion (Kreiner, 2006).

On the contrary, flexible work arrangements, such as semi-remote and remote work, enable individuals to better balance their personal and professional responsibilities. This is achieved by reducing commute times and freeing valuable personal time (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). These arrangements can encourage greater harmonious work passion, motivation and a sense of fulfilment (Fan & Moen, 2023). Flexible work arrangements can increase enjoyment and personal fulfilment by boosting job satisfaction and providing more autonomy, enhancing harmonious work passion and purposeful engagement (Allen et al., 2015). Drawing from these findings, the following hypothesis was stated to investigate the relationships between harmonious work passion, work–life balance and different types of work arrangements:

H5: The relationship between harmonious work passion and work–life balance will positively vary across traditional, semi-remote and remote work arrangements.

Depending on the work arrangement, obsessive work passion's adverse effects may be experienced differently. In traditional work environments, the rigid structure can intensify obsessive work passion, leading to increased stress and a higher risk of burnout (Fasana et al., 2022). This stress often spills over to personal time, creating conflicts between work and personal life.

On the contrary, flexible work arrangements, such as semi-remote and remote setups, bring unique challenges for employees, including changes in communication dynamics and job responsibilities (Cabrita & Duarte, 2023). The flexibility inherent in these arrangements can foster obsessive work passion, where individuals feel compelled to constantly engage with work, blurring the boundaries between personal and professional life (Badri et al., 2023). This blurred distinction and lack of physical boundaries between work and home can lead to individuals overworking themselves,

ultimately leading to resource depletion (Vallerand et al., 2003). Additionally, the pressure to always be available (often driven by obsessive work passion) can make it even more difficult for employees to disconnect from work (Vallerand, 2008). In line with this, the following hypothesis was stated to study the relationship between obsessive work passion, work–life balance and different types of work arrangements:

H6: The relationship between obsessive work passion and work–life balance will negatively vary across traditional, semi-remote and remote work arrangements.

Research objectives

Based on the introduction, literature review and hypotheses, this study aims to (1) determine what the relationships are, tested in a structural equation model, between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious work passion and obsessive work passion) and work–life balance; and (2) investigate how the relationships, tested in a structural equation model, between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious work passion and obsessive work passion) and work–life balance differ for employees with different work arrangements (traditional, semi-remote and remote working).

Research design

A quantitative approach using a cross-sectional design was used to achieve the objectives of this study. Quantitative research quantifies variables through hypotheses to get results through statistical analyses (Apuke, 2017). Hypotheses are formulated based on theory and literature that investigate the relationships between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious work passion and obsessive work passion) and work–life balance. A cross-sectional design was used to collect data from multiple subsections at a certain point in time (Thomas, 2022). Data were gathered using purposive, convenience and snowball sampling techniques.

Research participants and procedure

This study's population consisted of South African employees ($N = 445$). Data collection commenced after obtaining ethical clearance from the respective university and relevant parties. Data were collected by continuously sharing a survey link via social media, network connections and the university's alumni list. Upon accessing the survey's introduction page, respondents were presented with information about the study, ensuring informed consent. Participation in the study was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. There was no specific time limit, but it took approximately 10–15 min to complete.

The sample comprised 445 participants, of which 316 (71%) were female participants and 127 (28.5%) were male participants. Age distribution revealed that 175 (39.1%) participants were aged between 19 years and 29 years, 135 (30.1%) participants were aged between 30 years and 39 years, 64 (14.1%) participants were aged between 40 years and 49 years and the remainder (15.4%) were aged between

50 years and 76 years. In terms of race, 82 (18.4%) participants were African people, 316 (71%) participants were white people, 4 (0.9%) participants were Asian people, 22 (4.9%) participants were mixed race people and 17 (3.8%) participants were Indian people. Participants represented various employment sectors, with 174 (39.1%) respondents in managerial roles. Work arrangement varied, with 158 (35.7%) individuals working from a formalised office space, 155 (34.8%) individuals working with a semi-remote arrangement and 131 (29.4%) individuals working entirely remotely.

Measuring instruments

Job insecurity

The Job Insecurity Scale developed by De Witte (2005) was used. Pienaar et al. (2013) recommended a shortened version of eight items (instead of the original 11) for use in the South African context. The Job Insecurity Scale includes cognitive and affective job insecurity questions, measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly). Cognitive job insecurity was measured with four items (e.g. 'I am very sure that I will be able to keep my job'). Affective job insecurity was also measured with four items (e.g. 'I fear that I might get fired') (Pienaar et al., 2013).

Work passion

The Passion Scale, developed by Vallerand and colleagues, measured the respondents' passion for their work. The Passion Scale is a two-factor scale consisting of 16 self-report items designed to measure harmonious and obsessive work passion (Vallerand et al., 2013) and employs a seven-point response format ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). For this study, two subscales were used: harmonious work passion (six items, for example 'This activity is in harmony with other activities in my life') and obsessive work passion (six items, e.g. 'I have difficulty controlling my urge to do this activity'). Furthermore, the scale's applicability in the South African context has been established, supporting its validity and relevance for this study (Bester et al., 2020).

Work-life balance

The Domain Boundary Strength Questionnaire developed by Matthews and Farrell was used to measure the respondents' work-life balance (Bulger et al., 2007). The modified version of 19 items was used in this study, assessing four dimensions: work flexibility-ability (four items, e.g. 'If the need arose, I could leave work early to attend to family-related issues'), work flexibility-willingness (four items, e.g. 'I am willing to take time off from work to deal with my family and personal life responsibilities'), family flexibility-ability (five items, e.g. 'My family and personal life responsibilities would not prevent me from going into work early if the need arose') and family flexibility-willingness (six items, e.g. 'I am willing to cancel plans with my friends and family to deal with work-related responsibilities'). Each item is rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Statistical analysis

The study utilised Mplus Version 8.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2024) to test the latent measurement model. This analysis involved structural equation modelling (SEM) using confirmatory factor analysis, a method used to determine if observed variables contribute to unobserved variables. This approach focussed on modelling relationships, allowing for the evaluation of hypotheses concerning the interactions among such factors (Gallagher & Brown, 2013).

To evaluate the model's goodness of fit, several fit indices were used: the traditional Chi-square (χ^2) statistic, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Xia & Yang, 2018). Model fit was considered suitable with CFI and TLI values of 0.90 and above. Further, the RMSEA values of 0.05 or less indicated a 'close fit', whereas values between 0.05 and 0.08 indicated a 'good fit' of the model (Xia & Yang, 2018).

In this study, McDonald's omega (ω) was computed and reported to provide an accurate approximation of the scale's reliability, offering a more sensible measure of internal consistency (Peters, 2014). The use of omega has been preferred across various psychometric conditions because of its enhanced accuracy and applicability (Dunn et al., 2013). Furthermore, the correlation matrix was tested for statistical significance at a 95% confidence interval ($p \leq 0.05$). The practical significance of the correlation values was based on effect sizes: small ($p \geq 0.10$), medium ($p \geq 0.30$) and large ($p \geq 0.50$) (Cohen, 1988).

The study also employs a structural model (see Figure 1) to explore the relationships between variables in the overall sample, providing insights into the connections between the independent variables (job insecurity, harmonious work passion and obsessive work passion) and the dependent variable (work-life balance components). The same goodness-of-fit indices used for the measurement model were applied to assess the structural equation model fit. Further analyses tested this model for employees under different work arrangements. Differences in beta (β), standard error (*SE*) and *p*-values were examined to determine if relationships varied among employees in different work settings. As a pragmatic solution, differences in *R*-squared values were calculated based on the squared beta coefficient in each group to indicate the effect size differences between them. For this study, the difference in *R*-square was considered as 0.01 (small), 0.09 (medium) and 0.25 (large) (Cohen, 1988).

Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process, the researcher meticulously integrated ethical considerations into each phase to ensure the integrity and success of this study. Ethical clearance (No. NWU-00633-23-24) was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee of the supervising university to conduct the study. Before participating in this questionnaire, participants were

required to provide informed consent. This research was also grounded in autonomy, privacy and maintaining confidentiality. Additionally, the data were stored in a secure, password-protected database.

Results

Correlation matrix

The correlation matrix for the variables is presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, job insecurity negatively correlates with work flexibility-ability, work flexibility-willingness and family flexibility-ability. Harmonious work passion was the only variable (factor) that positively correlated with all the work-life balance variables (factors). This included work flexibility-ability, work flexibility-willingness, family flexibility-ability and family flexibility-willingness. Obsessive work passion had a positive association with work flexibility-ability, family flexibility-ability and family flexibility-willingness. The only two correlations that are not seen as significant to any extent are job insecurity and family flexibility-willingness, as well as obsessive work passion and work flexibility-willingness.

Structural models

Table 2 represents the baseline structural model that describes the path results (models were related to the contexts in which the relationships are situated in essence, traditional, semi-

remote and remote work arrangements). The baseline model demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 19668,429$; degrees of freedom (df) = 595; CFI = 0.945; TLI = 0.939; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.056.

As Table 2 shows, all other relationships were statistically significant except for the relationship between job insecurity and family flexibility-willingness, and obsessive work passion and work flexibility-ability.

Table 3 represents the tests on the work arrangements (traditional work, semi-remote work and remote work). The research model also demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 3029.521$ (χ^2 contribution from traditional work = 928.435; semi-remote work = 1071.583 and remote work = 1029.485); $df = 1981$; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.07.

The findings presented in Table 3 indicated that job insecurity generally had a negative effect on work-life balance across various work environments, with a small effect. It negatively impacted work flexibility-ability in all work environments and negatively impacted work-flexibility willingness in traditional environments. Additionally, job insecurity negatively impacted family flexibility-ability in semi-remote work settings. Lastly, family flexibility-willingness was negatively affected in traditional and, surprisingly, positively affected in remote work environments.

Harmonious work passion generally had a positive effect on work-life balance across diverse work arrangements. Harmonious passion improved work flexibility-ability across all work settings and increased work flexibility-willingness in semi-remote and remote environments. Harmonious work passion positively impacted family flexibility-ability in traditional and semi-remote work settings. Lastly, harmonious work passion negatively impacted family flexibility-willingness in traditional and semi-remote environments.

Obsessive work passion generally had a negative impact on work-life balance across diverse work arrangements, particularly reducing work-flexibility willingness in the semi-remote work environment. However, obsessive passion

TABLE 1: Reliabilities and correlation matrix for the latent variables.

No. of variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Job insecurity	0.89	-	-	-	-	-	-
Harmonious work passion	-0.45	0.88	-	-	-	-	-
Obsessive work passion	-0.30	0.77	0.72	-	-	-	-
Work flexibility-ability	-0.36†	0.49†	0.29‡	0.87	-	-	-
Work flexibility-willingness	-0.18‡	0.13‡	-0.03	0.69	0.84	-	-
Family flexibility-ability	-0.29‡	0.44†	0.37†	0.50	0.33	0.84	-
Family flexibility-willingness	-0.05	0.23‡	0.46†	0.08	-0.06	0.45	0.90

Note: McDonalds' omegas in bold on the diagonal.

*, Correlations statistically significant $p < 0.05$.

†, Medium effect size.

‡, Small effect size.

TABLE 2: Regression results of the structural model.

Structural path	β	SE	p
Job insecurity → Work flexibility-ability	-0.165	0.049	0.001*
Job insecurity → Work flexibility-willingness	-0.125	0.055	0.024*
Job insecurity → Family flexibility-ability	-0.132	0.049	0.008*
Job insecurity → Family flexibility-willingness	-0.008	0.053	0.878
Harmonious work passion → Work flexibility-ability	0.502	0.071	0.000*
Harmonious work passion → Work flexibility-willingness	0.212	0.088	0.016*
Harmonious work passion → Family flexibility-ability	0.266	0.064	0.000*
Harmonious work passion → Family flexibility-willingness	-0.191	0.067	0.004*
Obsessive work passion → Work flexibility-ability	-0.127	0.067	0.060
Obsessive work passion → Work flexibility-willingness	-0.195	0.083	0.019*
Obsessive work passion → Family flexibility-ability	0.160	0.062	0.010*
Obsessive work passion → Family flexibility-willingness	0.590	0.065	0.000*

Notes: β , standardised beta coefficient; p , two-tailed statistical significance.

SE, standard error.

*, Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

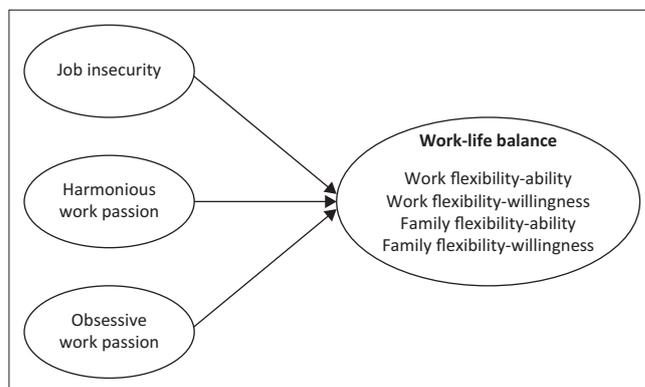


FIGURE 1: The structural equation model tested for the baseline model as well as various work arrangements, including traditional ($n = 159$), semi-remote ($n = 155$) and remote ($n = 131$) work arrangements.

positively affected family flexibility-ability in remote settings and family flexibility-willingness in all work arrangements.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious and obsessive work passion) and work-life balance across traditional, semi-remote and remote work arrangements in the South African context. The key findings of this study indicate that there are significant relationships between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious and obsessive) and work-life balance.

Firstly, the results of this study indicate that job insecurity had negative relationships with three of the work-life balance dimensions (work flexibility-ability, work flexibility-willingness and family flexibility-ability). The most meaningful detrimental impact was on employees' work flexibility-ability and the most negligible negative influence was on work flexibility-willingness. This indicates that when employees feel that they might get fired or are uncertain about the continuation of their career, they might feel less inclined to depart early or arrive late to work to attend to family matters. These results could be explained by research suggesting that job insecurity induces time constraints and performance-related challenges, which jointly undermine an individual's work-life balance (Yu, 2014). Feeling insecure or uncertain about their jobs, employees show altered behaviours at home and in the workplace, adversely impacting their work-life balance (Begum et al., 2022). In the post-COVID-19 landscape, factors such as heightened turnover intention and increased work-related stress further exacerbated feelings of conflict between work and personal life (Vohra et al., 2023). These findings can be explained through the lens of the boundary theory (Nippert-Eng, 1996), which posits that blurred boundaries under stressful conditions hinder an individual's capacity to manage their roles effectively, thereby compromising their ability to adjust their work schedules (Ashforth et al., 2000). Furthermore, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1998) supports these findings by

suggesting that when resources such as one's job or family time are at risk of depletion, the competing nature of these resource pools impairs an individual's ability and willingness to engage with these domains.

Secondly, the results showed meaningful relationships between *harmonious work passion* and all four work-life balance dimensions (work flexibility-ability, work flexibility-willingness, family flexibility-ability and family flexibility-willingness). More specifically, harmonious work passion had the highest positive impact on work flexibility-ability and the lowest positive impact on work flexibility-willingness. This shows that when an individual's job is in harmony or well integrated into other areas of their life, they are more able and willing to stop work, change arrangements or arrive late to work to attend to responsibilities relating to family activities. Specifically, being harmoniously passionate substantially predicted the ability of an employee to stop work to meet family responsibilities. These findings are consistent with previous studies that found that individuals with harmonious work passion report a sense of intrinsic motivation and self-regulation in work, which improves their capacity to manage their boundaries between professional and personal spheres (Vallerand et al., 2003). This develops a synergistic relationship, which could build individual resources and energy while improving work and family life (Jung & Sohn, 2022). The boundary theory holds that harmoniously passionate employees may invest in work, allowing them to conduct effective boundary management in their work and nonwork life (Vallerand, 2008). Conservation of Resources theory further suggests that harmonious work passion enriches an individual's resource pool, enhancing their capacity and inclination to adapt flexibly to work demands.

Interestingly, harmonious work passion was found to harm family flexibility-willingness, indicating that when work is in harmony with other parts of the individual and well integrated in their life, they might be less willing to miss or change plans with friends or family to deal with work-related responsibilities. When highly intrinsically motivated

TABLE 3: Regression results of the structural model for different work arrangements.

Structural path	Traditional work arrangement				Semi-remote work arrangement				Remote work arrangement			
	β	R^2	SE	p	β	R^2	SE	p	β	R^2	SE	p
Job insecurity → Work flexibility-ability	-0.226†,‡	0.051	0.107	0.034*	-0.203‡,§	0.041	0.079	0.010*	-0.172†,§	0.030	0.074	0.020*
Job insecurity → Work flexibility-willingness	-0.272	0.074	0.104	0.009*	-0.109	0.012	0.098	0.268	-0.152	0.023	0.086	0.076
Job insecurity → Family flexibility-ability	-0.000	0.000	0.108	0.997	-0.201	0.040	0.07	0.004*	-0.111	0.012	0.082	0.178
Job insecurity → Family flexibility-willingness	-0.347‡	0.120	0.118	0.003*	0.105	0.011	0.077	0.173	0.225§	0.051	0.082	0.006*
Harmonious work passion → Work flexibility-ability	0.390†,‡	0.152	0.154	0.011*	0.490‡,§	0.240	0.112	0.000*	0.446†,§	0.199	0.108	0.000*
Harmonious work passion → Work flexibility-willingness	-0.211	0.045	0.166	0.203	0.417‡	0.174	0.135	0.002*	0.249†	0.062	0.11	0.023*
Harmonious work passion → Family flexibility-ability	0.486†	0.236	0.134	0.000*	0.218§	0.048	0.104	0.036*	0.095	0.009	0.094	0.314
Harmonious work passion → Family flexibility-willingness	-0.506‡	0.256	0.170	0.003*	0.060	0.004	0.104	0.564	-0.282§	0.080	0.108	0.009*
Obsessive work passion → Work flexibility-ability	-0.108	0.012	0.138	0.435	-0.059	0.003	0.119	0.622	-0.061	0.004	0.106	0.568
Obsessive work passion → Work flexibility-willingness	0.052	0.003	0.154	0.735	-0.429	0.184	0.131	0.001*	-0.120	0.014	0.134	0.371
Obsessive work passion → Family flexibility-ability	-0.094	0.009	0.117	0.422	0.206	0.042	0.106	0.053	0.419	0.176	0.106	0.000*
Obsessive work passion → Family flexibility-willingness	0.715†,‡	0.511	0.150	0.000*	0.469‡,§	0.220	0.110	0.000*	0.800†,§	0.640	0.099	0.000*

Notes: β , standardised beta coefficient; p , = two-tailed statistical significance; R^2 = small effect (0.01), medium effect (0.09) and large effect (0.25).

SE, standard error.

*, Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

†, Impacted by comparing R^2 with the semi-remote work arrangement; ‡, Impacted by comparing R^2 with the remote work arrangement; §, Impacted by comparing R^2 with the traditional work arrangement.

employees, who often voice their ideas for improvement and demonstrate strong career commitment (Jung & Sohn, 2022), are confronted with changing personal life responsibilities, they tend to create stricter boundaries for themselves. As a result, when work intrudes on these boundaries, it can subsequently decrease their willingness to adapt to family schedules (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Thirdly, the results indicated a relationship between *obsessive work passion* and work–life balance; specifically, being obsessively passionate about one’s work only had a detrimental effect on the work flexibility–willingness dimension of work–life balance. This is an interesting finding for a cross-sectional study as obsessive work passion usually results in a negative relationship with work–life balance in the long term. It may be that the consequences of obsessive work passion were already present when the data were collected. Alternatively, the connection with work may have deteriorated rapidly, indicating that when employees find it difficult to control their work impulses, they are less likely to be late for work or take longer breaks to attend to personal and family responsibilities. This is supported by prior research, indicating that a lack of personal control over one’s time and commitments can result in negative consequences, such as an imbalance between professional and family responsibilities and depleting personal resources and energy (Jung & Sohn, 2022). According to boundary theory, individuals consumed with obsessive work passion may become overly absorbed in their work, leading to inflexible boundaries that hinder their adaptability and reduce their willingness to accommodate competing (Ashforth et al., 2000). Also, COR theory proposes that the intense engrossment in work stemming from obsessive work passion can deplete resources, including less available family time (Fasana et al., 2022).

Interestingly, the study found that obsessive work passion positively influences family flexibility–ability, particularly family flexibility–willingness. This indicates that employees are usually more inclined to think that their job controls them, leading to individuals missing holidays with friends and family to attend to work-related responsibilities. This positive relationship suggests that obsessive work passion may enhance certain aspects of efficiency (Breu & Yasseri, 2023), which enables employees to finish job assignments above attending to family responsibilities. Supporting this, obsessive work passion has been linked to high performance in the short term (Breu & Yasseri, 2023), which aligns well with the use of a cross-sectional design in this research. However, to capture the causality of direction over time, longitudinal research should be considered to explore how relationships might evolve and their implications for family and work dynamics.

Furthermore, this study investigated how the relationships, tested in a structural equation model, between job insecurity, work passion (harmonious and obsessive work passion) and work–life balance differ for employees with different work arrangements (traditional, semi-remote and remote working).

Job insecurity negatively impacts various domains of work–life balance across different work environments. Specifically, job insecurity negatively impacted work flexibility–ability in traditional, semi-remote and remote work environments. However, the impact of job insecurity on work flexibility–willingness was substantial only in the traditional work environment. For family flexibility–ability, job insecurity only had a significant negative effect on the semi-remote work environment. Additionally, job insecurity meaningfully affected family flexibility–willingness in traditional and remote work environments. Overall, this study found that job insecurity affects work–life balance to a small but statistically significant degree across different work arrangements, suggesting that the type of work arrangement does not substantially alter the adverse impact of job insecurity on work–life balance. The most detrimental impact was on family flexibility–willingness in the traditional work environment, showing that feelings of insecurity can spill over into family life, making it challenging to balance work and family responsibilities. The most minor negative relationship was observed between job insecurity and work flexibility–ability in the remote context, suggesting that job insecurity can hinder productivity and pose barriers to adapting to changes. This supports the conclusion that insecurity affects employees’ ability to stop working to attend to family responsibilities.

These relationships align with existing literature. In traditional work settings, job insecurity can severely strain the employee–employer relationship, leading to reduced motivation and adversely affecting work and personal life (De Witte 2005). Additionally, in more flexible arrangements, such as semi-remote and remote work, limited interaction with management and changes in the labour market can exacerbate job insecurity, making it increasingly challenging for employees to effectively separate their work and personal responsibilities (Junjunan, 2021).

Harmonious work passion positively impacts various domains of work–life balance across different work environments. Specifically, harmonious work passion positively affects work flexibility–ability in traditional, semi-remote and remote work environments. Furthermore, harmonious work passion positively influences work flexibility–willingness in semi-remote and remote work environments. Harmonious work passion also positively impacts family flexibility–ability in traditional and semi-remote work settings.

The most meaningful positive impact was observed between harmonious work passion and family flexibility–ability in the traditional work environment. In contrast, the smallest positive impact was found between harmonious work passion and family flexibility–ability in the semi-remote work environment. This suggests that employees with harmonious work passion may experience greater control and support, particularly in traditional work environments, through their work interactions (Vallerand et al., 2003), which can help them manage family responsibilities alongside work demands. This balance assists

the integration of work and family roles, enhancing control over family flexibility and indicating that employees may adjust family plans to accommodate work-related needs. Existing literature supports this by stating that in traditional work environments, characterised by stability and predictability, employees tend to experience a greater sense of fulfilment in their work, developing harmonious work passion (Valackiene et al., 2021). This feeling of harmonious work passion can, in turn, enhance an individual's ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Vallerand et al., 2003). More flexible work arrangements, such as semi-remote and remote work, can increase harmonious work passion and motivation (Fan & Moen, 2023), further improving the balance between personal and professional commitments (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Unexpectedly, harmonious work passion negatively impacts family flexibility-willingness in traditional and semi-remote environments. The unexpected negative relationship could likely be explained by employees who experience harmonious work passion, indicating that work is well integrated into their lives, meaning they are less inclined to alter plans with family and friends to complete job assignments. Furthermore, this finding could also be attributed to the highly structured (traditional work) or unstructured (remote) nature of specific work environments, which may contribute to individuals being less willing to adjust their family schedules (Vallerand, 2015).

Obsessive work passion can negatively impact work-life balance across different work arrangements. Specifically, obsessive work passion negatively affects work flexibility-willingness in the semi-remote work environment. This suggests that obsessive work passion often leads to rigid or resistant behaviours (Vallerand et al., 2003), reducing an individual's motivation to adapt and balance simultaneously working at an office and remotely. Previous literature shows that individuals become driven by an uncontrollable urge to engage in work, often at the expense of other life domains (Vallerand et al., 2003). In semi-remote work arrangements, increased work flexibility can paradoxically lead employees to feel the need to be constantly online and available, reinforcing obsessive work passion (Badri et al., 2023). This blurring of boundaries between work and life makes it challenging to disengage from work (Vallerand, 2008), leading to continual preoccupation and neglect of other important life aspects.

Interestingly, obsessive work passion was positively related to certain aspects of work-life balance domains. This may be attributed to the cross-sectional design used in the study that did not capture the long-term effects of obsessive work passion. Specifically, obsessive work passion positively affects family flexibility-ability only in the remote work environment. Additionally, obsessive work passion positively influences family flexibility-willingness in traditional, semi-remote and remote work environments. The most meaningful positive relationship was between obsessive work passion and family flexibility-willingness in

the remote work context. This may occur because employees with obsessive work passion, despite struggling to control their work-related urges, might be less willing to interrupt what they are working on to attend to family-related responsibilities. This could be because of the short-term positive effects of obsessive work passion (Breu & Yasseri, 2023). Derived from this, the finding might be explained by compartmentalising work stress as a psychological defence mechanism, which allows individuals to shift their focus away from family responsibilities when experiencing work-related stress (Cook et al., 2000). Additionally, supportive work policies, such as remote work, which assist employees in managing family responsibilities without compromising their work hours or performance, may assist obsessively passionate employees in better balancing their work and family obligations.

It is worth noting that, despite the provided explanations for the unexpected findings across this study, the unexpected direction of some of the relationships could also be attributed to statistical phenomena that may not necessarily reflect the actual effects and complexities of these relationships.

Limitations and recommendations

Job insecurity interacts with work passion and work-life balance, leading to complexities in various ways. It would be challenging to isolate or separate the influence of work arrangements, seeing as individuals' personality traits, family responsibilities and coping mechanisms also play a role (Kang & Malvaso, 2023). Furthermore, organisational culture is critical in influencing the employees' experience. The interaction between these variables could also have a critical yet difficult-to-control impact (Luz & Kayode, 2024). Future studies should investigate this complex interplay, considering the moderating effects of individual differences and the influence of organisational culture. Additionally, the role of support systems could contribute to a better understanding of the relationships between job insecurity, work passion and work-life balance. Furthermore, this study focussed on a broad spectrum of South African employees. However, policies and support systems may vary across organisations, which might influence the consistency of the findings. Future research should consider segmenting the sample by industry to better understand these factors' impact. Additionally, this study's cross-sectional design only collected data at a single point in time. Therefore, future research could consider adopting a longitudinal research design to further explore these relationships over an extended period, especially relevant for long-term outcomes of obsessive passion. Lastly, this study relied on a self-reported online questionnaire, where self-belief could influence the provision of socially desirable answers (Demetriou et al., 2015), potentially affecting data reliability. Future research may benefit from exploring alternative data collection methods to corroborate the findings and minimise potential biases.

Practical implications

The practical implications of this study hold meaningful value for both employees and organisations seeking to enhance employee productivity and well-being across various work arrangements (traditional, semi-remote and remote work). The research highlights the immediate necessity for organisational policies that can relieve the negative consequences of job insecurity and obsessive work passion while at the same time cultivating harmonious work passion and improving the work–life balance of employees. Open and transparent communication about job expectations and security is vital for lessening the negative impact of job insecurity. Implementing ‘right-to-disconnect’ policies can help safeguard and improve work–life balance (Harkiolakis & Komodromos, 2023). Also crucial for job security are long-term contracts, providing a clear career path for improved psychological well-being and a sense of stability (Harkiolakis & Komodromos, 2023).

Encouraging employees to be passionate about their work will increase intrinsic work engagement and job satisfaction. Specifically, harmonious work passion leads to higher work–family enrichment, while obsessive work passion leads to work–family conflict (Jung & Song, 2022). It is essential to cultivate an organisational culture that places value on balanced work engagement in order to mitigate potential drawbacks. As a result, employees can achieve greater well-being by avoiding overworking and compromising their health because of excessive job demands (Harkiolakis & Komodromos, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study’s insights highlight the intricate dynamics between job insecurity, work passion and work–life balance while also examining how these relationships differ across various work arrangements (traditional, semi-remote and remote work). The findings showed that job insecurity negatively impacts employees’ work–life balance while harmonious work passion generally positively affects the dimensions of work–life balance. Interestingly, the influence of obsessive work passion is more complex, demonstrating both positive and negative effects, while remaining significant. Notably, job insecurity did not predict work flexibility-willingness, and obsessive work passion did not predict work flexibility-ability.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article. The author, L.D.B., serves as an editorial board member of this journal. The peer review process for this submission was handled independently, and the author had no involvement in the editorial decision-making process for this manuscript. The authors have no other competing interests to declare.

Authors’ contributions

C.R. was responsible for assisting with the study’s conceptualisation, writing the research article and collecting the data, as well as interpreting and writing up the results with the assistance of K.M. and L.D.B. G.H.R. contributed towards the study’s conceptualisation and critically reviewed the final draft of the article. K.M. was responsible for the conceptualisation, provided critical and practical assistance with reviewing and editing the article, and helped verify the analytical and statistical methods. L.D.B. conducted the statistical analysis and assisted with interpreting the results of the article. C.R., K.M., L.D.B. and G.H.R. discussed the results and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, C.R., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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