



Navigating Work-Life Balance: Job Demands, Social Support, and Personal Boundaries Among Generation Z Employees

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ABSTRACT

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Work-life balance is increasingly important as employees must manage demanding work responsibilities while maintaining meaningful participation in personal life. This study aimed to explore how Generation Z employees experience job demands, work-related pressure, social support, and boundaries between work and nonwork activities. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed through semi-structured interviews with eight employees occupying different positions within the same organization. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and verification to identify patterns and variations across participants' experiences. The findings revealed five interconnected themes: demands for speed and accuracy, pressure associated with mistakes and uncertainty, work extending into personal life, social support and its limitations, and task clarity and work-life boundaries. Some employees experienced continued work-related thoughts, fatigue, and reduced participation in family or personal activities, while others reported more manageable experiences when tasks were clear, teamwork was supportive, and work boundaries were maintained. The study implies that work-life balance should be addressed through context-sensitive workplace practices, including appropriate workload allocation, clearer task procedures, accessible task-specific assistance, and reasonable boundaries for work-related communication outside working hours.

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INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance has become an important social issue because employment increasingly shapes not only economic security but also individuals' health, relationships, and participation in activities outside work. Employees are expected to complete organizational responsibilities while maintaining family relationships, friendships, personal interests, and adequate recovery time (Oteng & Eyono, 2024; Rattanaburi et al., 2026). When these

domains become difficult to manage simultaneously, the consequences may extend beyond individual employees to families, workplaces, and communities (Nazwa et al., 2025; Nur et al., 2025). Poor balance can reduce satisfaction with work and personal life, weaken social participation, and limit opportunities for rest and self-development (Karwa, 2025; Susanti et al., 2025). Therefore, understanding how employees experience the relationship between work and nonwork roles is important for creating healthier employment environments. A balanced working life should not be understood simply as an equal division of time, but as an arrangement that enables individuals to fulfil important roles according to their needs and priorities.

The importance of work-life balance becomes more evident as contemporary employment requires sustained attention, rapid responses, and adaptation to changing demands. Employees may physically leave the workplace while remaining mentally occupied by unfinished tasks, customer requests, production problems, or concerns about performance. Such conditions can reduce opportunities for psychological recovery and affect the quality of employees' involvement in personal activities (Al-Idrus et al., 2026; Ljungkvist & Moore, 2023). Work-life balance therefore represents a broader social concern involving how employment conditions influence everyday life beyond organizational boundaries. Supporting balance may benefit employees by allowing them to maintain meaningful relationships, pursue personal interests, and recover from occupational demands. It may also benefit organizations through healthier and more sustainable patterns of employee participation. Examining work-life balance is consequently important not only for individual well-being but also for understanding how workplace practices influence the quality of life within wider communities (Akbar & Amalia, 2023; Siagian et al., 2025).

A major problem arises when employees must continuously manage demanding work requirements while simultaneously fulfilling responsibilities and interests outside the workplace. High workloads, time pressure, concentration requirements, customer expectations, and uncertainty about task outcomes may consume physical and psychological resources (Holili & Khoiroh, 2023; Untung et al., 2026). Pressure can become particularly problematic when employees perceive that mistakes, delays, or incomplete tasks may affect their competence or the performance of others. Under these circumstances, work-related concerns may continue after working hours, limiting employees' ability to disengage from their jobs. The problem is not necessarily the existence of demanding work itself, because employees may accept challenging tasks when adequate resources are available. The difficulty emerges when demands consistently exceed available time, energy, attention, or support (Dravopoulou &

Lazakis, 2025; Vito & Widigdo, 2026). This condition can create tension between occupational responsibilities and employees' personal lives, making work-life balance increasingly difficult to achieve.

This issue is visible in printing-company operations, where work involves interdependent activities ranging from receiving customer orders and preparing designs to operating machinery, checking product quality, and dispatching completed products (Irmansyah, 2026; Suheri, 2025). Participants described situations in which changing customer requests and production problems required rapid adjustments. Employees needed to maintain accuracy while working against approaching deadlines, creating pressure when several tasks had to be completed simultaneously (Asyfahaani et al., 2025; Tanoto & Tami, 2024). The consequences were not limited to working hours. Some participants reported that unfinished tasks, production concerns, or accumulated fatigue continued to occupy their attention after leaving the workplace. These experiences suggest that work demands may influence employees' opportunities to rest, socialize, exercise, spend time with family, or pursue individual interests. The printing environment therefore provides a meaningful context for examining how employees negotiate occupational demands and personal life within everyday working conditions.

Previous research has established several important perspectives for understanding work-life balance. Work-family approaches emphasize employees' assessments of effectiveness and satisfaction across roles, while broader work-nonwork perspectives recognize activities beyond family responsibilities. Other approaches distinguish balance through time, involvement, and satisfaction, highlighting that employees may be physically present in their personal lives while remaining psychologically engaged with work. Research has also connected work-life balance with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and mental health. Job Demands-Resources perspectives further explain how workload, work pace, cognitive requirements, and emotional demands may consume employee resources, whereas social support can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, and esteem-related assistance (Adhiati et al., 2025; Molwitz et al., 2026). Together, these studies demonstrate that work-life balance involves interconnected workplace and personal conditions rather than time allocation alone. However, much previous research emphasizes relationships between predefined variables rather than employees' detailed everyday experiences.

Existing studies also provide evidence that workload, stress, social support, and work-life balance are interconnected across different occupational settings. Research involving banking employees, creative-industry workers, and younger employees demonstrates the relevance of these factors to contemporary

employment experiences. Nevertheless, findings from these settings cannot automatically explain how employees in printing work experience similar issues because occupational demands differ in task structure, production processes, customer interaction, deadlines, and performance expectations. Moreover, quantitative studies generally provide limited insight into how employees interpret pressure, how work concerns enter personal life, and why particular forms of support become meaningful in specific situations (Gunawan & Pratiwi, 2026; Ugwuezi et al., 2026). A further limitation is the relatively limited attention to variation among employees occupying different positions within the same organization. This gap is important because shared organizational conditions may produce different experiences depending on responsibilities, resources, and opportunities for support.

The state of the art of this study lies in examining work-life balance as an experienced and context-dependent process among Generation Z employees within a printing-company environment. Rather than treating demands, stress, support, and balance as isolated variables, the study brings these dimensions together through employees' descriptions of everyday working life. It focuses on how employees interpret demanding situations, how occupational pressure extends into nonwork life, and how available support influences their ability to manage competing roles. Particular attention is given to differences across organizational positions, recognizing that employees may encounter the same workplace environment but experience its demands differently. This perspective is important because work-life balance cannot be fully understood through numerical relationships alone. A contextual account can reveal forms of pressure, support, adaptation, and personal negotiation that standardized measures may overlook, providing a richer basis for understanding contemporary employee experiences.

The research problem addressed in this study concerns how Generation Z employees experience and negotiate the relationship between job demands and life outside work. The study asks which aspects of their work they perceive as difficult, how work-related pressure affects their personal activities and recovery, and what forms of social support or working conditions they consider helpful. The argument underlying the study is that work-life balance is shaped not only by the amount of work employees perform but also by how they interpret demands, manage pressure, access support, and prioritize different areas of life. Employees may respond differently to similar conditions because their responsibilities, resources, and personal priorities vary. A qualitative exploration is therefore appropriate for capturing these differences and explaining the meanings employees attach to their experiences. The study seeks to provide a contextual understanding of work-life balance without claiming causal relationships or statistical effects.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how employees experience job demands, work-related pressure, social support, and work-life balance in their everyday working lives (Pasha, 2024; Sulistiyani & Rifqi, 2026). A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because the study aimed to present participants' experiences in a direct and contextual manner rather than test causal relationships or statistical effects. The design enabled the researcher to examine how employees described their work responsibilities, difficulties, responses to pressure, and experiences outside working hours. The study focused on the meanings expressed by participants while maintaining their experiences within the organizational context in which they occurred. Eight employees participated in the study, representing different positions within the same printing company (Molwitz et al., 2026; Pelealu, 2025). This design was considered appropriate because the research questions concerned employees' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of workplace conditions and their influence on activities and experiences beyond the workplace.

The research was conducted at a printing company in a location anonymized as City P. Data collection took place on 29 January and 2 February 2026. The company was selected because its production activities involve interconnected tasks, customer demands, deadlines, machinery operation, quality control, and product completion, creating a relevant setting for examining job demands and work-life experiences. Eight employees aged between 20 and 27 years participated in the study. They occupied different positions, including UV machine operator, online order administrator, A3 machine operator, graphic designer, quality control employee, finishing employee, tax staff member, and production planning and inventory control employee. All participants were employed under fixed-term contracts. Variation in job positions was intentionally maintained to capture different experiences of work demands and support within the same organizational environment.

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. Participants were recruited based on their availability and willingness to participate, while the researcher sought variation in occupational positions. The interviews explored participants' daily work activities, responsibilities, situations that generated pressure, experiences of workload and stress, relationships with coworkers and supervisors, forms of support received, and activities or conditions experienced after working hours. Participants were encouraged to describe concrete situations and explain how they responded to demanding circumstances. Interviews were conducted on the two specified collection dates and were recorded with participants' agreement. The recordings

were subsequently transcribed for analysis. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and agreed that their accounts could be used for academic publication. To protect confidentiality, personal identities and the specific location of the company were concealed throughout the research and reporting process.

Data analysis followed a qualitative process involving data condensation, data display, and verification. First, interview transcripts were read repeatedly, and information relevant to job demands, work-related pressure, social support, and work-life balance was identified and condensed. Meaningful statements were organized into categories while preserving participants' descriptions and differences in experience. Second, the condensed data were displayed by arranging related findings into thematic patterns concerning demanding tasks, work-related pressure extending beyond working hours, forms of social support, and employees' efforts to maintain personal activities. Third, the researcher compared accounts across participants and examined both dominant and contrasting experiences. Finally, the findings were verified by reviewing the original transcripts and checking whether interpretations remained consistent with participants' statements. This process supported a contextual interpretation of the data while avoiding assumptions that all employees experienced workplace demands in the same way.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demands for Speed and Accuracy

The findings showed that job demands varied according to employees' positions and responsibilities. The online order administrator experienced difficulties in responding promptly to customers, recording orders accurately, and updating information when customer requests changed. The graphic designer encountered unexpected revisions when designs were almost completed, creating additional work while the original deadlines remained unchanged. The UV machine operator described receiving new tasks before completing previous ones, resulting in competing work priorities. In the finishing section, pressure increased as dispatch deadlines approached because employees had to arrange, glue, and pack printed products within limited time. The finishing employee also reported miscounting products while experiencing fatigue during preparation for a large delivery. These accounts indicate that employees encountered different combinations of speed, accuracy, changing information, workload, and deadline pressures.

The experiences further showed that job demands were not determined solely by the amount of work assigned. Employees faced different difficulties depending on the characteristics of their tasks. Operators depended on

functioning machinery and technical assistance, while the online order administrator depended on consistent and updated order information. The graphic designer required clear information regarding customer revisions to avoid repeatedly modifying nearly completed designs. Employees' experiences also differed according to the availability of clear procedures for responding to emerging problems. Participants who described clearer task procedures generally experienced increased workloads as more manageable. Conversely, changing orders and machinery problems became more difficult when employees were uncertain about how to resolve them. Thus, work pressure was associated with the interaction between task requirements, changing circumstances, available assistance, and employees' ability to organize their responsibilities.

Pressure Associated with Mistakes and Uncertainty

The findings showed that machinery problems and quality-control responsibilities generated substantial pressure for some employees. The A3 machine operator experienced pressure when machinery problems interrupted production while output targets remained unchanged. The participant described panic, fatigue, and concern about receiving a reprimand. The quality control employee experienced pressure from the responsibility to ensure that products met required standards before dispatch. Inspecting hundreds of sheets alone increased concern that a defect could remain undetected. Participants described physical and cognitive responses during particular situations, including a racing heart, crowded thoughts, uncertainty about what to do, and trembling hands. These experiences were particularly meaningful when employees believed that mistakes could cause financial losses for the company or lead others to question their competence. The findings therefore show that production problems and quality responsibilities could create pressure beyond the immediate technical task.

The participants' accounts also demonstrated that the meaning of mistakes extended beyond operational consequences. For some employees, an error represented a possible failure to meet organizational expectations and could influence how their competence was perceived. The A3 machine operator connected machinery failure with uncertainty about meeting production targets, while the quality control employee associated inspection responsibilities with preventing defective products from reaching customers. Concern about supervisors' judgments was also present in participants' accounts. However, the findings did not establish that the company had a culture of blame or that its evaluation system was unfair. The interviews instead revealed how employees personally interpreted uncertain outcomes and potential mistakes. These

interpretations varied according to occupational responsibility, the consequences employees associated with errors, and the extent to which they felt prepared to respond to unexpected situations.

Work Extending into Personal Life

Six participants described work-related thoughts or fatigue that continued after they returned home. The UV machine operator continued thinking about the priorities of the following day while attempting to rest. The online order administrator continued checking a phone because of customer notifications, creating a feeling that work had not completely ended. The graphic designer continued thinking about unfinished designs during family time and sometimes reopened a laptop at home. Other participants described changes in mood and energy after work. The A3 machine operator became more irritated by minor events at home. The quality control employee reduced conversations with family members and preferred to remain quiet. The finishing employee wanted to spend time with a child but felt too tired to participate fully. These accounts demonstrate that the effects of work continued beyond formal working hours.

The findings further showed that physical separation from the workplace did not always correspond with psychological separation from work. Participants could be at home while continuing to think about unfinished tasks, upcoming orders, customer requests, or workplace problems. For some employees, continued work involvement was expressed through thoughts, while others remained connected through digital devices. The online order administrator and graphic designer described checking work-related information or reopening work equipment outside scheduled hours. At the same time, fatigue reduced the energy available for family interaction, conversation, or other personal activities. These experiences varied across participants, indicating that work affected personal life through both continued cognitive involvement and reduced physical or emotional energy. The findings therefore demonstrate different forms through which occupational experiences entered employees' nonwork lives.

Social Support and the Limitations of Assistance

Participants described receiving support from colleagues, supervisors, partners, and family members. The support included opportunities to discuss concerns, encouragement, guidance, care, and practical assistance. The quality control employee felt reassured when a supervisor asked about personal well-being. The PPIC employee valued opportunities to seek advice from team members when facing difficulties. Several participants also discussed their working day with family members after returning home. These interactions

provided opportunities to express concerns and obtain reassurance. However, support was not consistently available when employees needed it. Some participants hesitated to ask for assistance because coworkers were also busy. The online order administrator limited what was shared because of concern that complaints might be viewed as excessive. A supervisor encouraged patience and accuracy, but the participant still needed to develop practical solutions independently.

The findings also demonstrated differences between emotional reassurance and practical assistance. Family members could provide comfort when employees experienced fatigue or frustration, but they could not resolve customer-order revisions, machinery problems, or other technical difficulties occurring at work. Workplace colleagues and supervisors were more directly positioned to provide task-related assistance, although their availability was also limited by their own responsibilities. Informal interactions with colleagues sometimes provided temporary relief from fatigue and pressure. Nevertheless, such interactions did not necessarily remove the underlying source of difficulty. Support therefore varied according to who provided it, when it became available, and what problem employees were experiencing. The findings indicate that employees valued interpersonal relationships, but support did not automatically eliminate work demands. Its usefulness depended on whether the assistance corresponded with the immediate emotional or practical needs of the employee.

Task Clarity and Work-Life Boundaries in More Manageable Experiences

The tax staff member and PPIC employee described comparatively more manageable work experiences. The tax staff member felt calmer when task procedures were clear, priorities were established, and workload increases could be coordinated with the team. The PPIC employee still experienced pressure when several large orders arrived simultaneously but generally stopped thinking about work after completing assigned tasks. Both participants described a comfortable team environment and opportunities for discussion. They also attempted to limit work-related matters at home, allowing time for family interaction, exercise, and meeting friends. Their experiences combined relatively manageable demands, clearer procedures, supportive relationships, and stronger boundaries between work and personal life. These findings do not indicate that they experienced no pressure. Instead, their accounts demonstrate that pressure could remain manageable when employees understood their tasks, coordinated responsibilities, received interpersonal support, and were able to disengage from work after completing their duties.

The contrasting experiences across participants demonstrate variation within the same organizational environment. Employees working in different positions encountered different combinations of deadlines, technical problems,

customer interactions, accuracy requirements, and workload fluctuations. The participants who reported greater difficulty were not necessarily less capable of managing their responsibilities. Rather, their experiences reflected differences in task characteristics and the circumstances surrounding their work. The findings therefore show that work-life balance was experienced differently across positions. Some employees continued carrying work-related thoughts or fatigue into their personal lives, whereas others were able to establish clearer boundaries after completing their tasks. The presence of clear procedures and supportive relationships appeared in the accounts of participants who experienced their work as more manageable. However, the findings do not identify a single factor that explains all differences among participants.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate substantial consistency with the broader understanding that work-life balance is shaped by the interaction between occupational demands and employees' capacity to maintain meaningful participation outside work (Oteng & Eyono, 2024; Rattanaburi et al., 2026). The experiences of speed pressure, changing orders, machinery problems, accuracy requirements, and approaching deadlines show that job demands are multidimensional rather than reducible to workload volume. This is particularly evident because employees in different positions experienced different forms of pressure despite working within the same organization. The findings also extend existing understanding by showing how specific task characteristics influence employees' experiences of manageability (Karwa, 2025; Nur et al., 2025). Clear procedures, coordinated priorities, and accessible assistance appeared to make demanding situations easier to handle, whereas uncertainty increased perceived difficulty. Theoretically, this supports viewing work-life balance as a contextual experience shaped by the relationship between demands, available resources, individual interpretations, and the conditions surrounding task performance.

The findings concerning pressure associated with mistakes and uncertainty also correspond with established understandings of occupational stress while adding a contextual dimension (Al-Idrus et al., 2026; Ljungkvist & Moore, 2023). Employees did not describe pressure simply as having too many tasks; rather, pressure intensified when the consequences of errors were uncertain or personally meaningful. The A3 machine operator's concern about interrupted production and possible reprimand illustrates how technical problems could become psychologically significant. Similarly, the quality control employee experienced pressure because an unnoticed defect could have consequences for the company and personal perceptions of competence. These findings suggest that employees' interpretations of responsibility are important

in understanding workplace pressure. Theoretically, this indicates that job demands become more consequential when employees perceive limited control over outcomes or anticipate negative consequences. Practically, organizations should therefore address not only workload but also procedures for responding to machinery failures, errors, quality concerns, and unexpected disruptions.

The continuation of work-related thoughts and fatigue into personal life provides another important contribution. The findings are consistent with the view that work-life balance involves more than the number of hours spent at work because employees may remain psychologically involved after leaving the workplace (Akbar & Amalia, 2023; Untung et al., 2026). Six participants reported continued thoughts or fatigue, while digital communication maintained work connections for some employees. At the same time, fatigue affected family interaction, communication, mood, and participation in personal activities. These findings demonstrate that work can enter personal life through both cognitive involvement and depleted energy. Theoretically, this reinforces the importance of considering time, involvement, and personal capacity together when examining balance. Practically, organizations could clarify expectations regarding communication outside working hours, particularly where customer messages or unfinished tasks encourage employees to remain available. Such boundaries may support recovery without requiring employees to reduce their commitment during scheduled working hours.

The findings on social support both confirm and qualify the positive role generally attributed to interpersonal relationships at work. Participants valued encouragement, advice, opportunities to communicate, and concern from supervisors, colleagues, partners, and family members. However, support did not consistently resolve the underlying problem. Emotional reassurance could reduce feelings of isolation, while practical workplace assistance was more directly relevant to machinery problems, customer revisions, or task difficulties. This distinction has theoretical implications because support should not be treated as a uniform resource whose effects are identical across situations. Its usefulness depends on the type of problem and the form of assistance available. Practically, organizations should provide mechanisms for employees to obtain task-specific assistance rather than relying exclusively on encouragement. Team coordination, accessible technical support, clear escalation procedures, and opportunities to discuss difficulties may make support more responsive to employees' actual needs (Sulistiyan & Rifqi, 2026; Vito & Widigdo, 2026).

The more manageable experiences of the tax staff member and PPIC employee further contribute to understanding why employees within the same organization may experience work-life balance differently. Both participants described clearer procedures, coordination with colleagues, supportive team

environments, and stronger boundaries after work. Their accounts do not suggest that manageable experiences result from lower demands alone, since the PPIC employee still encountered pressure during periods of large orders. Instead, manageability appeared to emerge when employees understood their responsibilities, could coordinate workload, and were able to disengage after completing tasks (Pasha, 2024; Pelealu, 2025). This finding contributes to the theoretical understanding of work-life balance by emphasizing conditions that enable employees to cope with demands rather than focusing exclusively on negative experiences. Practically, organizations can strengthen these conditions through clearer task procedures, workload coordination, communication within teams, and expectations that allow employees to disconnect from work when their responsibilities have been completed.

Overall, this study contributes a contextual explanation of work-life balance among Generation Z employees working in a printing-company environment. Its main contribution is the integration of job demands, pressure, social support, task clarity, and work-life boundaries within employees' everyday accounts rather than examining these dimensions as isolated constructs (Akbar & Amalia, 2023; Oteng & Eyono, 2024). The findings show that balance is negotiated differently across occupational positions and depends on how employees encounter demands, interpret potential consequences, access support, and protect time outside work. Theoretically, the study highlights the importance of understanding work-life balance as a dynamic experience involving both workplace conditions and personal capacity. Practically, the findings suggest that interventions should address concrete sources of difficulty, including changing customer requests, machinery disruptions, quality responsibilities, workload allocation, and after-hours communication. The study therefore provides a basis for organizations to develop more context-sensitive approaches to employee well-being and sustainable work practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that employees' work-life balance is shaped not simply by workload, but by the interaction between task characteristics, perceived pressure, task clarity, social support, and employees' ability to establish boundaries between work and personal life. The main lesson is that demanding work can remain manageable when employees understand their responsibilities, receive appropriate assistance, and can disengage from work after completing their tasks. The study contributes theoretically by providing a contextual understanding of how these dimensions are experienced across different occupational positions within the same organization, thereby extending work-life balance analysis beyond isolated variables. However, the study is

limited to eight employees in one printing company and relies primarily on interview accounts, limiting transferability and excluding direct comparison with other organizations or age groups. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, multiple data sources, and longitudinal designs. Practically, the findings suggest strengthening workload allocation, task clarity, task-specific assistance, and boundaries around work outside working hours to support sustainable employee well-being.

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