

**Blurring boundaries: work-life balance and unbounded work in academia. The role of flexibility, organisational support and gender**

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The paper explores whether work-life balance (WLB) is affected by the unbounded work context and how organisational support, work flexibility and gender affect this relationship.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study is quantitative, involving a survey of academics based in three UK institutions, using OLS regressions.

**Findings:** There is a significant negative relationship between the perception of the unbounded nature of work and WLB among academics, irrespective of their gender. While flexible work and organisational support are positively associated with WLB, they have limited effect in an unbounded work context.

**Originality:** The study makes original contributions for practitioners and academics. First, it provides empirical evidence of the relationship between the unboundedness of work and WLB, and finds no significant gender differences in WLB within an unbounded work context. Second, it helps to understand how flexible work and an organisational support culture are insufficient to eliminate the negative effect of unbounded work.

**Research limitations:** The research involves a relatively small sample of UK academics but provides insights into WLB in an unbounded work context.

**Social implications:** As became evident during the coronavirus pandemic, the boundaries between work and non-work domains in contemporary work settings are more and more blurred. Work will therefore become increasingly unbounded, potentially undermining WLB and causing tension between growing work demands and the necessities of family and personal lives.

**Keywords:** work-life balance, unbounded work, flexibility, organisational support, gender, border theory.

**Paper type:** Original Article

## Introduction

In contemporary workplaces, where increased digital and communication technologies allow work to be completed anytime and anywhere, flexible working and remote work options are leading to a blurring of work and non-work domains (Adisa *et al.*, 2017; Schieman and Glavin, 2016). As a result, the division between work and non-work is being clouded through a complex set of interrelated behaviours (for example, multitasking on work and family activities, being contactable at home for work purposes) and psychological indicators (for example, thinking about work while at home), which may be even more complicated among the well-educated, professionals, managers, and high earners (Schieman and Glavin, 2016; Glavin and Schieman, 2012; Voydanoff, 2007). The coronavirus pandemic has brought this issue to the fore since many people worked from home, where the boundaries between work and non-work domains have become permeable (Thomason and Williams, 2020; Author *et al.*, 2022).

The theoretical framework for WLB remains fragmented and underdeveloped (Md-Sidin *et al.*, 2010), and lacks empiricism (Karassvidou and Glaveli, 2015; Lavasani and Movahedi, 2014). In an unbounded work context, border theory may offer a perspective to analyse how individuals make daily transitions between their work and home domains (Clark, 2000). Therefore, the first objective of this paper is to explore WLB in an unbounded work context through the lens of border theory.

The study took place in the United Kingdom (UK) higher education sector, as previous research has shown that academics increasingly have to manage the intensification of work and unbounded demands of academia (Hogan *et al.*, 2014; Hallstein and O'Reilly, 2014). Furthermore, there are inconsistent findings on whether work flexibility, which offers the opportunity to balance work and non-work roles, leads to WLB for academics (Chung and van der Lippe, 2018; Beigi *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, organisational support culture is relevant to WLB (Eby *et al.*, 2005; Hyman and Summer, 2004), because by offering to support their employees in finding a balance between work and life, an organisation sends informal signals about the extent to which it values WLB (Feeney and Stritch, 2017). However, previous research has shown that WLB might be irrelevant in the academic context because of the long working hours and intensity of the work (Hogan *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, our study seeks to add to this body of literature by exploring how flexibility and organisational support may affect WLB in an unbounded work context such as academia.

Although the sector has adopted equality and diversity policies to promote a supportive environment for gender and WLB (Woodward, 2007; McTavish and Miller, 2006) women remain underrepresented. Moreover, academia as an organisation has been defined as greedy, uncertain, and with 'blind spots' that reveal biases related to gender and parental status, especially mothers (Thun, 2019), where the standard career path still benefits men over women (Bagilhole and White, 2013). In light of the persistence of gender-related norms and the masculine nature of academia that affect the way men and

women experience work and other roles (Powell *et al.*, 2019; Thomas and Davies, 2002), this study aims to explore the role of gender in WLB in an unbounded work context.

The next section reviews the literature on WLB, work flexibility and organisational support. The data, methods, and analysis are then presented; the concluding section of the paper covers the findings, discussion, and conclusions. The study's main contribution to the research lies in the findings, which show a significant negative association between unbounded work and WLB.

### **Work-life balance (WLB)**

Much has been written about WLB under a plethora of interchangeable terms such as work-family (Clark, 2000), work-life (Galinsky *et al.*, 1996; Guest 2002), work-non-work (Casper *et al.*, 2018) or work-home (Kreiner *et al.*, 2019). In this study we will use the more inclusive term work-life (Lewis and Campbell, 2008; Guest 2002), as it covers those who are not parents but who want balance for their non-work activities (Kelliher *et al.*, 2018; Author, 2015). This balance has been defined in various ways. While authors such as Guest (2002) focus on having sufficient time to meet commitments at work and home or in one's personal life, others offer a broader perspective and highlight how individuals choose to prioritise their work, family, individual, and community roles Munn *et al.* (2011).

In an attempt to overcome the variety of meanings and measures, Kalliath and Brough (2008, p.326) proposed a new definition based on the central features of the previous terms, as follows: 'Work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities'. This definition could help to advance the construct theoretically and facilitate practical human resource interventions.

Most of the previous research on WLB is fragmented but based on the foundations of boundary and border theory, which are rooted in role theory (Allen *et al.*, 2014). While the boundary theory perspective focuses on the ways individuals create, maintain or change boundaries to classify and simplify the world (Allen *et al.*, 2014; Ashforth *et al.*, 2000), highlighting the division of life into different domains, border theory underlines the influence of each sphere on the other, identifying antecedents of conflict and trying to find a balance (Clark, 2000).

According to Nippert-Eng (1996), some individuals construct or modify boundaries around their work and non-work lives and ensure that the two domains are segmented from each other, while others construct boundaries that can be integrated. Clark (2000) draws on Nippert-Eng's argument to identify physical borders such as office space within a home, and also includes psychological boundaries, which are rules created by individuals that dictate when thinking patterns, behaviours and emotions are appropriate for one domain but not the other. From the border theory perspective, when high levels of permeability and flexibility exist, blending may occur where people would be daily border-crossers between the different domains (Karassvidou and Glaveli, 2015; Speakman and Marchington, 2004; Clark, 2000).

Desrochers and Sargent (2004) argue that future research on border theory should pay greater attention to boundary characteristics, including the flexibility and permeability of boundaries and their perceived clarity or ambiguity. Thus, our research seeks to address this gap by exploring WLB in the context of unbounded academic work.

### **Unbounded work in academia**

Previous research has highlighted the unbounded and open-ended nature of academics' work (Griffin, 2022; Wortman, *et al.*, 1991), with multiple stressors such as long working hours, administrative paperwork, the requirement to work as independent researchers with little or no support, the need to obtain research funding and secure time for research, and having to deal with rapid changes, poor leadership and management, poor salary and increased managerialism, all of which impact on WLB (Steinþórsdóttir *et al.*, 2019; Fontinha *et al.*, 2018; Hogan *et al.*, 2014; Santos, 2016; Powell, 2016). According to Hallstein and O'Reilly (2014, p.19), academia has a specific culture of unboundedness because it lacks clear boundaries and academics try 'juggling it all - career, children, family...this lack of boundaries makes it more challenging.' The lack of boundaries and the pervasive nature of work is often a challenge. The academic context has normalised and ignored overworking, which often occurs at the expense of a well-balanced life (Bartlett *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the term 'work-work balance' has arisen to refer to how workers in higher education struggle to find a balance between conflicting concurrent work demands made on them, such as multiple temporary projects or having to deal with several functional roles (Griffin, 2022).

It has been suggested that universities are more pressurised environments with emphasis placed on accountabilities, performance monitoring, managerialism, marketisation, rankings and research outputs, competition, increasing student numbers, efficiencies, entrepreneurialism, and income generation (Steinþórsdóttir *et al.*, 2019; Hogan *et al.*, 2014, Deem, 2003). If academics are to achieve these multifaceted objectives, their WLB will be impacted (Kleinhaus *et al.*, 2015). They feel stressed and struggle to find the time for personal relationships and family around their ever-growing workloads (Bothwell, 2018). Academics face increasing and often conflicting expectations, pressures, and demands (Ylijoki, 2013), which lead to work intensification that results in imbalance (Griffin, 2022). Therefore, drawing from the literature, we may expect the following:

H1: The nature of unbounded academic work is negatively associated with WLB.

## **Gender in academia**

Although, achieving WLB can be a challenge for academy faculty members because of the different demands or expectations of the role (Owen *et al.*, 2018), motherhood in particular has implications for women's academic careers, and much of the WLB research has included gender as a relevant variable (Gatrell *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, Poelmans (2001) advises being suspicious of studies that do not distinguish between men and women, because the mechanisms of conflict are fundamentally different. For example, research on women with caring responsibilities (Dex and Bond, 2005; Lewis *et al.*, 2007) has shown that women face higher work and home demands and have less control over the distribution of time to fulfil such demands (Higgins *et al.*, 1994). Recent studies have confirmed the existence of gendered domestic norms, which make it very difficult for women academics to sustain the knowledge work that is critical to career advancement (Peetz *et al.*, 2022).

Women experience higher job demands not only due to the demanding nature of the academic work but also the social construction of gender that expects female academics to engage in affective labour such as advising and counselling students, which increases their workload (Bellas, 1999). Consequently, gender inequality and masculine culture in academia inhibit female careers, as has been well-documented in the WLB literature (van der Brink and Benschop, 2021; Maxwell, Connolly and Laoire, 2018; Feeney and Stritch, 2017; Knights and Richards, 2003, Deem, 2003). The stereotypical masculinist culture in universities can create additional problems for women, which affect their WLB and their careers (Neale and White, 2014). In light of the above, we predict that:

H2: Women in academia experience lower WLB than men.

## **Work flexibility**

Flexibility is related to the control that individuals may have over when and where work is undertaken, and therefore involves the daily crossing of borders between domains (Matthews and Barnes-Farrell, 2010; Clark, 2002). Flexible working policies are designed to give employees greater control over 'where' they work (referring to teleworking, working from home) and 'when' they work (referring to flexi-time and work schedule flexibility) (Allen *et al.*, 2013). In the UK, flexi-time, job sharing, working from home, part-time, compressed hours, annualised hours and staggered hours are some common flexible working arrangements (FWAs) that employers can offer their employees to balance work and personal lives (UK Government, 2018). While flexible work can reduce work-family conflict (Allen *et al.*, 2013), its uptake (various arrangements) and impacts are gendered. For example, in the UK context, Chung and Van der Horst (2018) found that flexi-time and teleworking help mothers stay employed and maintain their working hours after childbirth. While showing the gendered nature of FWA uptake, another study found that men are more likely to use flexi-time, which allows them to choose their start and end work time, while women are more likely to take reduced hours (part-time work) or job-share because of their family responsibilities. The study found a negative effect of FWAs on women's job

and life satisfaction compared to men, for whom FWA was positively associated with job and life satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017).

In their study on WLB, Cowan and Hoffman (2007) found that flexibility and permeability are central to contemporary employees. They placed an overarching emphasis on flexibility, which aimed at combining work and non-work domains (Cowan and Hoffman, 2007). In the academic context, despite exercising flexibility, academics' rigid tenure timelines, expectations to succeed or intense efforts to meet tenure expectations affect their WLB (Kinman and Jones, 2008; Anderson *et al.*, 2002). Although academics may have the flexibility to manage their tasks, this may come with little autonomy over the amount of work they need to perform (Lyons and Ingersoll, 2010), which may cancel out the positive effects of flexibility (Badrik and Panatik, 2020). Considering the mixed evidence on the effects of work flexibility (Bordeau *et al.*, 2019), we expect it to be positively associated with WLB, but we do not anticipate that flexibility will be sufficient to eliminate the negative effect of the unbounded nature of academic work. We thus hypothesise that:

H3: Flexibility is positively associated with WLB.

### **Organisational support culture**

Institutions of higher education often promote competitive cultures that threaten WLB due to the nature of academia, making organisational support to academics even more relevant (Diego-Medrano and Ramos, 2021). While an organisational support culture is important to WLB (Hyman and Summers, 2004) and may cover a range of policies and practices available within organisations (Guest 2002), researchers distinguish between organisations' formal 'policies' and their 'support culture' (Feeney and Stritch, 2017; Callan, 2007). The fact that policies are available does not necessarily transform the organisational culture even though they are designed to enhance the structural, cultural, and relational support an organisation provides for work, family and personal life (Kossek *et al.*, 2010). An organisational support culture includes social and relational support in the workplace, such as support from managers and co-workers, together with organisational cultural norms that increase employees' perception that the organisation values them in their paid and unpaid work roles (Kossek *et al.*, 2010). By offering employees support to balance their work and life, an organisation sends informal signals about the extent to which it values WLB (Author, 2021; Feeney and Stritch, 2017).

The research outlines different dimensions of organisational support culture, including managerial support, career consequences associated with the uptake of WLB, organisational time expectations (McDonald *et al.*, 2005; Thompson *et al.*, 1999), the gendered nature of policy utilisation and co-workers' support (McDonald, Brown and Bradley, 2005), organisational attachment (Thompson *et al.*, 1999) and policy uptakes (Clark *et al.*, 2017; Feeney and Stritch, 2017; McDonald *et al.*, 2005). Of all

these dimensions, managerial support has emerged as one of the main predictors of WLB (Darcy *et al.*, 2012; Kossek *et al.*, 2010; McDonald *et al.*, 2005), because managers can show emotional and instrumental support through role model behaviour and by creating a supportive culture (Clark *et al.*, 2017; Kossek, Lewis and Hammer, 2010). Managers are also important to the success of WLB policies because they make implicit and explicit choices regarding the adoption of workplace practices, and thus they are in a position to encourage or discourage employees' efforts to balance their work and non-work lives.

While existing research has demonstrated a link between WLB policies and work-life support culture, little is known about whether organisational support culture improves WLB in an unbounded work context. We therefore hypothesise that organisational support culture is associated with WLB, although we do not anticipate that it will be sufficient to eliminate the effect of the unbounded nature of academics' work.

H4: Organisational support culture is positively associated with WLB.

## **Data and methods**

### *Sample and procedures*

We disseminated a structured close-ended survey to three higher education institutions in the UK from November 2017 to February 2018. The survey was designed online using JISC software and respondents (academics) were provided with the online link. We received 242 responses, which yielded a final sample of 193 academics, of whom 124 (64%) were female and 69 (36%) male; 86% of the survey had all items completed, while 14% had missing values. We imputed missing items using the multiple imputation chained equation method following the missing at random (MAR) assumption (Allison, 2002; Social Sciences Computing Cooperative Knowledge Base, 2014). The imputation model produces unbiased results compared to only the complete case analysis model or the listwise deletion method (Social Sciences Computing Cooperative Knowledge Base, 2014).

### *Measures and scales*

#### *Work-life balance scale*

We based our WLB scale on the one by Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996). The items are as follows: (1) due to the demands of my work, I withdraw from family and friends; (2) due to the demands of my work, I am irritable at home; (3) due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my personal life; (4) things I want to do in my life outside work do not get done; (5) the amount of time my



job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil other responsibilities; (6) the demands of my work interfere with my life outside work; (7) I expect that in order to get promoted I will have to sacrifice family and friends because of work; (8) I expect that in order to get promoted I will have to make changes to my personal life; (9) I expect that in order to get promoted the amount of time I devote to my job would make it difficult to fulfil other responsibilities; and (10) I expect that in order to get promoted the demands of my work would interfere with my personal life. We reversed the values to measure WLB, in which a lower score (1) suggests a lower WLB and a higher score (5) suggests a higher WLB. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for WLB is 0.92.

#### *Organisational support culture scale*

Organisational support was adapted from Jahn, Thompson and Kopelman's (2003) perceived Organisational Family Support (POFS) scale, which is based on Eisenberger's perceived organisational support (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Thompson *et al.*, 2004). The scale included the following five items: (1) my organisation makes an active effort to help employees when there is a conflict between work and personal life; (2) my organisation puts money and effort into supporting employees and families; (3) it is easy to find out about work-life balance support programmes within my organisation; (4) in general, my organisation is very supportive of its employees' personal lives, and (5) employees feel that the organisation respects their desire to balance work and life demands. The Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.91. Surprisingly, the item 'my supervisor or line manager is understanding when an employee has a conflict between work and life' fitted poorly with other items on the scale, and was therefore dropped. All items were measured on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

#### *Flexibility*

The scale for flexible work was adapted from the Work-Related Quality of Life Scale (Easton and Van Laar, 2012). The Easton and Van Laar (2007) WQL scale has been validated in numerous countries and is used by the UK Health and Safety Executive. The scale included the following two items: (1) my working time is flexible; and (2) my current working hours/patterns suit my personal circumstances. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for flexible work is 0.59, while the Spearman-Brown coefficient is 0.898. All scale items were measured on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

#### *Unbounded work scale*

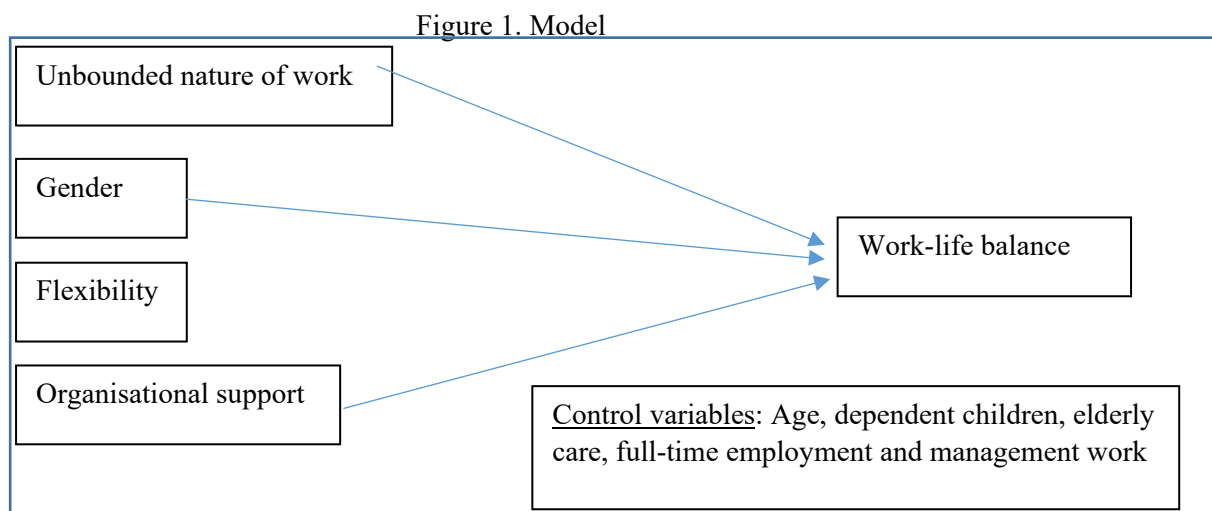
To generate an unbounded work scale, we adapted the following five items from the Work-Related Quality of Life Scale (Easton and Van Laar, 2012): (1) I have to work very intensively; (2) I have unrealistic time pressure at work; (3) even when I am not at work, I think of work; (4) I work long hours; and (5) I take my work home with me. The Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.86. All scale items were measured on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

## Gender

Gender is a binary variable in which the value 1 was assigned to females and 0 to males.

## Control variables

Control variables were age, dependent children, elderly care, full-time employment and managerial work. We coded age into three categories – 34 years and below, 35–44 years, and 45 years and above – to reflect early career and family stages (Darcy *et al.*, 2012; Toffoletti and Starr, 2016; Dex and Bond, 2005). Dependent children is a binary variable (0/1) indicating whether respondents had children to care for. Elderly care is a dichotomous variable recoded as 0 and 1 reflecting whether participants were caring for elderly relatives. Full-time employment is a binary variable (0/1) indicating whether respondents were in full-time paid work, since research has shown that full-time employees tend to have lower WLB (van der Lippe and Lippényi, 2018). Management work was included as a binary variable (0/1) as research has shown that academics' unbounded work included managerial tasks, which has an effect on WLB (Steinþórsdóttir, *et al.*, 2019; Hogan *et al.*, 2014). We present the relationship between WLB and other co-variates in Figure 1.



## Analysis

We first conducted a descriptive analysis (Table I) and then a Pearson's correlation analysis (Table II). We used ordinary least square (OLS) multiple regression techniques in Table III; these techniques are commonly applied to analyse continuous dependent variables (see Allison 1990) and have been used in previous research on WLB (Kinman and Jones, 2008; Crompton and Lyonette, 2006; Dex and Bond 2005). We constructed stepwise regression models, in which gender was entered first (M1, Table III); control variables were introduced in Model 2 (Table III), and the effect of unbounded work was added

in Model 3 (Table III). Lastly, to check the extent to which flexibility and organisational support affect WLB, we introduced the variables in Model 4 (Table III).

Table I demonstrates a substantial gender gap. On average, female academics experience lower WLB, have lower flexibility and report much lower organisational support than men. Both male and female academics indicate that their work is unbounded, although female academics report slightly higher unbounded work than men do.

[Table I at back]

[Table II at back]

Table II showed a positive relationship between WLB and flexibility of work, and WLB and organisational support culture for WLB. However, unbounded work is negatively related to WLB, work flexibility and organisational support culture for WLB.

[Table III at back]

Regression findings (Table III) show that female academics experience significantly lower WLB than their male colleagues (M1-M2), thus giving support to Hypothesis 2. However, this support is only partial as its effect disappears when we introduce unbounded work (M3), which results in no statistical differences between female and male academics' experiences of WLB. Thus, unbounded work tends to fade gender differences when other factors are controlled for. The findings further reveal that unbounded work is significantly and negatively associated with WLB, meaning that it significantly reduces WLB for all academics, which supports Hypothesis 1.

In terms of flexible work and organisational support culture for WLB, the findings reveal that flexibility and organisational support weaken the negative effect of unbounded work, which is reflected in the reduced effect size of unbounded work from M3 to M4. However, it does not eliminate it. In other words, while flexibility and organisational support are significantly and positively associated with WLB, and also reduce the negative effect of unbounded work on WLB, they are insufficient to eradicate the negative effect of unbounded work on WLB. Unbounded work continues to lower the WLB of academics (both women and men) regardless of whether they have flexibility and organisational support. Therefore, Hypotheses 3 and 4 are also supported.

## Discussion and conclusion

The present study explores the relationship between the unboundedness of work and WLB and includes gender, flexibility and organisational support in the debate. We consider that this paper contributes to the literature and can guide practitioners in their work, as discussed below.

Specifically, its first contribution is the consideration of WLB in an unbounded work context. Our research findings go some way to demonstrate that unbounded work blurs the boundaries between work and non-work domains, resulting in lower WLB; this is a significant finding given the inconclusive evidence of previous studies. Although some work offers more freedom and workers can manipulate the boundaries of work and non-work domains, there is a dark side to this freedom in the form of highly integrated work and non-work boundaries to accomplish work demands and the demands of the 'greedy institution' (Glavin and Schieman, 2012).

As has been evident during the coronavirus pandemic (Thomason and Williams, 2020), contemporary work increasingly involves a blurring of boundaries between work and non-work domains (Hunter *et al.*, 2019; Schieman and Glavin, 2016). Longer working hours can conflict with a broad range of obligations, such as family care commitments, time with friends, time for self-care, and volunteering and community work (Casper *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, in an unbounded work context such as academia, the increasing prevalence of technology that allows working anywhere and anytime can also make things more complicated for those who want to meet those commitments (Currie and Eveline, 2011; Heijstra and Rafnsdottir, 2010). Therefore, work becomes increasingly unbounded, potentially leading to lower WLB and putting people under strain to meet the rising demands of work and even facing conflicting tensions and expectations within their academic tasks (Griffin, 2022).

Not surprisingly, previous research has evidenced the negative effect of the increase in working hours on productivity (Collewet and Sauermann, 2017; Pencavel, 2015). Consequently, it seems academics face the challenge of responding to all the pressures of their unbounded work, which at the same time affects their well-being and negatively impacts the quality of their work (Doherty *et al.*, 2002). This paradox may be addressed by a more sustainable approach that does not focus on short-term outcomes which potentially harm employees, their families, and communities (Enhert *et al.*, 2016; Mariappanadar, 2012).

The study also contributes by analysing how flexibility and organisational support improve academics' WLB, which only occurs to a certain extent because the work is unbounded. We found that flexible work and an organisational support culture are insufficient to eliminate the negative effects of unbounded work. Thus, even when organisational support for WLB and flexible work practices do exist, the benefits may be limited because of the unbounded nature of the work. That is, flexible work as a popular arrangement designed to enhance WLB does not always help people attain WLB (Kelliger *et al.*, 2018). This finding echoes Van der Lippe and Lippényi's (2018) study which concluded

organisational support needs to be in place if WLB is to be achieved, but that WLB is difficult to achieve if there is a preference for the 'ideal worker' (Toffoletti and Starr, 2016; Lewis *et al.*, 2007; Gambles, *et al.*, 2006). An emphasis in the organisation on presentism could result in penalties (negative attitudes, emotions, or behaviours) for those employees who use flexible work arrangements, as part of the backlash associated with WLB policies (Perrigino *et al.*, 2018). From a practical perspective, the role of managers and government policymakers is vital to reduce the negative effects of blurring the limits of boundaries between work and non-work domains (Messenger, 2017). Therefore, universities need to be aware of the unintended or limited consequences of flexible policies and the impact of the working conditions on academics, and in consequence, pay particular attention to the support available for the health and well-being of their employees (Walters and Bam, 2021).

Regarding gender, although we initially found that female academics experience significantly lower WLB, no significant gender differences emerged within the context of unbounded work, showing that gender differences are sensitive to unbounded work. In other words, the stronger the effect of unbounded work, the more likely gender differences will be reduced, making both male and female academics prone to lower WLB. This finding supports Ruppner and Huffman's (2014) cross-national study and research by Author *et al.* (2020) among Spanish academics, which found that regardless of gender, work is increasingly interfering with non-work life.

While this paper offers insights on how the unbounded nature of work influences WLB and weakens the institutional arrangements in terms of FWAs and organisational support, it comes with a few limitations. We do not intend to generalise findings as they are based on a relatively small sample and a very specific context, namely three higher education institutions in the UK. Nevertheless, future research could extend this scope to examine other unbounded work contexts. Secondly, we have tried to measure unbounded work, but we do not claim to develop it as the items we used were taken from Easton and Van Laar (2012). Rather, we have attempted to operationalise it in this study. We nevertheless encourage researchers to operationalise the scale of unbounded work in different national and sectoral contexts with larger samples to examine the extent to which work is unbounded and permeates boundaries. Future research could also contribute to the literature by exploring the effect of flexibility in a different work context and by developing a flexibility scale, which in our research was measured with only two items. Additionally, the role of gender in WLB in different unbounded work contexts should also be developed, as our results are inconclusive. Qualitative research could offer an understanding of the underlying connections and provide insights into the problem and possible solutions for WLB in unbounded work settings.

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Table I: Descriptive

	All		Females		Males	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Work life balance	2.51	0.82	2.43	0.86	2.66	0.75
Flexibility	3.84	0.74	3.77	0.80	3.96	0.62
Organizational support culture	3.07	0.86	2.98	0.90	3.21	0.77
Unbounded work	3.57	0.81	3.61	0.82	3.51	0.78
Female	0.64	0.48				
34 year and below (age)	0.20	0.40	0.22	0.41	0.17	0.38
35-44 year	0.40	0.49	0.46	0.50	0.29	0.46
Dependent children	0.47	0.50	0.47	0.50	0.46	0.50
Elderly care	0.24	0.43	0.29	0.46	0.16	0.37
Full-time	0.81	0.39	0.73	0.45	0.97	0.17
Management work	0.84	0.36	0.81	0.40	0.91	0.28
Total	193		124		69	

Table II: Correlation

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Work life balance	1										
2	Flexibility	0.50*	1									
3	Organizational support culture	0.55*	0.48*	1								
4	Unbounded work	-0.76*	-0.43*	-0.44*	1							
5	Female	-0.13	-0.12	-0.13	0.06	1						
6	34 year and below (age)	0.19*	-0.03	0.02	-0.22*	0.05	1					
7	35-44 year	-0.10	0.07	-0.03	0.04	0.17*	-0.41*	1				
8	Dependent children	-0.01	0.09	0.05	0.04	0.00	-0.34*	0.28*	1			
9	Elderly care	-0.19*	-0.37*	-0.27*	0.29*	0.15*	-0.14	-0.19*	-0.09	1		
10	Full-time	-0.06	-0.18*	0.01	0.08	-0.30*	0.14*	-0.18*	-0.35*	-0.01	1	
11	Management work	-0.04	-0.03	0.03	0.20*	-0.14	-0.14	0.00	0.17*	0.01	0.01	1

Table III: OLS multiple regression analysis of organizational characteristics on work-life balance

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Female (ref. male)	-0.229*(.123)	-0.265** (.133)	-0.139 (.088)	-0.097 (.080)
34 year and below (age; ref 45and above)		0.341** (.171)	0.065 (.144)	0.163 (.105)
35-44 year		-0.115 (.139)	-0.078 (.092)	-0.037 (.084)
Dependent children (y/n)		0.007 (.133)	0.027 (.088)	0.025 (.080)
Elderly care (y/n)		-0.308** (.145)	0.089 (.099)	0.251** (.093)
Full-time (ref. part-time)		-0.299* (.166)	-0.062 (.110)	-0.011 (.102)
Management work (y/n)		-0.072 (.163)	0.252** (.109)	0.201** (.100)
Unbounded nature of work			-0.803*** (.051)	-0.646*** (.053)
Flexibility				0.201** (.059)
Organizational support culture				0.196*** (.049)
Constant	2.658*** (.098)	3.034*** (.265)	5.293*** (.227)	3.257*** (.390)
Obs.	193	193	193	193
F test		2.94**	36.25***	39.38***

Significant at \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Standard errors in parentheses