Short Article

Emerging Work Challenges for Working Women in the Digital Era: An Examination of Work Connectivity Behavior After-Hour

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Abstract

In the context of hyperconnected work environments, fueled by advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT), this research proposal underscores the significance of examining women's work connectivity behaviors outside regular working hours. It posits that although the "hyperconnected" work pattern affects all employees, women encounter unique challenges owing to their family obligations. The proposal puts forth several research inquiries, probing the relationship between technological progress, career advancement, physical and mental well-being, work-family balance, specific industry patterns and women's after-hours work connectivity. This investigation aspires to offer insights into workplace gender disparities, ultimately fostering equality and diversity.

Keywords: Working woman, Hyperconnected work pattern, Career advancement, Physical and psychological well-being, Work-family balance

Our recent study, titled "Navigating work-family conflict, entrepreneurial passion, and entrepreneurial exit intention during the COVID-19 pandemic in Shanghai," offers a new viewpoint on the interplay between role conflict, work psychology, and the work effectiveness of entrepreneurs within the pandemic setting. Drawing upon the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, our investigation explores entrepreneurs' work-family conflict, entrepreneurial passion, entrepreneurial exit intention, and external relationship embedding within the context of the pandemic, considering both resource loss and replenishment perspectives. Our findings illuminate how these elements mutually influence each other and significantly impact entrepreneurs' attitudes towards entrepreneurship and the overall performance of their organizations. This research not only lends new theoretical support to entrepreneurial management but also offers valuable insights and recommendations for entrepreneurial practice. In today's fast-paced and high-pressure work environments, achieving a work-life balance, enhancing work efficiency, and boosting employee satisfaction have emerged as critical challenges for organizations. Through rigorous scientific analysis, our study provides compelling answers to address these challenges [1].

In our studied group of entrepreneurs, there exists a certain imbalance in the gender ratio between men and women. The deliberation on the effects of gender disparities on work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement remains marginally inadequate. In contemporary society, women's significance in the workplace is escalating, and the obstacles and opportunities they encounter are progressively more evident. Hence, deeper exploration into the novel work stresses and obstacles confronted by working women within the modern digital work environment will facilitate a more comprehensive comprehension of workplace dynamics, ultimately fostering gender equality and female empowerment. Consequently, we propose that future investigations concentrate on women's work conduct within the realm of digital work, particularly their work connectivity behaviors beyond regular working hours [2].

In the wake of advancing information and communication technology (ICT) and the widespread adoption of electronic communication devices in the workplace, modern organizations have transformed into "hyperconnected" environments. This shift has effectively erased traditional organizational boundaries, significantly altering employees' conventional working patterns. As a result, employees now routinely use portable communication devices to engage in work activities or maintain continuous contact with work-related individuals anytime and anywhere, even during non-working hours (e.g., before work, lunch breaks, and after-work hours). The behavior of maintaining work connectivity after regular work hours, through the use of portable communication devices, has been termed "work connectivity behavior after-hours". Current research underscores the impact of this "unlimited link" working pattern on various aspects of employees' lives, including their health, cognition, behavior, and family life often leading to negative consequences. The effect of work connectivity behavior after-hours, as summarized by us based on existing research, is depicted in Figure 1 [3-10].

However, the majority of existing research predominantly focuses on the general employee population, neglecting the specific challenges
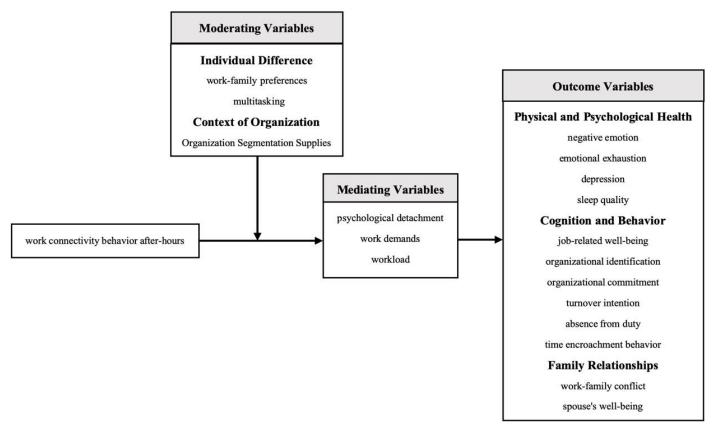
Figure 1: The effect of work connectivity behavior after-hours.

faced by women in the workplace. Women constitute a pivotal force in the progression of contemporary organizations, significantly contributing to enhancing team diversity and fostering innovation. Nonetheless, they often encounter additional pressures stemming from family responsibilities, particularly in maintaining a work-family balance. Certain studies have indicated that, in comparison to their male counterparts, female employees tend to have a weaker sense of boundary between work and personal life, and less awareness of family-work separation. Consequently, work connectivity behavior during non-working hours may exert a profounder influence on women in the workplace, an aspect that has received scant attention in research. Hence, we urge future scholars to devote more consideration to the ramifications of work connectivity behavior during non-working hours specifically for working women. Centering on this theme, we propose the following topics for deeper exploration in future research endeavors [11-14]:

A. How does technological advancement influence women's work connectivity behavior during non-work hours? With the emergence of remote working capabilities and advancements in mobile communication technology, the work connectivity patterns of women outside their regular work hours have undergone transformation. Further research is warranted to investigate how these novel technologies are reshaping their work habits and the subsequent implications for their professional and personal lives.

B. What are the distinct effects of working women's work connectivity behavior during non-work hours on their career advancement? This inquiry aims to ascertain whether maintaining work connectivity outside office hours differentially impacts the rate of career progression and job satisfaction for working women compared to their male counterparts.

C. How does engagement in work-related connectivity after work hours impact the physical and mental well-being of working women? Studies could delve into whether the engagement of working women in work-related tasks during non-work hours specifically affects their physical and psychological health. Potential areas of investigation include elevated stress levels, deteriorated sleep quality, and whether these effects are tied to societal expectations and gender roles.

D. How do working women manage the balance between maintaining work connectivity and their family life during off-hours? This line of inquiry centers on the strategies employed by working women to preserve harmony within their family life, specifically their spousal and parental relationships, while simultaneously maintaining necessary work connections.

E. Are there discernible differences in the after-work connectivity behaviors of women across various industries? Comparative research could explore the differences in work connectivity patterns among women in distinct industries such as finance, education, and healthcare, analyzing how industry-specific characteristics and work environments shape these behaviors.

F. Do job connectivity behaviors, characterized by different attributes (e.g., voluntary vs. involuntary), differentially impact working women? This study aims to uncover the potential benefits of workplace connectivity for female employees, particularly exploring whether voluntary engagement in work-related tasks outside work hours positively affects them.

G. What are the roles of varying organizational environments, individual personality traits, work capabilities, and organizational technology in shaping the impact of after-work connectivity on women's overall work experience? Which elements mitigate the potentially negative effects of work connectivity, and which ones exacerbate them? The objective of this research inquiry is to investigate the moderating factors influencing the effect of work-related connectivity behaviors outside of official working hours specifically on female employees.

H. What effective strategies can female employees adopt to counteract the potential downsides of work connectivity, such as job crafting or seeking out new job resources? By examining coping strategies, we aim to assist female workers in effectively managing the negative impacts of work connectivity behaviors on their work performance, personal life, and overall health.

The research proposal into women's work connectivity behavior beyond regular working hours bears significant theoretical contributions. Such behavior obscures the distinction between professional and personal life. For women in the workforce, striking a harmonious balance between family responsibilities and career aspirations remains a pivotal concern. Examining this behavior sheds light on the evolving nature of work-life balance, bolstering empirical support for associated theories. Furthermore, exploring the work connectivity patterns of employed women during their off-hours can provide organizations with valuable insights for tailored management strategies. Specifically, this analysis aids in determining effective allocation of work tasks, thereby minimizing the necessity for after-hours connectivity. It also suggests ways to furnish supportive resources that empower women in the workplace to manage their work-life boundaries more efficiently. Ultimately, given the heightened challenges and pressures encountered by working women in balancing their family and career, studying their work connectivity practices beyond regular hours aids in uncovering gender disparities in the workplace and advances research promoting gender equality and workplace diversity.

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