

CSCM69: Human-Centred Perspectives and Methods

Coursework 2 - Work/Life Balance

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance is an essential aspect of life that we need to get right, by getting this right we would expect to succeed within our jobs while also not burning out through overworking. With 94% of professionals stating they put in 50 hours or more into work a week [11], we wanted to see how people who are currently in a national lockdown feel and are finding managing their work-life balance.

Our study found that people do value work-life balance and that they feel like they are getting the right balance, but their devices and applications are hurting them and affecting balance. They are resulting in users wanting to have the ability to group different apps for work and social.

Author Keywords

Authors' choice; of terms; separated; by semicolons; include commas, within terms only; this section is required.

CCS Concepts

•**Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; *Haptic devices*; User studies; Please use the 2012 Classifiers and see this link to embed them in the text: https://dl.acm.org/ccs/ccs_flat.cfm

INTRODUCTION

Harvard conducted a survey which asked professional people how many hours they worked a week, 94% said they put in 50 hours or more. Out of these professionals, 50% said they are working 65 or more hours [11]. What is even more staggering is that this survey got done in 2009, a time where Blackberry mobile phones were all the rage and iPhones had only been on the market for around two years. This year was when the iPhone 3G was just about to hit stores and where the smartphone, as we currently know them, indeed took off and changed the way we interact with our mobile devices. As the Harvard survey also found out that 20-25 hours a week get spent monitoring their Blackberrys while outside of working hours [11].

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These numbers show that work-life balance has been an issue for some years. Especially when looking at statistics published in 2020, by the NY Post's Business Insider, that state 48% of Americans consider themselves workaholics and the CNBC stating that 66% of American workers lack a healthy work-life balance [7]. 77% of full-time workers suffer from burnout with their current job [7]. Rescue Time analysed their users' data in 2019 and found that 40% of people used their computers after 10 pm and 28% of people start their workday before 8:30 am [9].

What we aim to do within this report is to identify some of the leading apps that get associated with work-life balance. Once these apps get identified, we aim to investigate these tools while critiquing their designs concerning their interactions with HCI. These apps and devices include email, instant messaging (IM), mindful apps and mobile devices, and we will then be interviewing users and finding out their views on these applications and how they have impacted their work-life balance.

EXISTING APPS AND DEVICES USED WIDELY IN WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"With the pervasiveness of technology, it has not only permeated our workspaces but it has also become invasive in our private personal spaces [12]." This quote got taken from a CHI paper published in 2012, which also states what defines a work-life balance. A worker working longer than 50 hours a week compared to personal care and leisure whether it gets paid, or unpaid, but for women that also include the rate of employees who have children [12]. With this definition in mind, we are going to identify and critique four apps and devices that have made an impact for good and bad reasons for people's work-life balance. The applications and devices we will be looking at are emails, IM, mindful apps and mobile phone devices.

One application that has brought about both good things and bad things for work-life balance is the email. While it has made communication more accessible, it has now become very consuming. This has resulted in creating a sense of urgency around reading and responding to emails straight away [15]. However, in terms of work, email has improved the efficiency of working when aiming to communicate with colleagues or other people when they are not physically present.

An application that has both a positive and negative effect on work-life balance is IM, for example, WhatsApp and iMessage.

IM has shown that the same communication channel often gets used for personal activities as well as work arrangements. In some cases, both personal and work activities can almost be conducted simultaneously [8]. However, IM has become an alternative method to the traditional communication methods for both work [6] and private communication [3], instead of it being an additional medium on top. Though, IM, by its very definition, is an interruption, primarily if we use the definition defined by O'Conaill & Frohlich, "a synchronous interaction which is not initiated by the recipient, is unscheduled, and results in the recipient discontinuing their current activity" [13].

In the hustle and bustle of the modern-day life, the public's perception around mental health (MH) has started to shift focus. Applications that get promoted to help with MH and lockdown are meditation apps. While mindful apps do help with well being and mental health, however, they require training in order to be completely effective [2]. Mindfulness gets defined as the "awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment without judgment [1]". A study of mindful applications has found that only 4% provide any form of mindfulness training, the rest only offer time reminders for doing meditation [10].

The one technology that has made both work-life better and worse at the same time, depending on what angle it gets looked at is the mobile device. Through the introduction of mobile devices, it has made it very difficult to separate work-life [5, 14] as all the previous apps have demonstrated. This issue is a result of the mobile phone being the one device that enables all of these. Mobile phones have created a grey area between private and work domains, which is why much research is getting carried out in this area [4]. As studies have shown that workers average just 2 hours and 48 minutes of productive device time a day and check emails and IM about every 6 minutes on average [9]. We wonder if this is a result of mobile phones and them being so available and accessible to "just check" at any points.

CRITIQUING EXISTING APPS AND DEVICES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

We will now be critiquing existing apps and devices within the areas that we have identified as widely used within the work-life balance. We will be aiming to identify these apps or devices on how they could be adapted to amplify the user's experience. We will be looking at how they make it a particular part of being human, and how they aim to do this and possibly how they could do it better.

Mobile Device

Mobile devices have been around for many years, and until the introduction of the smartphone, that we know today, laptops were the only primary way to do any form of real work on the go. However, these did have their limitations and benefits. However, since the introduction of smartphones, and how powerful and capable they now are, mobile devices and the ability to do work from them has increased and become more proficient. While there are many smartphone devices out there, we will be focusing on Apple's iPhone for our critique. We

have chosen this device primarily due to our more familiarity with the device and what it can do.

The mobile device is an essential item for most people. People use them for a wide range of things, whether it be for socialising, relaxing by playing games, for example, or get used for business. No one device has given the user so much freedom in what it can do before, while still be relatively small and get carried in just a pocket. However, the applications and features that enable us to do so much. They can and do get used for so much more than what its intention was. For example, social media intended to connect people around the world if we take Facebook in this case. However, it has now not only become a platform to allow people to communicate, but it has allowed the business to have a platform to be able to trade from that would not have been their before. So social media is also business media, or is still social media? As we can see, a vast grey area has got generated, which we believe is through mobile phones and how accessible they are while being connected to the internet 24/7. However, this ability to have so much content on-demand, we could say, has created a form of addiction but this could be down to their interruption nature, through notifications and attention-grabbing features like ringtones, and haptic vibrates. So with mobile phones getting used for social and work, is there any surprise that works are not as highly productive within a typical workday or struggle to switch off from work. While we have used social media as an example, in this case, it is valid for several different applications available, like emails, instant messaging and socialising. We believe as they are all in one place, it has made it harder to maintain an excellent work-life balance.

A feature that we believe would genuinely enhance the user's experience and help with the work-life balance is to have an option that will allow the mobile device to flip between work and personal modes. What this feature would allow the user to do is list applications on their mobile device that are work-related, and then list all the apps that are social-related. The user will then be able to designate a time that is for work and not, which then activates the appropriate app lists. For example, if it is not in work time, then all the personal-related apps will be deactivated with no notifications appearing. If the user tries to log into one of these apps, then a message will appear, saying it is not in the specified social hours. Also, within social time, all the work apps that are likely to create distractions are deactivated. We believe this feature would, by having physical restrictions, make the users more aware of what they are doing and then be more mindful about their work-life balance. Therefore, as a result, enhancing both their work lives and their personal lives.

Email

Emails when they got created brought about significant changes within the communication area. An email allowed a user to be able to send a document to another user instantly, which meant that people did not have to wait for a document to be sent in the post if there were no fax machines available. However, emails have now evolved from business use to now a mixture of both. A single user is now likely to have multiple accounts, private and work, with the user not only receiving

potential vital documents like car insurance documents, for example, they could also be receiving advertisements in emails from companies.

With users now having multiple email addresses, email applications, like Apple's mail, allows the user to attach multiple email address to the app to all get viewed within the application. While this is a great feature and truly puts the user at the centre of allowing them to view all their different possible emails in one place, however, it has also created a significant overlap of what is work and what is life. We believe that this is a result of the application trying to be helpful and provide the user with all their emails in one place. Nevertheless, what it fails to do is to distinguish the difference between work and private email addresses and notifies the user when an email comes through, work or personal. Which we believe adds to the anxiety of emails and the need to have to respond instantly. We believe that a great feature would be to be able to distinguish which address is work and which ones are private and then create an automatic out of office style notification to the sender but does not display to the user until their designated work time.

Mindful Application

In regards to mindful apps, there are two main classes, and these are intrinsic, and extrinsic meditation [2]. However, the most important aspect of mindful apps is to be able to understand the core techniques that they are trying to use, to then allow for more efficient mindful training and overall experience for the user [2]. As an important finding within regards to mindful apps is the support for the echoing, guided meditation sessions [10].

A mindful application that we have experience with is Oak. Oak has a lot of different options available to the user, meditation, breathe and sleep. They have guided sessions and unguided sessions, which is suitable for the training aspect of the users and making it accessible for any user. The app also employs a form of gamification by awarding medals to the user for consecutive log on days and completing certain activities, which is an excellent external motivator tool. However, this app will give the user notification, which is useful and handy, but only once a day at the chosen time that is prespecified reminding the user to do their meditation. This feature is useful if the user is always free at that time, but what if that time is not always perfect? We believe a useful feature here would be for the app to link to the device and maybe look to see if the user has been stationary for a while. If so to then notify them to say to the user that they have been stationary, maybe now is a good time for some meditation.

Instant Messaging

IM is an application that genuinely changed the way people communicated. Instead of everything seeming very formal in the way of an email, and without having the limitations of using mobile text message, whether its a lack of available credit or limited character limits, IM allowed users to be able to communicate more naturally over the internet for free. With the responses being almost instant, depending on the user's internet speed. Our first experience of this was with Microsoft

Network (MSN) in the mid-2000s. This service truly put the user first and allowed users, as long as they were both logged on, communicate with each other. To top it all off, it was all for free. However, this started to take on a new direction when mobile phones started to become very popular and capable. Traditional text messages more moved into IM, and critical apps like WhatsApp started to emerge. This app was great as it allowed users, regardless of the operating system of their device used, to communicate with each other for free. Also, users were able to send images to each other without incurring a network fee.

Even though apps like WhatsApp has brought about some actual benefits, it has also blurred the lines of work-life balance. With the messages and IM being distractive by nature, affecting workflow and work colleagues contacting people using these services but out of work time. On top of that, a feature within the app allows people to see if the recipient of the message has read the message. However, in the relation of work relationships, this could cause frustration and add to the sense of anxiety to communicate straight away not to upset someone especially if it is the user's boss that's sending the message. The app will show the sender that the user has read the message but not responded, even if it is not in working hours. Therefore, having an impact on work-life balance and boundaries.

While WhatsApp has brought about tremendous benefits, WhatsApp puts all the user's conversations, whether it be personal all or work-related all within once place. With the work-life divide becoming much unclearer, a great feature would be to allow the user to label contacts as personal or work-related. With the contacts being label then, the application can then group the contacts or conversations as appropriate. Additionally, the application could then stop any work messages getting sent or seen out of work hours and any non-work messages getting shown in work hours. However, if a message needs to get sent urgently a command likes Apple's driving mode setting on iPhones, sending urgent, could be used to get the message sent out of the allocated time.

DESIGNING THE USER INTERVIEW

Due to the restrictions of a national lockdown, certain restrictions have naturally been placed upon us in regards to carrying out our research. Although there are many ways for us to gather information on potential subjects to help give us insights, for example, focus groups, participants diaries, interviews and finally surveys. We decided to focus on just two of these research methods types, interviews and surveys. This choice was due to time restrictions and current national situations, as mentioned before.

While diaries would have given us great insight into what participants are using and doing on a day-to-day basis, they also require a required amount of time to complete and then analyse. However, they can not always be reliable as we are relying on the participant to be completely honest and telling us everything that we need to know. Interviews are an excellent way to be able to get a general conversation with a participant and allow the conversation to take different avenues if it is required, allowing us to have more in-depth answers in areas

that we might not have planned. However, we decided to take the survey option. This decision has been based on the fact that the country being in a lockdown, it would not be appropriate to arrange to meet up with people.

The survey got made up of both quantitative and qualitative results. The intention behind this was to be able to get quite a good overview of the participant's thoughts about the topic and their potential habits. Seventeen questions got asked in the survey. These ranged from multiple-choice questions in regards to the questions: gender, age range, in what direction is their work-life balance leaning towards, what device has the biggest impact on them, as well as what device do they use the most for work and for social, and what apps have the most impact on their work-life balance. However, the last question the participants could select multiple options. A range of 1 to 5 got used for: how much emails, IM and mindful apps impact them. As well as how much impact mobile devices have on them. With a score of 1 being it improves the balance, 3 being neutral and 5 having a negative impact. However, an additional range question got used but had a range of 1 being not important, and a score of 5 is very important, was how important is work-life balance to them. Open-ended qualitative questions then got asked where the user could write a short paragraph. These questions were: What feature(s) do you think could be introduced to emails, IM, mindful apps and mobile devices to help with the work-life balance, and Any other general thoughts or ideas you would like to share.

What we believe worked about the survey was that we were able to get a lot more responses back than we would have expected, in comparison to a face-to-face interview as we did get useful insights from the results. However, while reviewing the results, we came across some fascinating responses which we would like to have followed up. However, with no way of knowing who had completed the survey, we were unable to contact them to arrange a follow-up. However, one concern we have is that if the participants had to give away contact information, this could have lead to the users not being entirely truthful, with fear of where their comments might lead.

So in regards to surveys, we found that it is essential to think about the questions we are asking the participants in great depth. To make sure we are covering all aspects that we think we might need, as once it has got sent out it is challenging to be able to change it and get the original participants to refill it in. So in future, we would like to set up a way that the users give some form of consent to be contacted, in the future if we would like to explore some of their responses further.

THE RESULTS

We will now explore the results of the questionnaire that included both quantitative and qualitative questions. While we will be focusing more on the quantitative results, we will also be using the participant's qualitative responses to see if these can give us any additional insights.

After conducting the questionnaire, we had a total of 16 responses. Seven responses were male participants, and nine were female (see table: 1). While it is not exactly fifty-fifty in terms of male and female participants, it is fairly close in

Gender	Total
Male	7
Female	9
Prefer not to say	0

Table 1. The total number of participants by gender.

terms of their being less likely for any bias within the results and giving a good generalisation.

In what direction would you say your work life balance leans towards?	Total
More towards work	5
More towards life	1
Fairly equal	10

Table 2. The participant's focus level towards work-life balance.

When we look at the results in table 2, we can see that the consensus is that people believe they are keeping a fairly good balance between work-life. However, five of the participants stated that their balance was towards work rather than life, with only one saying that their balance was more on life than work.

What Applications have the biggest impact (positive and/or negative) on your work-life balance?	Total
Emails	10
Mindful Apps	6
Instant Messaging	14

Table 3. The participant's cumulative values of apps that impact on work-life balance even if its positive or negative.

The results in table 3 show that IM has the most significant impact on the participant's work-life balance, whether that is good or bad. A total of fourteen people said it impacted them in one way or another, with the next highest being emails at ten. Only six of the participants stated that mindful apps have an impact on their lives. So that is nearly half of what people put for emails.

In table 4 we can see that the device that has the most significant impact on the participants is a mobile device, with 13 participants stating this to be the case. In comparison, 3 participants said a laptop and 0 for desktop computers. We find this result interesting as the assumption would be that most work gets done on a laptop or computer, but these get deemed not to have much of an impact. Is that to do with the fact that the user can not just take them anywhere, so making it easier to step away unlike a mobile device?

One comment from the survey suggests that "the ability to set notifications to work hours only (i.e. teams, social media messages). Feel obliged to respond out of work hours when notifications come through". While another said, "[to have] A notification to inform you immediately for the length of phone calls", are significant factors of impact on work-life balance. Clearly showing that people are very unaware of how long exactly they are sending on work-related tasks and how they feel obliged to have to respond to work-related communication, even while out of work hours, based on the aspect of messages being instant.

What device have the biggest impact (positive and/or negative) on your work-life balance?	Total
Desktop Computer	0
Laptop	3
Mobile Device	13

Table 4. The participant's cumulative values of devices that impact on work-life balance even if its positive or negative.

What device do you use the most for work?	Total
Desktop Computer	6
Laptop	9
Mobile Device	1

Table 5. participant's identifying what devices they use the most for doing social activities.

However, when we look at table 5, the picture paints a slightly different story to table 4. 6 participants stated that they use a desktop and 9 participants said they use a laptop as their primary work device. In contrast, only one participant said a mobile phone. So leading to the view that a mobile phone is not primary used for work but yet has the most significant impact overall. Again is this to do with the notion that most people will always have their mobile phone close to them?

The results in table 6, we can see that 100% of the participants said that the mobile phone was the device they used the most when doing personal tasks. However, when we look at the impact of mobile phones (see table: 7), the score is 3.5. Showing that the mobile phone generally has a more negative impact, but its meant to be what they use for the user's life tasks, which is a bit contradictory, is it that the phone is harming work or their private life?

What device do you use the most for social?	Total
Desktop Computer	0
Laptop	0
Mobile Device	16

Table 6. participant's identifying what devices they use the most for doing social activities.

A comment about mobile phones a participant said was, "Notifications that illustrates the amount of use that can be set by the users, to assist as a reminder if you are over-using in your down time". While another one states, "Ability to group apps as "work apps" and apply settings to those apps en mass. Eg. Mute them all." However, one comment states, "none, I manage my device - silent notifications, remove the "online" banner". Therefore while some people do feel like they have a sense of control over what they do most feel like the device needs to give them a helping hand in staying on top of everything, and ideally separating the work from the social.

From the questionnaire, ten participants said that their work-life balance (see table: 2) is relatively equal, but five said they lean more towards focusing on work. What we believe is worrying is that only one participant said that they lean more towards life. So these factors bring about, do we live to work or work to live and is it the technology that is making us lean more towards work with being so easily contactable. This statement is due to (see table: 3) the question of "what applications have the biggest impact (positive and/or negative) on your work-life balance" and IM receiving 14 votes. So

Question	Average Result
How important is work life balance to you?	4.8
How much would you say emails impacts on your work-life balance?	3.1
How much would you say Instant messaging impacts on your work-life balance?	3.5
How much would you say mindful apps impacts on your work-life balance?	2.8
How much would you say mobile devices impacts on your work-life balance?	3.5

Table 7. An average of the participant's responses to each relevant question.

that means that only two participants feel that their IM does not impact on their work-life balance. While 10 participants have said emails impact them. However, when we look at the average scores of the individual apps and devices impact (see table: 7), we can see that mobile phones and IM both had an average score of 3.5. Therefore meaning the results were leaning more towards having a negative impact. While on the other hand, emails were 3.1, so learning towards a more neutral impact but yet email was the second most significant impact on work-life balance. So could this mean that people think emails impact them more than they do and that IM is the main application that impacts that balance?

A comment from a participant stated, for users to be able to have a "unwind from work [feature that contains] special mindfulness and meditation episodes. [Allowing for the user to have] Specific pathways for those who struggle with work-life balance." This comment fits in nicely in regards to the sentiment of the mindful apps literature, as it states people need training in how to do these sessions, not just to have reminders. We believe that this focus could be a great innovation within the work-life balance. As most people have a smartphone or speaker, the user could announce that they are at home, and then the device will start to take them through some of the mindful activities, to help them unwind. By having this trigger to say that the user is home could help improve the balance and let the user not get so tempted to look at work-related content.

CONCLUSION

Humans always want to put life before everything, but as the literature and our study shows, it is not as easy as people think. Our study showed that while people think they are relatively even in terms of work-life balance, they use, where ever they are, a mobile device, which in result harms both their work and their social life.

Hence, we believe it is vital for there to be some form of tool that can allow users to be able to categorise work-related content and social content. Therefore, as a result, only allowing that content to get activated and displayed within the allocated time slots. For example, work apps are only working within office hours we believe would genuinely improve the human's experience with the devices and life overall.

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