

Working from Home Across Generations: Examining Work-Life Conflict, Flexibility, and Productivity Among Gen Z and Millennials

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Abstract

The expansion of working from home (WFH) has reshaped modern work practices, raising questions about its impact on employee outcomes. This study examines the effects of WFH on work-life conflict, productivity, and flexibility, with a focus on differences between Generation Z and Millennials. Using survey data from 207 respondents, quantitative analyses were conducted, including descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and correlation analysis. The results indicate that WFH is generally perceived positively, with respondents reporting high flexibility and productivity, alongside relatively low work-life conflict. A significant generational difference was found in work-life conflict, with Millennials experiencing lower levels than Generation Z. No significant differences were observed for productivity or flexibility. Correlation analysis revealed notable generational variations in the relationships between variables. For Generation Z, flexibility was strongly associated with higher productivity and lower work-life conflict. In contrast, for Millennials, flexibility showed a weaker relationship with productivity and no significant association with conflict. In both groups, work-life conflict was negatively related to productivity. Overall, the findings suggest that while WFH offers similar benefits across generations, the way these outcomes are interconnected differs. The study highlights the importance of considering generational differences when designing remote work policies, particularly in supporting boundary management and flexibility.

Keywords

Work from home; work-life conflict; flexibility; productivity; generational differences

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Introduction

The nature of work has experienced a profound transformation in recent years, with remote working, commonly referred to as working from home (WFH), becoming a fundamental component of modern organizational practices (Wang et al., 2021). While remote work slowly gained traction prior to 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its adoption at a global level, forcing organizations worldwide to rapidly transition to digital and decentralized work arrangements (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). As a result, WFH has evolved from a flexible perk offered by select organizations into a mainstream mode of work. One of the main concerns associated with WFH is the removal of physical separation between the workplace and home environment, leading to increased work-life conflict (Rashmi & Kataria, 2022). At the same time, remote work offers greater flexibility and autonomy, allowing employees to better manage their schedules and responsibilities (Palumbo, 2020). Existing research has largely focused on examining individual outcomes such as productivity, flexibility, or work-life conflict in isolation (Charalampous et al., 2022). Less attention has been given to how these factors influence different generational groups, such as Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennials, the cohorts that are increasingly shaping the contemporary workforce (Dessler,

2018). Consequently, limited research has examined whether the relationships between work-life conflict, flexibility, and productivity differ across generations in a WFH context. To address this gap, the present study investigates these relationships while comparing Gen-Z and Millennials. More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research question: How do Generation Z and Millennials differ in their perceptions of work-life conflict, productivity, and flexibility when working from home, and how are these variables related within each generational group? From a practical perspective, the findings may help organizations develop more effective and generation-sensitive remote work policies and employee well-being strategies.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Working from Home and Remote Work Dynamics

The nature of work has changed significantly in recent years, with remote working, also referred to as teleworking or working from home (WFH), becoming an increasingly important aspect of modern employment. Although WFH existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, the global health crisis accelerated its adoption on an unprecedented scale, reshaping organizational operations and employee work practices (Anderson et al., 2020). As a result, WFH evolved from a flexible perk into a central organizational strategy, despite ongoing debates regarding its long-term viability (Baruch, 2020; Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Remote work provides greater autonomy, flexibility, and reduced commuting time (Buchheit et al., 2016; Toscano & Zappala, 2020), but it may also create challenges such as social isolation, blurred work-life boundaries, and communication barriers (Biron et al., 2021; Como et al., 2021; Soga et al., 2022). Some scholars suggest that flexible or hybrid arrangements may offer a more balanced solution by aligning work conditions with job demands and employee preferences (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). These dynamics highlight the need to better understand how different employee groups experience WFH.

1.2. Work-Life Conflict in a WFH Context

Work-life conflict is among the most frequently examined consequences of WFH, as remote work often weakens the boundaries between professional and personal life (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Unlike traditional office settings, remote work makes it more difficult for employees to disengage from work, contributing to an “always-on” culture characterized by constant connectivity and difficulties psychologically detaching from work. Consequently, employees may experience higher levels of stress, fatigue, and work-life conflict (Charalampous et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022; Smirnykh, 2024). However, several studies suggest that remote work can reduce conflict by eliminating commuting time and increase discretionary time (Charalampous et al., 2022; Ferrara et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). This increased flexibility allows employees to integrate personal duties into their daily routines. In addition, generational differences further complicate this relationship. Gen Z, typically defined as individuals aged between 18 and 28, are digital natives accustomed to constant connectivity and technology-mediated communication (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021). While this familiarity can help adaptation to remote work, it may also increase vulnerability to blurred boundaries and over-engagement in WFH. In contrast, Millennials (aged 29 to 44) are more experienced with work responsibilities and may have developed approaches to balancing work and personal life. This experience can translate into stronger boundary management skills, enabling them to better navigate the demands of remote work (Nelson, 2023). However, Millennials may also face pressures, such as greater family responsibilities, which can introduce different forms of work-life conflict (Smirnykh, 2024).

1.3. Flexibility and Productivity in Remote Work

Flexibility and autonomy are widely recognized advantages of WFH and are often associated with improved productivity. Remote work allows employees to organize schedules around peak productivity periods and personal responsibilities, which may reduce stress and improve efficiency (Saura et al., 2022; Kłopotek, 2017). However, this relationship is not always positive, as some employees may struggle with self-discipline, time management, or home-related distractions (Saura et al., 2022). Generational differences further shape how flexibility influences productivity. Gen Z, as digital natives, tend to value flexibility and autonomy and may adapt more easily to remote work, although their limited professional experience can make effective self-management more difficult (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). In contrast, Millennials often possess more established work habits and professional experience, enabling them to manage flexible work arrangements more effectively. However, flexibility may serve more as a tool for balancing work and personal life

rather than directly enhancing productivity (Frost, 2025). Overall, while flexibility is generally linked to higher productivity across both generations, its impact may vary depending on experience, work values, and life stage (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

1.4. Generational Differences and Research Gap

Generational differences have become an important lens through which to understand contemporary work behaviors, particularly in the context of remote work. Gen Z and Millennials differ not only in terms of life stage but also in their work values, technological familiarity, and approaches to managing professional responsibilities (Waworuntu et al., 2022). For Gen Z, their relative lack of work experience may make them more susceptible to challenges such as boundary blurring, overconnectivity, and difficulties in managing workload independently (Rampen et al., 2023). In contrast, Millennials, who entered the workforce during earlier phases of digital transformation, typically combine technological competence with greater professional experience. This may enable them to navigate remote work more effectively, particularly in terms of organizing, and maintaining work-life boundaries. At the same time, Millennials are more likely to face additional responsibilities, such as family, which may affect their WFH experience (Subramaniam et al., 2022).

Despite growing research on remote work outcomes, much of the existing literature tends to examine variables such as productivity, flexibility, and work-life balance in isolation or across general populations, without accounting for generational variation. While some studies acknowledge differences in preferences for flexible work arrangements, there remains a limited understanding of how the relationships between key constructs, such as flexibility, productivity, and work-life conflict, may differ across generational groups. Therefore, a series of hypotheses are proposed to examine both group differences and the interconnections among the key constructs.

- H1: There is a significant difference in perceived work-life conflict between Gen Z and Millennials when working from home.
- H2: There is a significant difference in perceived productivity between Gen Z and Millennials when working from home.
- H3: There is a significant difference in perceived flexibility between Gen Z and Millennials when working from home.
- H4a: Work-life conflict is negatively associated with productivity when working from home, in the case of Gen Z.
- H4b: Work-life conflict is negatively associated with productivity when working from home, in the case of Millennials.
- H5a: Flexibility is positively associated with productivity when working from home, in the case of Gen Z.
- H5b: Flexibility is positively associated with productivity when working from home, in the case of Millennials.
- H6a: Flexibility is negatively associated with work-life conflict when working from home, in the case of Gen Z.
- H6b: Flexibility is negatively associated with work-life conflict when working from home, in the case of Millennials.

2. Research methodology

A survey-based approach was selected as it allows for statistical comparison and the identification of relationships among three key constructs: work-life conflict, productivity and efficiency, and flexibility when the employee is working from home. Data were collected through an online survey distributed between September 2025 and March 2026 using a convenience sampling approach. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and university-related online groups. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were given unlimited time to complete the questionnaire and could withdraw from the survey at any point. The final sample consisted of 207 respondents, which, as Wilson VanVoorhis et al. (2007), suggest is generally considered adequate for obtaining reliable statistical results.

This sample is divided into two generational cohorts, established based on commonly used classifications in generational research (Dimock, 2019): Gen Z participants ($n = 127$), aged between 18 and 28 years, and Millennials ($n = 80$), aged between 29 and 44 years. In the sample there are mostly residents from urban areas (169) and women (118). Regarding educational background, 58.5% of respondents completed a bachelor's degree. All participants have experience with WFH.

The questionnaire consisted of 14 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly agree" and 5 indicated "strongly disagree." This reverse-oriented scaling was maintained throughout the analysis, meaning that lower mean values reflected stronger agreement. The instrument was adapted from the Employee Work-Life Survey (EWLS) (Balagiu, 2023), retaining only the constructs relevant to the study: work-life interference, productivity/effectiveness, and flexibility, while excluding organizational trust. The questionnaire was translated and administered in Romanian. Items that did not demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency ("I am happy with my work life balance when e-working remotely") or conceptual alignment ("If I am interrupted by family/other responsibilities whilst e-working from home, I still meet my line manager's quality expectations") were excluded from the final constructs to improve reliability and interpretability.

For each construct, an index was calculated which allowed the examination of broader WFH experiences, between groups of comparisons, and relationships among the main variables. Prior to scale construction, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α (Bujang et al., 2018). The work-life conflict construct (4 items; "My e-working takes up time that I would like to spend with my family/friends [...]", "When WFH I often think about work related problems outside of my normal working hours", "Constant access to work through e-working is very tiring", "My social life is poor when e-working remotely") measured negative spillover between work and personal life. The scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.718$) and was computed as the mean of the selected items. The productivity construct (3 items; "When WFH I can concentrate better on my work tasks", "WFH makes me more effective to deliver against my key objectives and deliverables", "My job productivity has increased by my ability to WFH") assessed perceived efficiency, focus, and output when WFH. This scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.911$). Finally flexibility (3 items; "My supervisor gives me total control [...] when e-working", "My work is so flexible I could easily take time off [...] when I want to", "My line manager allows me to flex my hours to meet my needs [...]") measured autonomy, scheduling freedom, and the ability to manage work around personal needs. This scale also showed strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.829$).

All data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Following data entry, variables were checked for accuracy, consistency, and completeness. Given the Likert scale orientation (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree), Table no. 1, particular attention was paid to maintaining consistent interpretation across variables. No reverse coding was required within the finalized scales, as items were grouped according to conceptual alignment and directional consistency. Descriptive statistics were computed for all composite variables, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values. This analysis provides an overview of respondents' general perceptions of WFH.

Table no. 1. Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients

Variable	Gen-Z Mean (SD)	Millennials Mean (SD)	Cronbach's α
Work-life conflict	3.57 (1.17)	3.88 (0.88)	0.718
Productivity	2.19 (1.33)	1.90 (1.13)	0.911
Flexibility	2.40 (1.30)	2.37 (1.09)	0.829

Source: Author's own work

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

The results showed that: Flexibility ($M = 2.08$) and Productivity ($M = 2.39$) had a low mean, indicating that WFH is perceived as a productive and flexible environment for the responders. Work-life conflict had a higher mean ($M = 3.69$), indicating that respondents tended to disagree with statements reflecting conflict, suggesting relatively low levels of perceived conflict. Standard deviations for all variables exceeded 1, indicating a moderate degree of variability in responses across participants.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether significant differences exist between Gen-Z and Millennials across the three key constructs: work-life conflict, productivity, and flexibility. Prior

to interpreting the t-test results, Levene's test for equality of variances was assessed. In all cases, the assumption of equal variances was violated ($p < 0.05$), and therefore, results from the "equal variances not assumed" rows were used. The analysis revealed a significant difference in work-life conflict between generations ($p < 0.05$), with Millennials reporting lower levels of conflict compared to Gen-Z. These results revealed a statistically significant difference ($t = -2.162$, $p = .032$), supporting H1. However, the observed effect size was small (Cohen's $d = 0.29$), suggesting that the practical magnitude of the difference between the two groups is limited. No significant differences in productivity ($p > 0.05$) or flexibility ($p > 0.05$) between the two groups were observed. The difference in productivity demonstrated a small effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.23$), while the difference in flexibility showed a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.02$). These findings suggest that overall perceptions of productivity and flexibility are largely similar across generations, leading to the rejection of H2 and H3.

To further explore the relationships between the key constructs, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted individually for each generational group. The dataset was split by generation using the "Split File" function in SPSS, allowing correlations to be examined separately for each group.

Among Gen-Z respondents, all three variables were significantly correlated, sustaining H4a, H5a, and H6a. A strong negative correlation was observed between work-life conflict and productivity ($r = -0.607$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that higher levels of conflict are associated with lower perceived productivity. Additionally, work-life conflict was moderately negatively correlated with flexibility ($r = -0.422$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that increased flexibility is associated with reduced conflict. A moderate positive correlation was found between flexibility and productivity ($r = 0.465$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that greater flexibility is linked to higher productivity levels. Overall, these results suggest a highly interconnected relationship among the three constructs for Gen-Z, with flexibility playing a central role in influencing both productivity and work-life conflict.

For Millennials, a somewhat different pattern emerged. A moderate negative correlation was found between work-life conflict and productivity ($r = -0.522$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher conflict is associated with lower productivity, consistent with the findings for Gen-Z. Flexibility was positively correlated with productivity ($r = 0.299$, $p = .007$), although this relationship was weaker compared to that observed among Gen Z respondents. As such, H4a and H5b are accepted. Notably, no statistically significant relationship was found between flexibility and work-life conflict ($r = -0.130$, $p = .252$). This result rejects H6b and suggest that, for Millennials, flexibility does not play a significant role in reducing perceived conflict.

3.2. Discussions

Overall, the results suggest that WFH is perceived positively by respondents. Participants reported high levels of flexibility and relatively strong productivity, alongside low levels of work-life conflict. These findings reinforce existing literature (Toscano et al., 2020; Charalampous et al., 2022) that positions remote work as a flexible arrangement capable of enhancing employee autonomy and efficiency. At the same time, the variability in responses indicates, as stated by other research (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022) that WFH experiences are not uniform and may depend on individual characteristics and contextual factors.

Perceived work-life conflict, productivity and flexibility between Generation Z and Millennials.

In terms of generational differences, the study found that Millennials experience significantly lower levels of work-life conflict compared to Gen-Z (*H1, accepted*). As noted by Nelson (2023), millennials already have a greater professional experience that better helps them in establishing boundary management strategies, which in turn enable Millennials to better navigate the challenges of remote work. However, this result contradicts other research (Smirnykh, 2024), that found Millennials can also experience work-life conflict due to increase family responsibility, as an example. However, no significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of productivity and flexibility (*H2, H3, rejected*) suggesting that both generations are similarly capable of maintaining performance and benefiting from the autonomy offered by WFH. Although research states (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021). that Gen-Z's reduced work experience and increased exposure to digital environments may cause them to be vulnerable to boundary blurring and over engagement at work, our findings suggest that this doesn't seem to make a difference against the Millennials higher work experience (Nelson, 2023).

Perceived work-life conflict, productivity and flexibility across Gen-Z and Millennials.

The most notable contribution of this study lies in the analysis of relationships between variables across generations. While both groups demonstrated a negative relationship between work-life conflict and productivity (*H4a, H4b, accepted*), and a positive relationship between flexibility and productivity, the strength and structure of these relationships differed (*H5a, H5b, accepted*).

For Gen-Z, flexibility played a central role, being significantly associated with both increased productivity and reduced work-life conflict (H6a, accepted). This indicates that flexibility functions as a key mechanism through which WFH outcomes are shaped for younger employees. In contrast, for Millennials, flexibility was only weakly related to productivity and showed no significant relationship with work-life conflict. Previous findings (Waworuntu et al., 2022) noted that contemporary work behaviors show up differently across generations, and our results show this to be true. This difference could be attributed to what Millennials may consider important or as a driving factor in their personal life (increased responsibilities such as family or domestic duties) as well as already established professional habits (Frost, 2025). Furthermore, Gen-Z is at a different stage of life, where habits are still forming and discovery of self just begins, especially career wise, which may explain why flexibility is more valued. As other studies noted (Saura et al., 2022; Kłopotek, 2017), in a remote work context, this allows employees to structure their time around their own convenience and when they believe to be most productive, instead of relying, as Millennials on professional habits.

Conclusions

This study set out to examine how working from home (WFH) influences work-life conflict, productivity, and flexibility, with a particular focus on differences between Gen-Z and Millennials. The findings provide a nuanced perspective on remote work, highlighting both its overall benefits and the ways in which its effects vary across generational groups. These findings have practical implications for organizations designing remote or hybrid work policies. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective, as different generational groups respond differently to the same working conditions. For younger employees, providing clear structures, boundary-setting support, and guidance on managing flexible work may be particularly beneficial. For more experienced employees, flexibility can be maintained as a supportive feature, but additional factors influencing work-life balance should also be considered.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences. Third, some questionnaire items did not form reliable scales, indicating potential issues with construct validity. In addition, few sample imbalances have been noted in terms of generation groups between Gen Z (127) and Millennials (80), urban responders (168) and women (118) were predominant. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution and within the study's context. Lastly, no pilot-study was conducted before hand which may impact how well the questions were understood, as well as the results. Future research could refine the measurement instrument and employ longitudinal designs to better capture changes over time.

In conclusion, while WFH offers clear advantages in terms of flexibility and productivity, its impact is shaped by generational differences, particularly in how key variables interact. By recognizing and addressing these differences, organizations can better tailor work arrangements to support diverse employee needs and enhance overall effectiveness in remote work environments.

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Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement

ChatGPT (version 5.0) was responsibly used for language improvement. After this process, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the present article.

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