

Work-Life Balance through a Salutogenic Lens

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1. Introduction: The Entrepreneurial Balance Crisis

“Work–life balance hasn’t been my strength, but I’m trying to get better and give my family and grandchildren more of my time... Work–life balance is important for our health and the health of our families.” – Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (WHO Director-General) – (From his public LinkedIn reflection on balancing service and family life.). This post highlights the critical importance of Work Life Balance as a foundational element of professional and personal well-being.

Work-life balance (WLB) in entrepreneurship is the dynamic equilibrium entrepreneurs attempt to accomplish between the intense demands of the enterprise, like extended hours, uncertainty, and role multiplicity, and personal areas, including family, leisure, wellbeing, and self-care. Work-life balance, defined as the equilibrium between professional obligations and personal pursuits, is integral to individual well-being and satisfaction. Disproportionate workload and conflicts between entrepreneurial role and personal life are the substantial challenges confronted by the entrepreneur. As individuals increasingly board on entrepreneurial journeys, questions arise about the connection between their professional ambitions and personal lives. Unlike employees bound by fixed time schedules, entrepreneurs have high autonomy but face indistinct boundaries, inescapable work intrusion, and pressures that are self-induced. Therefore, the multi-layered relationship between entrepreneurship and work-life balance is a subject of growing interest and importance.

Entrepreneurs often give importance to work, viewing it as passion-driven; however, available literature shows that poor work-life balance leads to burnout, reduced firm growth, and lower subjective well-being.

Sirgy and Lee (2018) characterized work-life balance definition's in to two main dimensions, the first being engagement of role across various roles in work and non-work life, and the second one, minimal conflict between work and non-work roles. They identified at least four diverse definitions of work-life balance, within the overall dimension of engagement in multiple roles. The first definition involved observant engagement in the various roles (e.g., Marks 1977; Marks and Mac Dermid 1996; Sieber 1974). The second definition involves equal time and involvement among the various roles (e.g., Greenhaus et al. 2003; Kirchmeyer 2000). The third definition is composed of satisfaction through life domains (e.g., Clark 2000; Greenhaus et al. 2003; Kirchmeyer 2000). The fourth definition of work-life balance involves well-adjusted involvement and satisfaction through all the domains of life. Specifically, this is defined as the distribution of psychological energy and time in a well-adjusted way while deriving much satisfaction from both domains (Greenhaus et al. 2003).

A 2024 IJRASET survey found entrepreneurs recognize Work Life Balance's role in productivity but cite excessive workload and role conflicts as barriers, with coping via boundaries yielding mental health gains. Brunel University's 2019 study reveals that entrepreneurs reject rigid boundaries, working "everywhere," prioritizing work over life, yet desiring integration for sustainability.

Hustle culture glorifies relentless work, continuous availability, and personal sacrifice as rudiments for entrepreneurial success, often at the expense of respite and well-being. Popularized in the 1990s-2000s entrepreneurial booms, it claims sleep deprivation and blurred boundaries as virtues, correlating with higher burnouts and stress, despite short-term gains, with 58% hobby loss among adherents. Also, it is noted that 82% of Adobe's 2025 surveyed entrepreneurs lost sleep over work.

Across the world, workers now rank work-life balance above monetary rewards as a top motivator, signalling a shift towards well-being as a core driver of work engagement and sustainable economic performance, as reported by the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 survey.

As discussed above, entrepreneurs frequently confront work-life balance (WLB) challenges due to not-so-defined personal-professional boundaries that affect venture sustainability. Mentoring significantly improves entrepreneurs' work-life balance (WLB) by giving guidance on role management, boundary-setting and resource allocation. Meantime, mentoring also facilitates family integration through shared personal insights and support networks. Research indicates that mentors who share personal knowledge double mentees' satisfaction with personal-professional balance, extending to entrepreneurial contexts where family dynamics intersect with business demands.

2. Theoretical Landscape of the Work-Life Interface:

In entrepreneurship contexts, a few significant salient theoretical frameworks that explain how personal social structures of entrepreneurs, which include family networks, cultural norms, and institutional supports, create trails for entrepreneurial behaviour and resource mobilization: namely, Border, Boundary, Spillover, and Job Demands-Resource model are discussed herewith.

Border Theory, conceptualized by Clark (2000), views work-life balance as managing penetrable borders between work and family domains. Individuals as "border-keepers" or "integrators" negotiate time, space, and role transitions; flexible borders suit entrepreneurs but risk interference. Strong border strength (e.g., routines) preserves resources. The fluidity and permeability of the boundaries between entrepreneurs' work/non-work domains and the frequency of border crossing, which is almost uncontrollable, especially from the work domain to the non-work domain, is described as work/non-work border blurring.

Boundary Theory, established by Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000), is a socio-cognitive framework. It explains how individuals create, maintain, and manage boundaries between their various life roles—most notably between work and family. This theory views boundaries as psychosocial lines separating life roles. Entrepreneurs blur them via role accumulation, enabling enrichment but intensifying conflicts. Punctuated transitions (e.g., mentoring sessions) aid management. Empirical studies show integrators report higher satisfaction with support networks.

Spillover Theory: This Theory (Staines, 1980; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990) postulates bidirectional transfer of moods, attitudes, behaviours, skills, and energy between work and family domains. Positive spillover occurs when experiences, moods, skills, values, or behaviours from one domain (work/family) transfer beneficially to another, enhancing performance and satisfaction. For entrepreneurs, positive work-to-family spillover manifests as job-derived energy (e.g., venture achievements) boosting family engagement and subjective well-being, while family support elevates work motivation. Negative spillover, within spillover theory (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), occurs when experiences, stress, moods, behaviours, or fatigue from one domain (work/family) detrimentally transfer to another, impairing functioning and satisfaction. According to this study, the four Dimensions of Spillover are:

1. Negative Work-to-Family like stress or exhaustion from work hindering home life
2. Negative Family-to-Work, like home responsibilities, reduces effort at the job
3. Positive Work-to-Family like skills or moods from work, helping at home, and

4. Positive Family-to-Work, like a supportive home life, helps manage job pressures.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model: This model, postulated by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli (2001), categorizes work characteristics into two processes, predicting employee well-being: job demands and job resources. High workload, emotional strain, and role conflict are the job demands that deplete energy, leading to exhaustion/burnout. Autonomy, support, and feedback are the job resources that foster motivation, engagement, and growth. Excessive demands cause physiological/psychological strain. Resources buffer demands, promote learning goals. The high resources mitigate demand effects; imbalance predicts Work Life Balance failure. The JD-R model brings out how "entrepreneurial job demands" (uncertainty, 24/7 responsibility) often outstrip available "job resources" (autonomy, flexibility), leading to strain.

3. Salutogenesis: Sense of Coherence as a Well-being Framework

The concept of Sense of Coherence (SOC), from Antonovsky's salutogenic model, comprising comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness, reinforces entrepreneurial work-life balance by empowering entrepreneurs to see stress-causing factors as organized, resource-supported, and worthy of engaging, cultivating entrepreneurial tenacity amid calamity. SOC, from Antonovsky's salutogenic model, arms people to cross chaos through three components: understanding stressors (comprehensibility), accessing coping resources (manageability), and viewing challenges as motivating (meaningfulness). High SOC promotes health and well-being under adversities.

Sense of Coherence (SOC) enables entrepreneurs to transform chaotic disruptions into manageable opportunities, thereby directly improving work-life balance through its three core components: Comprehensibility, Manageability, and Meaningfulness. SOC's comprehensibility empowers entrepreneurs to perceive crises as organized rather than chaotic, facilitating swift sense-making. Comprehensibility enables entrepreneurs to perceive business stressors (market volatility, role conflicts) as structured and predictable rather than chaotic, reducing cognitive overload from blurred work-family boundaries.

Manageability equips entrepreneurs with resources (networks, time allocation strategies) to handle Work Life Balance demands like dependent care and role overload, preventing resource depletion (COR theory). Mentoring's network brokering directly builds this capacity. Manageability is associated with resource distribution during severe adversities and sustained recovery. Manageability provides resource

mobilization capacity—networks for dependent care, financial buffers for health maintenance, mentoring for boundary skills—directly countering role overload and support deficits.

Meaningfulness of SOC translates crises into purpose-driven growth opportunities. This is the hallmark of Work-life balance. Entrepreneurs showcasing "optimism" and "proactivity" viewed pandemic challenges as learning experiences. Meaningfulness transforms entrepreneurial sacrifices into purposeful investments, aligning venture goals with family priorities to combat hustle culture and foster integration. It reframes entrepreneurial sacrifices as purposeful investments, sustaining motivation despite long hours while preserving family commitments as equally significant, preventing negative spillover.

High comprehensibility equips entrepreneurs with a superior sense-making during adversities—discerning regulations, market signals, and stakeholder reactions — reducing cognitive overload from unpredictable role conflicts that erode work-life balance (WLB). High manageability mobilizes critical Work Life Balance resources like networks, finance, and time allocation, with mentoring emerging as the most effective catalyst through strategic introductions and boundary guidance. High meaningfulness fosters tenacity, reframing entrepreneurial failures and sacrifices as purposeful investments worth sustained effort, countering role depletion.

4. The Role and Reality of Entrepreneurial Mentoring:

Mentoring nurtures entrepreneurial work-life balance by extending emotional support, navigational expertise, and social leverage, enabling entrepreneurs to cross over adversities, live through let-downs, and acclimatize well. Every inexperienced company hopes to reach new heights. It wants to leave a lasting imprint. However, many Startups do not get off the ground. There is always someone nearby who is knowledgeable and experienced in a certain profession and can offer advice (Haddoud et.al. 2022). These individuals assist as mentors in a way. Mentorships for startups can assist business owners in resolving crises. Mentors naturally have a wide contact network which includes professionals, investors, vendors, customers, and stakeholders, because they have been in the field for long. Review points out that mentoring programs improve psychological well-being and resilience through social capital expansion, effective stress management techniques, and decision-making under uncertainties, reducing burnout in entrepreneurs (D’Oria et al., 2025).

St-Jean & Audet (2012) emphasise that mentors offer emotional reassurance and technical guidance, building novice entrepreneurs' confidence and resilience during isolation and stress. In the study titled “The role of mentors in addressing issues of work–life integration in an academic research environment”

by Durbin DR, House SC, Meagher EA, and Rogers J G. (2019), the results show that mentees' self-reported skills in addressing work-life issues can be improved through a structured training approach.

Effective mentoring equips mentees with boundary-setting skills (e.g., time-blocking rituals), delegation competencies (identifying delegable tasks), and time management frameworks (prioritization matrices), directly addressing Rincy-Panchanatham's core Work Life Balance dimensions. St-Jean, E.& Mathieu, C. (2015) demonstrate the direct effect of mentoring on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which mediates the relationship between satisfaction of being an entrepreneur and the intention of staying in the profession. Moreover, according to the study, mentoring has a direct effect on intention and an indirect effect on satisfaction. These findings may be due to the awareness of novices regarding the limitations of their new business project. Mentoring should come earlier in the entrepreneurial process, as entrepreneurs are closely tied to their business enterprise, so that the process can influence career satisfaction and retention. Also, Cronje (2025) proposes that coaching and mentoring can enhance the confidence and self-belief of survival-driven entrepreneurs, helping them steer through challenges in the initial stages of the entrepreneurial journey. With its exploratory approach, Coaching, helps the transformational development of entrepreneurs by changing their self-perceptions, aligning with an evolutionary coaching relationship. On the other hand, mentoring relies on the mentor's experiences and skills, using a directive communication style. Here, the mentor's knowledge serves as the primary learning resource. The results indicate that coaching primarily supports the growth of self-regulatory processes, such as affective and motivational aspects, whereas mentoring primarily fosters cognitive processes.

5. Methodology and Results:

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Empirical Analysis of Work-Life Balance Deficits among Sampled Entrepreneurs

Objective: To study the effect of mentoring on the Work Life Balance of entrepreneurs and compare the effect of formal Vs. informal mentoring, synthesising theoretical concepts with empirical analysis of data collected from 50 entrepreneurs. This paper employs a descriptive study design combining a narrative literature review with cross-sectional empirical analysis of purposive sample data with Conceptual Recommendations.

Methodology: Data from 50 entrepreneurs from the small and medium-scale service sector in Greater Chennai was collected purposively through a structured Work Life Balance questionnaire. The purposive sampling technique was used. The descriptive statistics method was used for data analysis.

The questionnaire was adapted from the WLB Questionnaire by Rincy V. Mathew and N. Panchanatham (2010). Data was collected from entrepreneurs in the service sector in small and medium scale at Greater Chennai using the survey method to assess work-life balance of entrepreneurs, both Mentored and non-mentored, and also to identify patterns and validate theories. This study employed purposive sampling to select 50 entrepreneurs in the service sector in small and medium scale at Greater Chennai and a questionnaire survey as the primary data collection method using a validated Work Life Balance questionnaire. The sub dimensions are Role Overload, Quality of health, Dependent care issues, time management, and support network.

I. Table-1 depicting the number of years in entrepreneurship

No. of years in entrepreneurship	One or less than one year	2-5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	More than 15 years	Total
Men	0	18	11	4	8	41
Women	3	3	1	0	2	9
Total	3	21	12	4	10	50

Of the 50 entrepreneurs, 3 are in entrepreneurship for less than one year, and 10 for more than 15 years. 74% of the entrepreneurs have been in entrepreneurship for more than 2 years and less than 15 years.

II. Table-2 depicting the mentoring status of the samples

Mentoring status	Mentored	Non-mentored	Total
Male	22	19	41
Female	4	5	9
Total	26	24	50

Of the 50 entrepreneurs, 26 were mentored, and 24 were non-mentored

III. Table-3 depicting the type of mentorship

Type of mentorship	Formal	Informal	Total
No. of mentored entrepreneurs	4	22	26

Of the 26 mentored entrepreneurs, 4 have received formal mentoring, while 22 have received informal mentoring.

IV. Table-4 depicting the Work-Life Balance of the Entrepreneurs

Work-life balance score	Excellent WLB (156-195)	Good WLB (117-155)	Moderate WLB (78-116)	Poor WLB (39-77)	Critical WLB (0-38)	Total
Men	3	3	28	7	0	41
Women	0	0	7	2	0	9
Total	3	3	35	9	0	50

On administering the questionnaire to measure all five sub-dimensions -Role Overload, Quality of health, Dependent care issues, time management, and support network, it is noted that only 6% of the entrepreneurs had an excellent work-life balance. i.e., only 6% of entrepreneurs effectively manage their role demands, maintain health, secure support networks, and exhibit strong time mastery across all dimensions. Similarly, only 6% had a good work-life balance with minor challenges in dependent care or time allocation, but sufficient resources and coping strategies to maintain satisfaction. Whereas, 70% of the entrepreneurs had moderate work life balance with noticeable imbalance; frequent role conflicts, health concerns or support deficits, requiring targeted interventions like mentoring, a considerable number of the entrepreneurs (18%) have poor work life balance, i.e., they have significant imbalance; pervasive role overload, time scarcity, and weak support networks indicate high burnout risk and negative spillover. None of the entrepreneurs had severe dysfunction; acute role conflicts across all dimensions that threaten entrepreneurial sustainability, family integration, and mental health.

V. Table-5 depicting the mentoring status with work-life balance of the entrepreneurs

Work-life balance score	Excellent WLB (156-195)	Good WLB (117-155)	Moderate WLB (78-116)	Poor WLB (39-77)	Critical WLB (0-38)	Total
Mentored	1	2	17	6	0	26
Non-Mentored	2	1	18	3	0	24

Total	3	3	35	9	0	50
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Of the 6% entrepreneurs with excellent work-life balance, 4% were non-mentored. From the table above, it is noted that there is no significant work-life balance impact on the mentored status of the entrepreneurs. Surprisingly, 70% of the entrepreneurs, exhibit moderate Work Life Balance that is both mentored and non-mentored. Data from 50 entrepreneurs suggests that mentoring does not significantly differentiate Work Life Balance outcomes.

Results and findings: Despite the widespread use of mentoring to support the entrepreneurs, data from 50 entrepreneurs suggest that mentoring does not significantly differentiate Work Life Balance outcomes. The descriptive analysis of the data collected posits that entrepreneurs are low in Work-Life Balance, irrespective of whether they were mentored or non-mentored. It indicates that current mentoring patterns remain inadequate to tide over Work Life Imbalance.

6. Discussion

Despite the widespread use of mentoring to support entrepreneurs, data from 50 entrepreneurs suggest that mentoring does not significantly differentiate Work Life Balance outcomes. The descriptive analysis of the data collected posits that entrepreneurs are low in Work-Life Balance, irrespective of whether they were mentored or non-mentored. Findings reveal no significant mentoring effect on Work-Life Balance, with formal/informal mentoring equally ineffective. It indicates that current mentoring patterns remain inadequate to tide over Work Life Imbalance. Informal networks provide psychosocial support but lack structured manageability training.

It can be noted that mentors often amplify entrepreneurs' meaningfulness (passion, purpose), boosting SOC-meaningfulness yet inadvertently worsening work-life balance by increasing job involvement and time-based conflicts (Symon & Whiting, 2019). High meaningfulness drives over-commitment—entrepreneurs sacrifice family time viewing work as "worth it"—creating the paradox where purpose erodes manageability.

Mentored entrepreneurs often perceive enhanced autonomy as freedom to work more intensively rather than rest, exacerbating time-based WLB conflicts (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001). Their typology reveals "workaholics" leverage flexibility for extended hours (60+ weekly), mistaking over-commitment for control, destabilizing Sense of Coherence-manageability while passion sustains meaningfulness, thereby underscoring mentoring's need for boundary training over unchecked independence. While

mentoring is generally expected to improve well-being, it may not address the structural and psychological drivers of poor work-life balance (WLB) in entrepreneurs. Hustle culture undermines long-term Work Life Balance and Subjective Well Being, clashing with salutogenic approaches.

The reason for poor work-life balance could be a performance-centric focus where mentors may prioritize business growth and "scale" over the mentee's holistic health. Mismatches in values regarding life balance between mentor and mentee could also be attributed to the poor work-life balance of the entrepreneurs. It is also possible that mentors who succeeded through extreme overwork (e.g., 996 cultures) may inadvertently validate poor WLB in their mentees. Mentoring could have been a "business resource" rather than a "well-being resource", as 84.6% of the mentored entrepreneurs in this study have received informal mentoring only. Obsessive passion (compulsive engagement) is strongly correlated with burnout and life conflict, and informal mentoring may feed this obsession rather than fostering "Harmonious Passion". Without institutional or ecosystem changes (e.g., reducing "hustle culture" pressure), individual mentoring remains insufficient to overcome structural Work Life Balance demands. A modest sample size is the limitation of the study.

7. Conclusion and Practical Implications

Poor WLB is an "occupational hazard" of entrepreneurship that mentoring, in its current form, i.e., informal mentoring, fails to mitigate. High meaningfulness fuels venture passion yet destabilizes the Sense of Coherence through manageability deficits, manifesting as pervasive role overload and time scarcity. Grounded in Salutogenesis and Sense of Coherence (SOC), the paper postulates that mentoring needs to be based on Salutogenesis, thereby enabling entrepreneurs to perceive stressors as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful, thereby easing role overload and nurturing harmonious professional-personal dynamics. Explicit Salutogenic Formal Mentoring targeting sense of coherence gaps for Work-Life Balance improvement is recommended.

Structured Salutogenic Mentoring emerges as the transformative intervention, explicitly targeting comprehensibility (role clarity workshops), manageability (time-blocking, delegation training), and balanced meaningfulness alongside business goals. Formal mentoring programs systematically addressing role overload, health quality, dependent care, time management, and support networks—integrated with SOC development would yield Work Life Balance improvements. Unlike 996 culture's burnout trajectory or autonomy illusion's over-commitment, this approach prevents negative spillover while harnessing positive transfer.

Mentoring functions as a pressure valve, converting psychosocial support into boundary competencies (Straus et al., 2019; Cronje, 2025). The integrated framework—mentoring → SOC → WLB → resilience—offers policymakers and accelerators a testable model for sustainable entrepreneurship. Future SEM validation on larger samples will confirm these pathways, positioning salutogenic mentoring as essential infrastructure for entrepreneurial ecosystems where human flourishing drives economic vitality. It is also recommended that mentors be trained in recognizing the "dark side" of entrepreneurial passion and burnout.

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