

# INTEGRATION PREFERENCE AS MODERATORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK-RELATED ICT USE OUTSIDE WORK HOURS AND WORK-FAMILY ENRICHMENT

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## Article history

**Received date** : 15-8-2024  
**Revised date** : 16-8-2024  
**Accepted date** : 30-8-2024  
**Published date** : 30-9-2024

## To cite this document:

Ahmad A., & Zakaria, M. N. (2024). Integration preference as moderators of the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family enrichment. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 9 (56), 35 - 46.

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**Abstract:** *Modern workplace demands cause employees to engage in work, even without written contractual obligations. The advancement in digital technology encourages an “always on” culture, blurring the line between work and family life. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has forced the use of mobile technology to perform work tasks among employees. Still, relatively little research has examined whether work-related ICT use outside work hours may help individuals benefit from multiple roles. This study investigated the effect of work-related ICT use outside work hours (WRICT) and work-family enrichment (WFE) experienced by non-academic employees in Malaysia. Specifically, the moderating roles of integration preference were considered in investigating the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours on WFE. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and an online survey was used to collect data. The sample consisted of non-academics from a public university in Malaysia (n = 690). Two statistical programs were used for the data analysis: Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The research revealed a positive effect between work-related ICT use outside work hours and WFE. Furthermore, the results showed that integration preference significantly moderated the relationship between WRICT and WFE. This study contributes to the literature on growing challenges in the work-family interface by demonstrating how work-related ICT use outside work hours (WRICT) impacts work-family enrichment (WFE). These findings suggest that for integrators, ICT use outside work hours may be favourable to meet both work and family roles, which has the potential to experience more work-family enrichment.*

**Keywords:** *Work-Related ICT Use Outside Work Hours, Work-Family Enrichment, Integration Preference, Non-Academic*

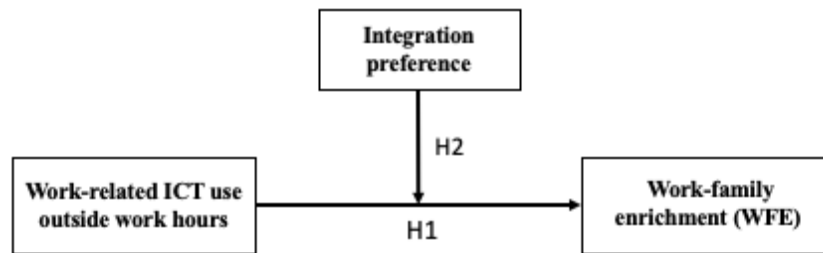
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## Introduction

In the current modern working environment, Information communication technologies (ICTs) are an integral element in today's workplace. Aside from increasing global competition, an aging workforce, an increase of women in the workforce, and the prevalence of ICTs have been identified as major trends that have an extensive and profound influence on employees' work and family lives (Jayasingam, Lee, & Mohd Zain, 2021). ICT use is engaging at work and home, making employees believe they must be available and accessible at all times (Andrade & Matias, 2021; Yang, Zhang, Shen, Liu, & Zhang, 2019). According to Tennakoon (2021), ICTs enable employees to balance their responsibilities at work with family duties and other roles. Thus, ICTs have transformed the nature of work practices into work time and non-work time and organized their work with greater flexibility, with many work roles becoming virtually boundaryless (Bliese, Edwards, & Sonnentag, 2017; Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016).

Moreover, the demands of living in the current times are causing conflict between work and family roles. These higher work demands, connected with new technological advances, allow work to integrate into non-work life (Dettmers, Bamberg, & Seffzek, 2016; Jain & Nair, 2020). Indeed, a large body of research in the work-family literature has mostly focused on negative spillover (i.e., work-family conflict) from work to family life that results from work-related ICT use outside work hours (Derks, Bakker, Peters, & Wingerden, 2016; Gadeyne, Verbruggen, Delanoeije, & De Cooman, 2018; Yang et al., 2019; Zoonen, Sivunen, & Rice, 2020). However, more recently, some studies have begun to examine the positive spillover (i.e., work-family enrichment) that occurs from the integration of ICT use between work and family life (Bauwens, Muylaert, Clarysse, Audenaert, & Decramer, 2020; McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010; Wan, Shaffer, Lau, & Cheung, 2019). So far, however, there has been little discussion about work-family enrichment that may result from work-related ICT use outside work hours (Derks et al., 2016; Gadeyne et al., 2018; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). It has been suggested that individuals who prefer integrating work and family domains are more likely to use communication technologies for work purposes after hours, whereas individuals who prefer segmenting are less likely to do so (Choroszewicz & Kay, 2019; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005; Thorel, Pauls, & Goritz, 2020).

As stated in past studies, the managerial and professional groups routinely take their work during their personal time and are exposed to work longer hours. However, within the context of Malaysia, we have little understanding of how work-related ICT use outside work hours might significantly impact work-family outcomes, specifically among professional occupations in public universities. Therefore, the central aim of this study is as follows: (i) to examine the effect of work-related ICT use outside work hours on work-family enrichment and (ii) to determine whether the integration preference plays a role in the influence that using work-related ICT outside of work hours has on work-family enrichment. The research model is presented below (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Research model**

## Literature Review

Work-related ICT use outside work hours is the use of communication technologies to communicate or perform work tasks with others outside of work hours (Gadeyne et al., 2018). The ICT use after hours has changed the connection to work through technological tools such as e-mail, mobile phones, and computers, where employees can stay connected to work even when not formally on working hours. Technology has fundamentally altered how individuals communicate, manage their work and family roles, and plan their careers (Nevin & Schieman, 2020). Research on work-related ICT use has found that technology use for work purposes acts as a double-edged sword for employees. While it contributes to employees' work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and work stress, it also enhances employees' work-family balance, work satisfaction, and work engagement (Andrade & Matias, 2021; Farivar & Richardson, 2020; Tennakoon, 2021).

### Work-Family Enrichment

Work-family-enrichment is "the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life, namely performance or affect, in the other role" (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p.73). Enrichment reflects the positive side of the work-family interface and is defined in terms of the beneficial effects of work on an individual's performance and quality of life in the family and vice versa. As Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz (2006) and Frone (2003) noted, work-family enrichment is conceptually and empirically different from work-family conflict. Both WFC and WFE, on the other hand, represent multiple dimensions comprising bidirectional relationships (i.e., work-to-family and family-to-work). Work-family enrichment has been identified as a multidimensional construct with three dimensions that work to work-to-family and family-to-work (Carlson et al., 2006); it includes work to family development, work to family affect, and work-to-family capital. The research to date has tended to focus on work-family conflict rather than work-family enrichment. Although many of the existing studies have investigated how work-related ICTs use outside work hours associated with work-family conflict (e.g., Andrade & Matias, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Tennakoon, 2021) some scholars have considered the positive influence between work-related ICTs use outside work hours and work-family enrichment (Ghislieri, Emanuel, Molino, Cortese, & Colombo, 2017; Mcmillan & Shockley, 2019; Wan et al., 2019). Thus, employees who use their technology tools for work purposes outside of normal working hours may have the flexibility to manage work and family domains, which is associated with improving work-family enrichment. The above discussion suggests the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Work-related ICT use outside work hours is positively related to work-family enrichment.

### Integration Preference as a Moderator

Integration preference refers to people having varying preferences for segmenting or integrating aspects of their work and family lives (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nippert-eng, 1996). Much literature has shown that employees who use work-related ICT outside of normal work hours may blur the lines between their work and personal lives. According to Boundary theory, employees vary in their preferences to integrate or separate life domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). This theory proposes that the employee's preference to integrate both life domains can have beneficial effects because high integration enhances the utilization of resources across domain boundaries (Junker & Dick, 2019; Reinke & Gerlach, 2021). Other studies reported that employees with integrated boundary strategies have strengthened the levels of WFE (Bansal & Agarwal, 2020; Carvalho, Correia, & Chambel, 2021; Padhi & Pattnaik, 2017). In addition, the study explained that an integrated boundary strategy would make the boundaries between roles flexible and permeable, leading to work-to-family development and work-to-family capital. Hence, the role of integration preference can be taken into consideration to strengthen the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-to-family enrichment. Considering previous findings and the effects of integration preference in influencing work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family enrichment, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**Hypothesis 2:** Integration preference moderates the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family enrichment.

### Methodology

#### Procedure and Participants

In this study, the sampling of the respondent is based on stratified sampling. The stratified sampling method was chosen as selecting respondents involves a process of stratification, followed by random selection from each stratum (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The population is first divided into mutually exclusive, relevant, appropriate, and meaningful groups in the study context. The sample consists of non-Academic from public universities. Therefore, the samples for the study were collected from 20 public universities in Malaysia. During an online data collection, 800 were sent out to the list of samples for each university to represent the population from each group proportionally. Finally, 690 responses were recorded, with a response rate of 86.25%.

#### Measures

All the constructs were adapted and adopted from past literature. The items for each construct are as in Table 1.

**Table 1: Research Instruments**

Construct	Statements
Work-related ICT use outside work hours	How often do you ICTs (Information and Communication Technology) in the following ways to perform your work outside of normal work hours (before or after work, on weekends, during vacations) in a week? (1) Smartphone (2) Personal computer (3) Laptop (4) Email (5) PDAs (Table, iPad)

(Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Gadeyne et al., 2018; Richardson & Benbunan-Fich, 2011)	How often do coworkers, division head, senior assistant registrar, director, or clients contact you about work-related matters outside normal work hours using ICTs (Information and Communication Technology)? Smartphone (2) Telephone (3) Email
	How many minutes per day you spent on work-related ICT use outside normal work hours using ICTs (Information and Communication Technology)?
Work to family enrichment (Carlson et al., 2006)	My involvement in work helps me to understand different viewpoints and this help me be a better family member. My involvement in work helps me to gain knowledge and this helps me be a better family member. My involvement in work helps me to acquire skills and this helps me be a better family member. My involvement in work puts me in a good mood and this helps me to be a better family member. My involvement in work makes me feel happy and this helps me be a better family member. My involvement in work makes me cheerful and this helps me be a better family member
Integration Preference (Kreiner, 2006)	I don't like to have to think about work while I'm at home. I prefer to keep work life at work. I don't like work issues creeping into my home life. I like to be able to leave work behind when I go home

The Cronbach's alpha values of all the scales exceeded the requirement minimum value of 0.7 (Awang, Afthanorhan, & Asri, 2015), and hence the scales under study are considered to be reliable. Table 2 presents Cronbach's alpha values for the various scales used in the study.

**Table 2: Cronbach's alpha values**

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha values for the current study</b>
1.Work-related ICT use outside work hours	0.864
2.Work-Family Enrichment	0.980
3.Integration Preference	0.703

## Findings

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 shows the demographic representation of the prospective respondents. The data were analyzed using SPSS software to obtain the value of frequency and percent for each group of variables. Respondents were primarily female (63.9%), married (79.6%), bachelor's degree holders (58.8%) and between the ages of 31 to 45 (67.7%). In this sample, 55.7% of respondents are provided with an ICT device for work-related purposes.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Groups	Frequency	Percent %
Gender	Male	249	36.1
	Female	441	63.9
Age	23-30	66	9.6
	31-37	188	27.3
	38-45	279	40.4
	46-52	112	16.2
	53-60	45	6.5
Marital Status	Single	123	17.8
	Married	549	79.6
	Divorced	18	2.6
Education	Bachelor's degree	406	58.8
	Master	249	36.1
	PhD	35	5.1
ICT Provided	Yes	384	55.7
	No	306	44.3

### Hypotheses testing

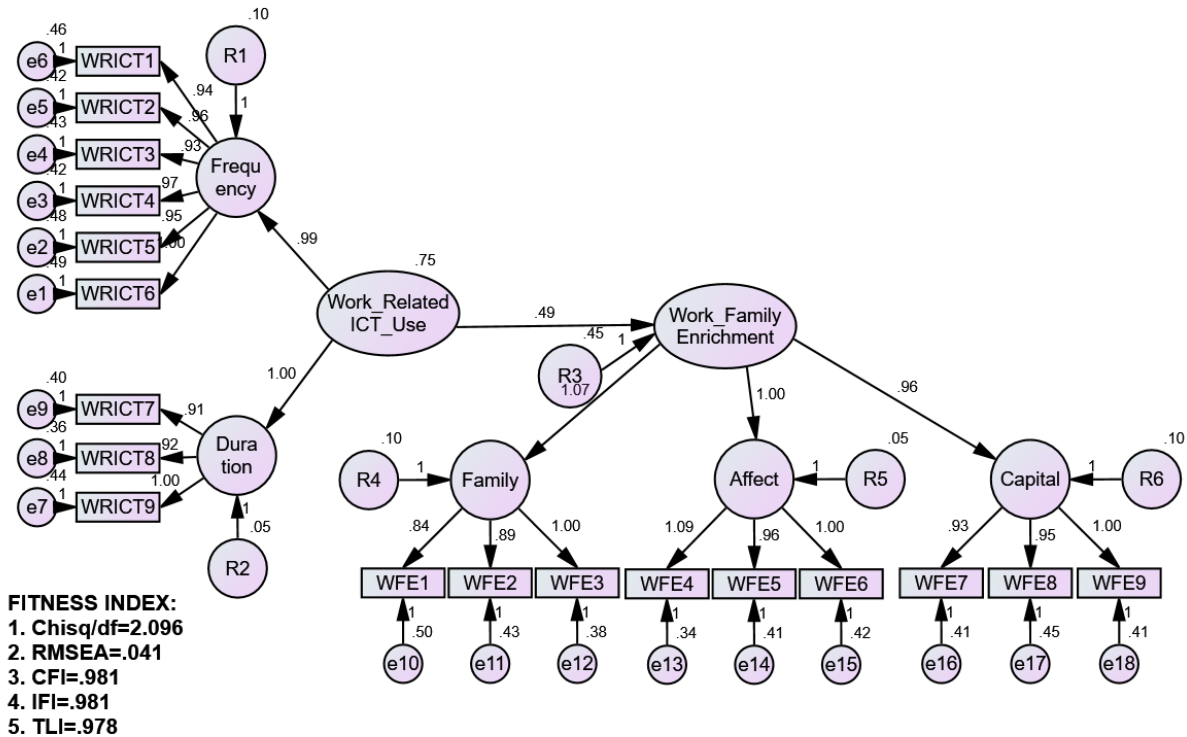
This study follows evaluation guidelines to analyze the first-order construct measurement and the structural model (Awang, Lim, & Zainudin, 2018). The first phase performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the measurement model of the key variables. The CFA was conducted to evaluate and validate the measurement model of work-related ICT use outside work hours, work-family enrichment, and integration preference. This study used chi-square/df, RMSEA, CFI, IFI, and TLI to represent parsimonious, absolute, and incremental fit to evaluate the measurement of model fitness. The chi-square/df is satisfied when the value is below 3.0, and RMSEA is below 0.08. CFI, IFI, and TLI demonstrate an excellent fit when the values estimated are above 0.95 (Kline, 2010). The CFA all the recommended threshold values (chi-square/df = 2.906, RMSEA = 0.041, CFI = 0.981, IFI = 0.981, and TLI = 0.978).

To test the study hypotheses, the SEM was used. For testing the proposed hypotheses above, the structural model was conducted to test the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family enrichment. The result is in Table 4 shows the standardized and unstandardized estimates. **Error! Reference source not found.** also shows the result for  $R^2$  values, in which the model is explained by 0.45 or 40%. For path coefficient estimates, it is revealed that work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family conflict have a positive and significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on work-family enrichment. The results are shown in Table 4. H1, the work-related ICT use outside work hours had a significantly positive effect (estimate=0.49,  $p < 0.001$ ) on work-family enrichment, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1.

**Table 4: Results of path coefficients**

Hypotheses	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
Work related ICT use → Work family enrichment	0.49	0.042	11.788	***	Significant

Note: \*\*\* indicates a p-value of 0.001



**Figure 2: Structural Model**

Hypothesis 2 suggested that the integration preference moderated the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family enrichment. To analyze this moderator, this study used the chi-square difference test to assess the significance result for the categorical moderators, as it is vital to understand the significant effect on each group. Both moderating effects were significant because the Chi-Square value for constrained and unconstrained models is more than 3.84, as depicted in Table 5. According to Hair et al. (2017), the moderator is statistically significant when the value of the chi-square difference is above 3.84. Thus, integration preference moderates the effect of work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family conflict. To identify the different low and high integration preference groups, the researchers compared the standardized regression weight and p-value for both groups. As indicated in Table 6, the low integration preference had a higher standardized estimate ( $\beta = 0.407$ ) than the high integration preference ( $\beta = 0.456$ ). Hence, the high integration preference dominates the relationship.

**Table 5: Moderating of Integration Preference between WRICT and WFE**

Group	Value	Constrained	Unconst rained	Chi-Square Difference	Result
Lower Form	Chi Square	208.625	98.184	110.441	Significant
	Degree of Freedom	61	60	1	
Upper Form	Chi Square	116.663	73.384	43.279	Significant
	Degree of Freedom	61	60	1	

**Table 6: Regression Weight on WRICT and WFE**

WRICT→WFC	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
Low Integration preference	0.407	0.047	8.717	***	Significant
High Integration Preference	0.456	0.067	6.811	***	Significant

### Discussion of the Findings

Modern information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly blurred the work/life boundary for many individuals. The study intended to understand the work-family interface by examining how ICT use outside working hours may enrich performance on the work and family. Increased use of work-related ICT use outside work hours results in positive experiences in one domain transferring over to positive experiences in another. A possible explanation for this might be that the use of ICT after hours to solve a work-related issue may transfer into more goal-directed behavior in fulfilling one's role at home and experiencing more positive emotions. Therefore, it can be assumed that the higher work-family integration has been positively linked to the strength of mood spillover between domains; thus, employees can enrich their work and family roles, resulting in a higher quality of life at home. Moreover, in light of the boundary theory, the capacity to transition from one domain to another when needed is a way to lessen conflict between roles, but it may also be a way to increase the benefit of multiple roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). This view is supported by Kreiner (2006), who writes that employees have varying degrees of maintaining the boundaries between work and non-work domains depending on the employee's ability to integrate or separate between domains to attain work-family enrichment. Results of this study indicated that work-related ICT use outside work hours will increase work-family enrichment among those with high integration preference because it allows for more flexible and permeable boundaries between roles. Overall, the results demonstrate the moderating role of integration preference on the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours and work-family enrichment.

### Practical Implication

Work-family outcomes are influenced by changes in work nature, technology, and social demographics. Our study shows that work-related ICT use outside work hours positively influences work-family enrichment; thus, organizations need to consider both strategies to increase positive spillover to work and family lives. This study also indicates that employees can use communication technology for their benefit. Although employees are highly engaged in work-related ICT use outside of work hours, it helps them achieve work-family enrichment. This technology revolution brings employees to work remotely and have flexibility, and the employee can remove the limit between work and personal life. These findings urge higher authorities of the public universities in Malaysia to be concerned about employees by providing policy with practical guidelines on how to achieve a good quality of life even outside regular work hours. Such as, management should recognize the diversity of their employee's needs and preferences for integration or segmentation of work and family domains to help employees meet their individual boundary preferences.



### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are a few limitations associated with the study. First, data were obtained from the survey responses of a random sample of non-academic employees of public higher education institutions in Malaysia. The findings were based on a survey conducted by Management officers and professional from non-academic staff in Malaysia. As mentioned by previous studies, managerial and professional workers are reported as groups who frequently use the Internet compared to other occupations (Chen & Karahanna, 2014; Duxbury, Higgins, & Thomas, 1996; Venkatesh & Vitalari, 1992; Wajcman et al., 2010). Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other populations. Second, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, thus unable to articulate causal relationships. Nevertheless, the result of this study was supported by the work-related ICT use outside work hours during the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, further research needs to be conducted on the impact of work-related ICT use outside work hours on work-family outcomes in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period not only in Malaysia but also in other countries.

The results suggest that work-related ICT use outside work hours significantly affects work-family enrichment. The present study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours on work-family enrichment (WFE). These findings may encourage organizations to emphasize employee's work-life issues by developing policies that include practical guidelines for achieving a beneficial effect even when working outside regular work hours and when connected to information and communication technology (ICT). Moreover, when employees prefer to integrate between work and family roles with strong integration preference, the work-related ICT use outside work hours has strengthened the impact on work-family enrichment. The findings extend previous research and contribute to a better understanding of ICT usage for work purposes after hours and work-family enrichment. Overall, our findings support the relevance of studying work-family boundary management to influence work-family enrichment (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

The results suggest that work-related ICT use outside work hours significantly affects work-family enrichment. The present study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the relationship between work-related ICT use outside work hours on work-family enrichment (WFE). These findings may encourage organizations to emphasize employee's work-life issues by developing policies that include practical guidelines for achieving a beneficial effect even when working outside regular work hours and when connected to information and communication technology (ICT). Moreover, when employees prefer to integrate between work and family roles with strong integration preference, the work-related ICT use outside work hours has strengthened the impact on work-family enrichment. The findings extend previous research and contribute to a better understanding of ICT usage for work purposes after hours and work-family enrichment. Overall, our findings support the relevance of studying work-family boundary management to influence work-family enrichment (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000).

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