Evaluating the impact of perceived information overload on work performance and the moderating effects of perceived work-life policy

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Abstract

Perceived Information overload (PIO) proceeds to be a trending subject among organizations and organizational psychologists due to its negative impact on work performance (WP). It is essential to enhance our knowledge about the employee's perceptions and experiences through information overload due to its significant role in work performance.

In this report, we will examine how the employees perceive their organization's work-life balance policies and how their perception of these policies reduces the negative impact of perceived information overload on work performance. The data (*N*=285) was collected from various countries (Canada, Netherlands, Greece, United States, etc.). Results show that – as expected – perceived information overload was negatively associated with performance. Contrary to the expectations, perceived work-life balance policies (WLBpol) did not buffer the negative effects of PIO but instead enhanced them. These findings provide insight to help us understand when WLB policies should be implemented and when information overload is the main problem. The results of this study could help organizations strategize and plan more effectively in terms of their training or work policies

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Perceived Information Overload, Organizational Policies, Work Performance.

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Perceived Information Overload

The workforce is constantly evolving, and work responsibilities and demands are increasing. Today's society is living in the pinnacle of the information era, where loads of information is given, and it may be expected to absorb this information. Information Processing Capacity theory refers to the capacity and ability of an individual to process information (Li et al, 2022). This is done through sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory. Working memory is the most active when working because people use working memory to solve problems, organize, innovate, and make good decisions. Research shows that people have clear limits to the brain's quantity and speed with which the brain can process this information. For instance, when told to remember a list of items in a short period, on average, people will only remember seven items (Miller, 1956). Organizations tend to hire employees that do well under pressure and successfully navigate their way in stressful, high-pressure situations sufficiently (Pârvu et al., 2014). Due to the high consumption of information being received from different channels throughout, it would become difficult to keep up with the demands and result in burnout complaints (Eliyana et al., 2020).

The ability to process or retain information becomes more difficult when the information being provided exceeds the capacity of an individual (Eliyana et al., 2020). For instance, when an abundance of information that would be enough for a three-hour training is compacted into a one-hour training. It would be too much information received in such a short period of time, which would make it difficult to process and retain any information. Based on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping Perspective (McGrath, 1976), information overload is a construct that occurs when individuals are receiving external information that exceeds the capacity to handle the stimuli at the rate which they are consuming. Furthermore, information overload tends to be present when an individual's capacity to process and retain information is compromised, which makes it difficult to make relevant choices in difficult or high-pressure situations (Eliyana et al., 2020). This can also be triggered by various factors in work settings that require employees to dedicate additional hours, work at a faster pace, or must process multiple sources of information simultaneously (Misra, Roberts, & Rhodes, 2020). Information overload is also associated with feeling burdened by a large quantity of information received at an excessive pace

that overburdens the process to absorb information efficiently or use effectively (Kumar et al., 2021).

Information overload is becoming a societal issue and may be the primary problem in organizations. Research categorizes information overload as a 'Decision Stressor', which displays a weakening effect on processing information when in high-pressure situations (Philips-Wren, and Adya, 2020). Aligned with Information Processing Capacity theory (Li et al., 2022), as the level of information increases and exceeds the capacity, this results in reduced attention to detail. This makes it more difficult to prioritize and distinguish important information for proper judgements (Philips-Wren and Adya, 2020). This inattentiveness to detail due to information overload was found to lead to increased errors and misjudgements while working (Thakur & Kumar, 2015). This is due to the overabundance of tasks requiring a significant amount of time and cognitive effort to complete but not being provided with the adequate time or resources to perform successfully (Thakur & Kumar, 2015). This research provides evidence that information overload plays a significant role in one's work performance (WP). This calls for action to help work towards solving information overload or finding strategies that reduce employees' perceived information overload (PIO). This current research study explores one way how organizations may approach information overload, which is through the exploration of perceived work-life policies (WLBpol) and their influence.

Work performance

Work performance is determined by ideals, goals, and values aligned with the company and the quality of the assigned responsibilities (Eliyana et al., 2020). The performance is the standard of what the organization hired the employee to do well. The quality of the performance is assessed by the manner of the tasks or achievements of a group or individual held to a specific standard by the organization (Philips-Wren & Adya, 2020). Therefore, performance is determined by the evaluation of action instead of the act itself (Motowidlo et al., 1997). In this study, we will measure the perceived evaluation of performance from the employee to get a sense of how they think they perform (assessed by how driven, adaptable, productive, or innovative the employee perceives themselves to be). The items also measure how productive the employee is believed to be through work performance. It is argued that work performance should

be defined through work productivity. This is because it is often used interchangeably to describe the other in the literature (Koopmans et al., 2011).

It is argued that work performance is the demeanour that all employees follow according to their positions in the organization (Eliyana et al., 2020). Some elements factor into work performance that is needed to ensure the quality of performance, such as the efficiency and the ability to make reliable decisions within the organization's timeline (Eliyana et al., 2020). These decisions tend to be dependent on the accuracy and relevant information from external sources. Work performance is considered to be a multi-dimensional concept which can be divided into dimensions; task performance, adaptive performance, and contextual performance (Koopmans et al., 2011). Task performance itself is argued to be also multi-dimensional concept as Campbell (1995) proposes five dimensions in relation to task performance (job-specific task proficiency, non-job-specific task proficiency, written and oral communication proficiency, supervision, and management). Task performance is associated with the proficiency with which primary job tasks are being executed. Additionally, adaptive performance refers to an employee's ability to adapt to various situations and changes in roles (Koopmans et al., 2011). This study specifically focuses on the task and adaptive performance; we aimed to collect insight on how adaptive one may perceive to be when overloaded with information or if PIO jeopardizes how they navigate through task performance. Contextual performance, though similar to adaptive performance, was excluded from this study due to being associated with how employees are in their interpersonal relations at work and cooperation with others.

Information overload and work performance

Employees who experience prolonged information overload can experience negative effects (such as depressive symptoms and impacting overall well-being) and fall behind in their work tasks which can be detrimental to their work performance (Matthes et al., 2020). Information overload is determined by the characteristics of the tasks provided (Oldroy et al., 2012). Therefore, when the demand to retain information increases, there is also a delay in information processing that is experienced which results in disrupted proficiency (Eliyana et al., 2020. For instance, when sharing information between colleagues, delays are encountered in information processing as the amount of information being shared increases. This is due to several sources from which the information is being received, which disrupts efficiency,

impacting an employee's performance at work and harming the organization (Eliyana et al., 2020).

Information overload likely weakens the quality of decision making which harms the quality of work performance (Eliyana et al., 2020). Information overload has been viewed as a negative phenomenon to work performance, representing a significant distraction to workflow and time dedicated to work tasks (Eliyana et al., 2020). In juxtaposition, Bloom and colleagues (2014) regarded it as one of the key drivers for developing specialized knowledge and professional skills for task performance. In this study, information overload was assessed to determine if it influences work performance.

Such patterns of disrupted efficiency impact an employee's work performance and harm the organization. Considering these findings, exploring how employees perceive information overload in the workplace can be a vital influential variable that may provide important insight into the workforce. This research study focuses explicitly on how employees perceive information overload, which would provide relevant knowledge of the intrapersonal work experience and their outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: High information overload predicts lower work performance.

Work-life balance organizational policies and work performance

As information overload can contribute to one's work performance, it is crucial to innovate ways that can allow employees to thrive in their work as they learn valuable things to help them succeed along the way. Work-life balance continues to be a subject of interest to scholars and organizational psychologists because it significantly contributes to the improvement of the performance of employees (Mendis & Weerakkody, 2014). It may seem logical to introduce work-life balance policies to reduce how overwhelmed employees may be due to stress from information overload. However, the extent to which organizations can manage their employees' work-life balance through their policies hasn't been thoroughly studied in the context of the effects of perceived information overload (Poulose & Dhal, 2018). Though the shortage of sources is becoming a topic of interest as growing numbers of organizations are taking initiatives to adjust their work policies to develop a healthier and more productive workplace (Aryee et al., 2013). The concept of balance between work and life experienced by the employee is precarious since employees must juggle loads of information at a time.

Studies have highlighted interactions between perceptions of work-life balance policies and an individual's productivity at work. This research provides evidence that if the perception of WLB policies is positive, it leads to increased employee performance (Mendis & Weerakkody, 2014). Policies as an organizational resource that are in place to enforce workplace flexibility have been linked to positive outcomes for both individuals and businesses. If perceived as a resource, employees can benefit from organizational policies, for instance, to buffer this negative effect, as it was found that organizational policies can increase work performance (Kumar et al., 2021). According to the Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) model, through the health impairment process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), job demands (e.g., many tasks and deadlines, time pressure, role stress) intensify personal strain (e.g., information overload), which leads to negative work outcomes for the employee, such as poor work performance. Also, this model further explains that employees who have an overload of work demands and lack of resources (e.g., social support, policies) experience more emotional and mental exhaustion than those who perceive to experience a balance between their work demands and resources.

A nationally representative survey of mid-sized to large-sized companies' employees revealed that employees' perceptions of policies that allowed for more flexibility in their work (schedules, autonomy in tasks, etc.) were strongly related to improved levels of work engagement and expected information retention (Richman, 2006). These policies made managing work and personal commitments more viable (Richman, 2006), which can ease employees from information overload. However, there is still room for further exploration of the moderating role of work-life policy and measuring the perceived capacity of information absorption preceding information overload, impacting work performance. It is an essential obligation for the organization to have appropriate policies that aid employees in maintaining an equilibrium between work and personal life. Examples of policies that promote healthy work conditions are policies that aim to sustain appropriate work processes (e.g., not having to work after work hours, not answering emails outside of work hours, etc.) (Valcour, 2007). According to previous studies, businesses benefit greatly from employees by improving policies to contribute to easier navigation between work and personal life (Ferguson et al., 2012). It was found that employees who perceive to have some control over their work tend to experience less stress and negative consequences (e.g., depression or harming well-being) (Lazar et al., 2010). Also, performance

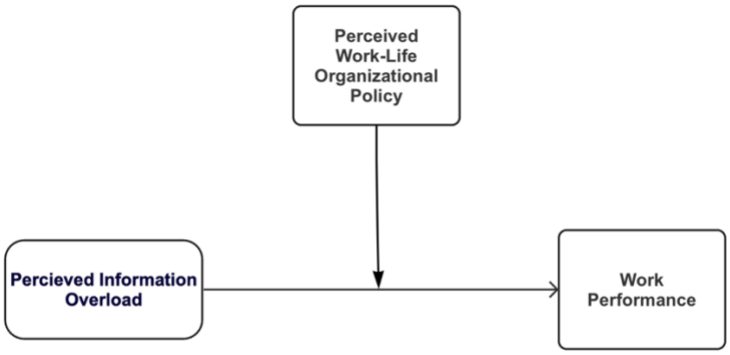
and retention of information improves by 30% from the implementation of work-life balance policies such as flexible work hours (Lazar et al., 2010). Consequently, many organizations that don't have these policies in place at work find it difficult to achieve stability, resulting in an impact on their employees' level of commitment to their work and harming their performance (Huang, Lawler, & Lei, 2007).

Substantive evidence can be seen in the relation between work performance and perceived work-life organizational policy (WLBpol), independent of that which exists between PIO and WP. This draws the need to explore and assess the combined effects of WLB policy and PIO on employees' performance at work. This research study aims to explore these relations through this model (Figure 1).

Hypothesis 2: Perceived work-life balance policies will qualify the association between information overload and work performance such that the negative effects of high information overload on work performance will be diminished.

Figure 1

Proposed research model



Note: The moderating effect of WLBpol on PIO and WP.

Methods

Participants and Design

A power analysis was conducted prior to starting the study to determine the appropriate number of participants needed for this study. Through G*Power, with a partial R^2 of .05 and a power of 80%, it has been concluded that the total sample size of this study requires 250 participants. Participants' eligibility to participate is determined if they work at least 16 hours a week and have been an employee at a company for at least six months.

A total of 317 participants started the survey. However, six were excluded due to being under the age of 18 or working less than 16 hours a week. Participants who met the requirements but didn't complete the survey will still have contributed to the data and were therefore included in our analyses. The final dataset (N = 229) consisted of 202 women (57.9%), 76 men (21.8%), and 1 non-binary individual (0.3 %). When excluding pairwise, the dataset consists of 192 participants who completed the study.

This study follows a correlational quantitative research design to test how perceived information overload influences work performance and to examine the moderating effect of perceived work-life balance policies.

Procedure

The online survey was collected in collaboration with students in the same Social, Health, and Organizational Psychology master's program. Consent forms, instructions and debrief forms were presented with the questionnaires in the Qualtrics survey platform (Appendix A). First, participants were given an informed consent form. In this, the aim of the study (to gain information about the workplace, relationships with co-workers, and workplace policies) was explained, and the participants were given all relevant information about their rights as a participant (we assured participants that they would remain anonymous and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time) and withdrawal procedures. Participants were reached through various platforms by sharing the link that directed them to the start of the survey. The questionnaire was organized in order of demographics, then each scale measuring its respected variables; first, participants were asked to fill out relevant background information, such as age, gender, education, country, industry, leadership position, and hours. Then, were presented with the scales from each researcher involved in the online survey to measure the respected variables.

The survey ended off with a debrief, which states the objectives of the studies, in which each researcher's research questions were presented. Lastly, the contact information of the researchers was included in case they have any questions or if they end up wanting to withdraw from the study. The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Ethical Approval

This research study was registered and approved through the Student Service of the Faculty Ethics Review Board of Utrecht University.

Measures

For this study, a questionnaire was given that consists of a 5-point Likert scale that provide ranks from 1 ("*strongly disagree*") up to 5 ("*strongly agree*"), unless otherwise mentioned.

Background information

Background information was measured by asking for information about their gender, age, where they were born and where they live now. As well as the highest level of education that was obtained, the industry of work, total hours of work a week in and out of the office, and whether they hold a leadership position or have to respond to a superior

Perceived Information Overload (PIO)

To measure PIO, we included an adjusted version of the Information Overload scale (Hunter & Goebel, 2008). The scale for this study allocates four items for PIO (e.g., "Sometimes I feel frustrated or overwhelmed during work due to the volume of information I must retain" The scale displayed good reliability (α= .84).

Perceived Work-Life Balance Policy (WLBpol)

To obtain data for PWLP, we included an adjusted version of the five items of Jahn and colleagues' (2003) Perceived Organisational Family Support (POFS). An example item was "My organization provides work policies and initiatives [flexible schedules, maternity leave, etc.] which consider the emergent needs of employees". The scale was deemed reliable (α= .75).

Work Performance (WP)

Work performance was measured through two dimensions which include 1) task performance (e.g., "I manage to plan out my work so that I finish on time") and 2) adaptive performance (e.g., "I work at keeping my job knowledge and skills up to date"), in correspondence with Koopmans and colleagues' Measuring Individual Work Performance (2011). The original scale includes four dimensions: 1) task performance, 2) contextual performance, 3) adaptive performance, and 4) counterproductive work behaviour. For this study, task performance and adaptive performance have been chosen due to being the most relevant in relation to the effect of perceived information overload. This is because task performance consists of elements that include: planning and organizing work, being result-oriented, prioritizing, and working efficiently (Koopmans et al., 2011). Information overload can impact the quality of task performance. Similarly, adaptive performance can be affected by information overload due to its performance indicators, including resiliency, critical thinking, up to date with job skills and knowledge, etc. Counterproductive work behaviour was considered less relevant to PIO due to measuring the interpersonal experiences with colleagues. Such as, if gossip or arguing is occurring in the workplace, which is not the direction of this study. Contextual performance was not included in this study because of the aim to measure interpersonal behaviour, and some displayed some overlap with task performance with regard to proactivity with tasks. Therefore, for this study task and adaptive performance were chosen due to the relevance and relation with the other variables. This scale was deemed reliable (α= .73).

Statistical Analysis

Results are analyzed in the IBM SPSS*20 software. Hypothesis 1 was analyzed through regression analysis in the inferential analysis of the data set. The main variables in this study consist of Perceived Information Overload (PIO) as the independent variable and Work Performance (WP) as the dependent variable, with Perceived Work-life balance policies (WLBpol) as a moderator. The moderation model testing for hypothesis 2 examining the moderation effect of WLBpol on PIO and WP was tested using the PROCESS macro SPSS extension for further analysis (Hayes, 2022).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

First, a correlational analysis was conducted to determine potential covariates from the background variables (industry, work hours, leadership status, education, & gender). Table 1 shows the correlations between gender and the three main variables in the research model of this study. It was displayed that gender showed a significant correlation to perceived work-life balance policies (WLBpol), indicating that gender differences may be prevalent in how WLBpol is perceived. Women might view policies to be more useful in the organization than men would, this may be because some policies target women more than men (maternity leave, childcare as an onsite provision). Based on these findings, we decided to include gender as a covariate in all the remaining analyses.

Second, we inspected correlations between the hypothesized variables (i.e., perceived information overload, work-life balance policies, & work performance). There was a negative correlation between perceived information overload (PIO) and work performance (WP), r=-.21, p = <.001, meaning that high perceived information overload is associated with lower levels of work performance. Also, perceived information overload (PIO) displayed a negative correlation with perceived work-life balance policies (WLBpol), r=-.22, p=<.001. This indicates that high information overload is associated with participants that were less likely to report that their organization implements work-life balance policies.

Overview of Analyses

The relationship between perceived information overload, work performance and perceived work-life balance policies were investigated. A test of assumptions was conducted to ensure that there is no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. One outlier was found but after examination, it was decided to still include it due to a large sample size.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test Hypothesis 1: high perceived information overload predicts lower work performance. In this model, the covariate (i.e., gender) was added in Step 1, and perceived information overload was added in Step 2.

Second, and to test the hypothesis that explores whether perceived work-life balance policies qualify the association between information overload and work performance (Hypothesis 2), we ran Model 1 of the PROCESS macro-SPSS version 4.1 (Hayes, 2022).

Does Perceived Information Overload Lowers Work Performance?

In line with Hypothesis 1, we indeed found that high perceived information overload lowers work performance. As shown in Table 2, there was a significant regression coefficient of perceived information overload on work performance, indicating that the higher information overload then results in lower work performance. The model explains 4.4 percent of the variance in work performance, R^2 = .044 F (2,189) =4.4, p<.001. Controlled for gender, alone did not have any significance but tested with PIO resembled statistically significant.

Does Perceived Work-Life Balance Policies Qualify the Association Between Information Overload and Work Performance?

In line with Hypothesis 2, there was indeed a significant interaction effect of perceived information overload and perceived work-life balance policies on work performance, b = -.069, t (187) = -1.9, p<.001. However, and contrary to Hypothesis 2, inspecting the slopes for perceived information overload at each level of perceived work-life balance policies showed opposite patterns (see Table 4). Specifically, there was no association of PIO on WP for the lower level of perceived (perceive to have low or no policies in place) WLBpol b = -.027, t (187) = -.49, p =.62 However, when participants perceived their organization on average or highly above average to have work-life balance policies in place, they also reported that higher perceived information overload was associated with lower work performance. So, perceived information overload negatively predicts work performance only when employees believe their organizations to implement WLBpol on average score of perceived WLBpol b = -.095, t (187) = -2.56, p<.001, and when WLBpol are perceived as high b = -.164, t (187) =3.3, p<.001.

Table 1

Means, SD's, and correlations between gender and the variables

Variable	*Mean*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Gender	1.28	.45	-			
2. PIO	2.72	1.01	-.141*	-		
3. WLBpol	3.37	.98	-.150*	-.217**	-	
4. WP	4.11	.52	.025	-.211**	.072	-

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

Regression Coefficients for predicting work performance

Model	*b*	*Std. Error*	*Beta*	95% CI	*t*	*p*
Gender	-.003	.081	.003	[-.162, .155]	-.043	.966
PIO	-.107	.036	-.211	[-.179, -.035]	-2.94	.004

Table 3

Predictor's relation to Work Performance Through PROCESS

Model	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Model 1: PIO	-.09	.03	-2.5	.011
Model 2: WLBpol	.02	.03	.53	.59
Model 3: Interaction	-.06	.03	-1.9	.05
Model 4: Gender	-.006	.08	-.08	.93

Table 4

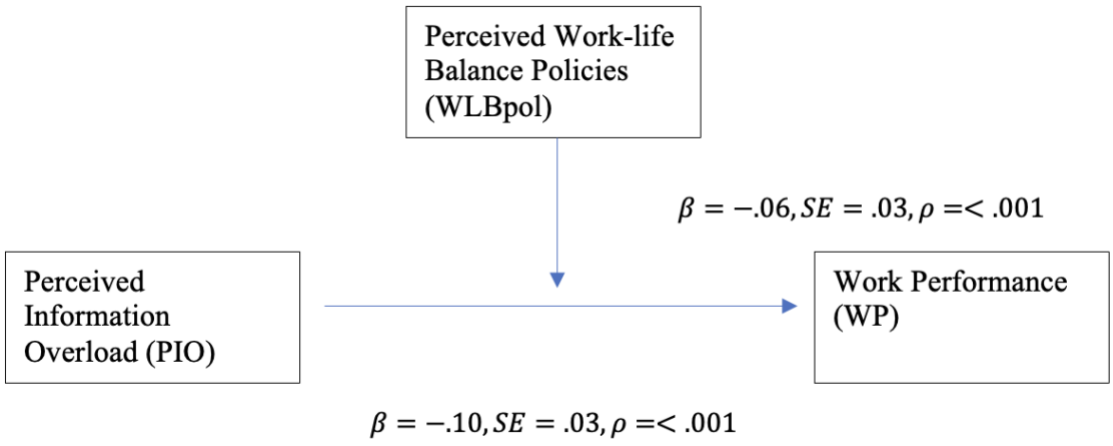
Slopes for perceived information overload predicting work performance at each level of perceived work-life balance policies

WLBPOL	*b*	*SE*	*T*	*p*
WLBPOL low	-.02	.054	-.49	.620
average WLBpol	-.095	.037	-2.56	.011
WLBPOL high	-.164	.048	-3.39	.0008

Note. WLBpol= perceived work-life balance policies, *b*= coefficient, *SE*= standard error.

Figure 2

Research Model including the results of the analysis



Discussion

In this thesis, I find support that high perceived information overload worsens work performance. When employees are perceived to be overwhelmed and overloaded with the information required for work, their work performance tends to suffer as a result. Second and unexpectedly, this thesis further shows that perceived high work-life balance policies can

negatively affect work performance when information overload is also perceived as high. This means that work-life balance policies do not buffer the negative effects of high information overload. However, information overload may predict negative outcomes in an organization. Implementing work-life balance policies at that level may cause more harm than good and, in the end, worsen work performance. Information overload can play a significant role in one's work performance.

Information Overload and Exhaustion on Work Performance

This finding aligned with hypothesis 1, which can be represented through the term *Information Fatigue Syndrome* (Thomas, 1998). Information fatigue syndrome suggests that overburdened by information damages the ability to make sound decisions, causes retention difficulties, and causes loss of work motivation, among other symptoms. Through this, employees believe they are expected to handle too much regarding work and are overloaded with information, which leaves them overwhelmed, resulting in decreased work performance. Being overwhelmed as a response to information overload leads to the damaged quality of performance and/or decreased motivation for work (Thomas, 1998). Research suggests that information overload happens because of the time pressure or restraint preventing the information from being processed effectively and, therefore, overloaded (Kock, 2000). In today's information age, work performance depends on the efficiency and the ability to make reliable decisions within the organization's timeline. To do so, the decisions are based on accuracy and relevant information from external sources, which if one is overloaded with information, one cannot do efficiently. Research suggests that if the amount of information that is received, goes beyond the threshold of one's cognitive capacity, it will result in a decline in quality of performance. This is because exceeding the information threshold will cause confusion or doubt, affecting an employee's retention and ability to prioritize information to then make reliable decisions (Zhuang et al., 2011).

Information overload can occur on the individual and organizational level. In this current study, we aimed to capture how information overload was experienced and affected by the demands set by the organization. Information overload can occur when the resources provided by the organization have failed and is a sign to take a different approach or reassess the situation (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021). Furthermore, information overload may also arise due to

unclear objectives or communication gaps with superiors of the organization, leaving the employee without guidance and overwhelmed.

It would be recommended for further research to examine information overload that may have been caused by personal factors. Research also shows that on a personal level, information overload can occur due to insufficient skills. The employee is accountable for the distress caused due to being insufficiently qualified for the task. On both levels, information overload on a personal and organizational level, research suggests that the negative influence of information overload tends to transmit into other aspects of life (work and personal life). This transmission prevents employees from performing optimally, which harms their overall decision-making and judgement, causing reduced efficacy and stress (Yan et al., 2016). Work performance will worsen if perceived information overload is not dealt with, whether on a personal or organizational level.

Information Overload and the Moderating Effect of Perceived Work-life Balance Policies on Work Performance.

It was found that when information overload is perceived to be high, it does more harm to have work-life balance policies compared to employees without these policies. However, when employees perceive that their company implements work-life balance policies and have lower perceived information overload, then they thrive in work performance.

This unexpected finding is in line with what is suggested by Perrigin and colleagues (2018), who examines the dark side of work-life balance policies. They found that these policies can cause more stress between work and personal life. This backlash from work-life balance policies then demonstrates a *spillover mechanism* reflecting how WLB policies lead to unintended negative consequences outside of the work domain and within their personal life (Perrigino et al., 2018). This can be displayed as frustrations from work that eventually start occurring in other aspects of personal life, which causes a domino effect of negative events.

Another potential explanation for the negative effects of high information overload and high perceived WLB policies can be a mismatch between the perceptions of employees and the people who develop and implement these policies. Research shows that nearly 100 percent of supervisors rated themselves as supportive of work-life balance, but that only half of the employees rated their supervisors as work-life supportive (Kossek et al., 2018). In this current

study, the scale items aimed to capture the perception of if their organization implements work-life policies and the perception of how supportive their organization is of work-life through their policies. Therefore, the perceptions and intentions of the organization with WLB policies don't account for the employees' perceptions and experiences of these policies. This finding brings attention to the fact that there needs to be an alignment between what the policies do and how the employees perceive work. Considering the current study, it could be that employees may perceive to have WLB policies. However, their experience with these policies is negative because they are still overloaded with information. Further research can take it further and explore supervisory support of WLB policies. In order for there to be increased effects on work performance, the policies need to be implemented and practiced correctly. Otherwise, the organization will experience the downside to having WLB policies, specifically in the performance of their employees.

The role of perceived supervisory support may be a potential predictor of information overload. Campo and colleagues (2021) found that there is a significant positive relationship in work performance with work-life balance and family supportive supervisor behaviour. Supervisor behaviours that were shown to be effective were emotional support, instrumental support, role modelling behaviours, and creative work-family management (Campo et al., 2021). Talukder and colleagues (2018) also found evidence in which emotional support from supervisors contributed to a work-life balance that was perceived to be helpful. This indicates that supervisor support goes beyond just the implementation of WLB policies, but they have to be an active participant to continuously make the policies effective by being involved. As supervisors become more involved the WLB policies have a higher chance of being effective (Campo et al., 2021). This is because in some cases WLB policies may be implemented to dismiss information overload, but employees continue to be overburdened by too much information. Additionally, supervisor support of WLB policies can potentially be a buffer against the negative effects of information overload. This can be through being involved and being aware of how overloaded the employees are, to then take further action (Campo et al., 2021).

Another alternative explanation for the adverse effects of WLBpol may be that the work-life policies that are being implemented don't necessarily target the actual problem in the organization. For instance, implementing onsite provisions such as childcare (a commonly implemented WLB policy; Friedman, 2001), however, only accounts for the people that have

children and are still overloaded with information at work because it doesn't benefit the majority of employees. This is because the onsite provisions can be used as an *enclosing policy* and enclosing employees within the workplace while simultaneously maximizing their availability for work (Bourdeau et al., 2019). This leaves employees under more supervision, less flexibility, and the inability to detach from work, which can leave employees still overloaded with information. Perceived utilization of work-life policies in the organization that are perceived as positive (employees found these policies helpful) tends to display an increase in positive attitudes toward work and increased performance (Hayman, 2009). However, in some cases, employees do not feel authorized to utilize the policies freely due to possible negative consequences, such as reprisals or withheld from promotions and delaying career advancements (Hayman, 2009). This may lead to resentment towards the organization and decrease work performance overall (Hayman, 2009). It is essential for employees to perceive work-life policies as a resource that diminish the high demands of work to allow employees to obtain the capacity and ability to carry out tasks successfully. Therefore, employees may acknowledge that their organization does have WLB policies but may also reflect negative attitudes. This is because they don't apply to the employee, or they aren't eligible to take advantage of the policies. Unfortunately, implementing work-life balance policies may have unjust intentions and are used as *control mechanisms* that aim to exert control over employees. For example, childcare is implemented as onsite provisions that are accompanied by longer hours in the office (Bourdeau et al., 2019).

Drawing the inference that WLB backlash reflects negative attitudes and behaviours among employees when the availability and the use of WLB policies are insufficient or relevant to the majority (Perrigino et al., 2018). Therefore, if information overload is high and seems to be what the majority of employees are struggling with, it is best to do something to reduce the information overload than to implement any work-life balance policies.

Practical Implications

Information navigation may be difficult to achieve when being overburdened by information. Often organizations implement work-life balance policies to dismiss how overloaded with information their employees are and then continue to overload them with information (Bourdeau et al., 2019). AL-Kumaim and colleagues (2021) suggest consulting and

personal skill techniques in order to regulate information overload. The consulting technique consists of relying on a supervisor for guidance which will diffuse the occurrence of information overload because they will be able to obtain clarification and support. Personal skill technique consists of adapting information management skills which include the ability to filter, categorize, and organize information as a reflection of information literacy. Organizations should take the time to train employees to ensure they have the adequate skills to navigate themselves in information management and increase their information literacy to better process information (Mutch et al., 1997). Also, implement time flexibility instead of time restraints to process information and provide time to detach from the work (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021). However, it is not enough to only choose a single method to concur information overload. Bawden and colleagues (1999) state that it cannot be solved in a single method but a combination of solutions due to the complexity of information overload. This is because information overload can be caused by various elements such as personal, environmental, organizational, etc. However, information overload is also well managed with coping strategies that align with information literacy (filtering, withdrawing, queuing, etc.) and would aid in discovering an equilibrium in consuming and understanding information that is presented (Bawden & Robinson, 2020). Hunter (2015) proposes an information overload scale that uses the data to guide the organization to gain insight to identify when information becomes harmful to work performance. In this current research study, we utilized a scale to generally measure PIO to gain a sense of how overloaded with information employees are. Hunter (2015) proposes a situation-specific scale in the context that is relevant to the company (information needed to improve sales, provide training, facilitate information-packed meetings, etc.). Providing a scale to check in with employees would be a proactive way to get insights on what is working and what isn't in terms of the resources provided and the system the organization works on.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has a few limitations. First, this study has been collected on a global scale with no restriction on countries. This approach was taken because collecting data from different countries can provide very interesting results, namely, to see how data differs from country to country. Some factors raise concerns about the validity of the questionnaire by country, for instance, language barriers to how they define information overload (Ulijn & Strother, 2012). It

is difficult to know if the items in the survey were understood the way they were meant to be understood.

There is also a possibility that some participants didn't fully understand the items and stopped doing the questionnaire halfway through. Opening the questionnaire to different countries was an effective way to reach the participant goal in a short period. Still, it may have risked the quality of responses. This is because we don't know the level of English understanding among these participants, which may have impacted the data. A recommendation for further research that is possibly being done on a larger scale may be to have country representatives to provide a translation or assistance in understanding. Alternatively, specific countries can be chosen based on the level of English understanding varying per country.

Another limitation is that the scale, in accordance with work performance, was a self-reported measure of their perception. Although it is valuable to gain the perception of WP, there is a slight risk to the credibility of the data because the actual performance is not being recorded. Someone can perceive to be doing extraordinary work, but in the eyes of the organization, it can be seen as mediocre. Measuring employees' and supervisors' perceptions of employee performance is beneficial because it would provide an accurate assessment of their work performance (Landry et al., 2014). A recommendation for further research can be to have some assessment or evaluation of work performance from a supervisor and the perception of their work performance. It is important to match what someone is perceived to be doing well to what they are doing well from the person assigning the tasks (Landry et al., 2014). Without this insight, there is a risk of biases regarding perceived work performance.

A recommendation for further research would be to explore the complexity of information overload in more depth to gain more insight into the root cause of information overload. However, also future research can investigate if work-life balance policies are perceived to be helpful or not relevant or valuable to gain a sense if the perception of these policies are positive or negative. This can provide direction on what kind of interventions should be applied. This would provide relevance for companies with work-life balance policies that aren't successful in the workplace and rethink how information overload is being approached.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand information overload in the context of work performance. As predicted, we found that information overload worsens work performance. To then examine if work-life balance policies would reduce information overload, work-life balance policies were found to be beneficial and harmful. This would depend on the characteristics of the employees' experiences. Specifically, whether or not employees are perceived to be overloaded with information. In an organization where employees perceive to have low information overload, employees would benefit from the implementation of WLB policies, and their work performance would increase. In juxtaposition, for employees who perceive to have high information overload, WLB policies would be harmful to the work performance among employees.

This provides insight into which organizations should thoroughly plan on what would benefit the employees more; work-life balance policies or assessing and solving the issue of information overload. Organizations cannot dismiss how overloaded with information their employees are by implementing work-life balance policies but may continue to overburden employees with too much information. Significant findings of the main effect emphasize the importance of addressing information overload among the employees as a primary predictor before it impacts work performance to a greater degree. Also, the results of WLBpol and information overload should be considered before adopting new policies; organizations should consider how overloaded with information their employees are before implementation.

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Appendix A

Information letter

Policies and social relationships in the workplace
Agnes Czerniecki, Jovana Bojović, Eleftheria Foka
Social, Health and Organizational Psychology
Utrecht University

Dear participant,

To help you make an informed decision regarding your participation, this letter will explain what the study is about and your rights as a research participant. If you do not understand something in the letter, please ask one of the researchers prior to consenting to the study.

You are invited to participate in a study which is conducted as part of the master's program Social, Health and Organizational Psychology, Utrecht University. You will be asked questions about your workplace, relationships with your co-workers, and workplace policies.

Participation in the study consists of filling in an online questionnaire which will take approximately …. minutes to complete. Information gathered will be anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Thus, no identity will be disclosed in the study, and your responses cannot be linked back to you as a person. Your answers will be aggregated with the answers of other participants. Access to the collected data will be given to students conducting this research and their supervisor.

In order to participate, you must be over 18 years old, working for at least 6 months for at least 16 hours per week, and have coworkers.

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide by not submitting your responses. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not incur any penalty.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Utrecht University's Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social & Behavioural Sciences. If you have questions for the Ethics Review Board, you may contact them through their website: https://ferb.sites.uu.nl/contact-us/ .

In any case that you have questions regarding this study in general or your role in the study, you may contact us via a.m.czerniecki@students.uu.nl / j.bojovic@students.uu.nl / e.foka@students.uu.nl, or our supervisor Melissa Vink via m.vink1@uu.nl.

Consent (in the form of a tickbox)

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study conducted by Agnes Czerniecki, Jovana Bojović, and Eleftheria Foka. I have had the opportunity to ask questions related to the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions and any additional details.
I was informed that participation in the study is voluntary and that I can withdraw this consent by informing the researchers.
This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Utrecht University's Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social & Behavioural Sciences. If you have questions for the Ethics Review Board, you may contact them through their website: https://ferb.sites.uu.nl/contact-us/ .
For all other questions contact Agnes Czerniecki (a.m.czerniecki@students.uu.nl) / Jovana Bojović (j.bojovic@students.uu.nl) / Eleftheria Foka (e.foka@students.uu.nl), or our supervisor Melissa Vink (m.vink1@uu.nl).

Demographics

Before we start with our main questions, we first like to ask you some questions with regard to your background.

1. What gender do you identify as?
    0. Female
    1. Male
    2. _____
    3. Prefer not to answer
2. What is your age?
    0. ___
3. Please specify your country of birth:
    0. ___
4. In which country do you currently live?
    0. the Netherlands
    1. ?
5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
    0. Some High School
    1. High School
    2. Bachelor's Degree
    3. Master's Degree
    4. Ph.D. or higher
    5. Trade School
    6. Prefer not to say
6. In which field of industry do you work?
    0. Architecture and engineering

    1. Arts, culture, and entertainment
    2. Business, management, and administration
    3. Communications
    4. Community and social services
    5. Education
    6. Science and technology
    7. Installation, repair, and maintenance
    8. Farming, fishing, and forestry
    9. Government
    10. Health and medicine
    11. Law and public policy
7. Are you holding a leadership position?
    0. Yes
    1. No
8. Are you coworkers of a different age than yourself?
    0. 5-point Likert (1=strongly disagree-5=strongly agree)
9. Are you coworkers of a different gender than yourself?
    0. 5-point Likert (1=strongly disagree-5=strongly agree)
10. Are you coworkers of a different ethnicity than yourself?
    0. 5-point Likert (1=strongly disagree-5=strongly agree)
11. How many hours do you work per week?
    0. ___
12. Looking back into last month, how many hours on average did you work in the office per week?
    0. ___

Questionnaires

Now, we are interested to hear your vision and experiences in the workplace. There are no right or wrong answers, we are solely interested in your impressions.

<u>Transformational leadership</u>
Global Transformational Leadership scale (GTL) by Carless et al. (2000)
My leader:

1. communicates a clear and positive vision of the future
2. treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development
3. gives encouragement and recognition to staff
4. fosters trust, involvement, and cooperation among team members
5. encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions
6. is clear about his/her values and practices what he/she preaches
7. instills pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent

- measured in 5-point Likert (1=strongly disagree , 5=strongly agree)

<u>Perceived Work-Life policy</u>
~revised from Mcarthy, et al (2013)
1. My organization provides work conditions (eg. flexible schedules, child care facilities, etc)

which take into account the emergent needs of employees
2. My organization enforces policies that refrains work done on off-hours (not emailing after work hours)
3. My organization makes an active effort to help employees when there is a conflict between work and personal/non-work life
4. I feel that organization respects my desire to balance work and personal/non-work demands

Inclusive climate
Climate for Inclusion by NIshii (2013)

1. My organization is characterized by a non-threatening environment in which people can reveal their "true" selves.
2. My organization values work-life balance.
3. My organization commits resources to ensuring that employees are able to resolve conflicts effectively.
4. Employees of my organization are valued for who they are as people, not just for the jobs that they fill.
5. In my organization, people often share and learn about one another as people.
6. My organization has a culture in which employees appreciate the differences that people bring to the workplace.
7. In my organization, employee input is actively sought.
8. In my organization, everyone’s ideas for how to do things better are given serious consideration.
9. In my organization, employees' insights are used to rethink or redefine work practices.
10. Top management in my organization exercises the belief that problem-solving is improved when input from different roles, ranks, and functions is considered.

- measured in 5-point Likert (1=strongly disagree , 5=strongly agree)

Diverse Workplace Friendship
Adjusted scale by Nielsen et al. (2000).

1. I have the opportunity to get to know my coworkers who are of different gender, age, or ethnicity.
2. I am able to work with my coworkers of different gender, age, or ethnicity to collectively solve problems.
3. In my organization, I have the chance to talk informally and meet others who are of different gender, age, or ethnicity.
4. Communication among employees of different gender, age, or ethnicity is encouraged by my organization.
5. I have the opportunity to develop close friendships with employees of different gender, age, or ethnicity at my workplace.
6. Informal talk is tolerated by my organization as long as the work is completed.

7. I have formed strong friendships with coworkers of different gender, age, or ethnicity at work.
8. I socialize with coworkers of different gender, age, or ethnicity outside of the workplace.
9. I can confide in people of different gender, age, or ethnicity at work.
10. I feel I can trust many coworkers of different gender, age, or ethnicity a great deal.
11. Being able to see my coworkers of different gender, age, or ethnicity is one reason why I look forward to my job.
12. I do not feel that anyone I work with of different gender, age, or ethnicity is a true friend. ®

- measured in 5-point Likert (1=strongly disagree , 5=strongly agree)

<u>Sense of belongingness at work</u>
Workplace belongingness scale by Jena and Pradhan (2018)
1. I am able to work in this organization without sacrificing my principles.
2. I use to refer as “we/us” rather than “they/them” when I refer my organisation to outsiders.
3. Being a part of this organization inspires me to do more than what is expected.
4. In my work unit I have many common themes with my co-workers.
5. My personal needs are well met by my organization.
6. Whenever I have any personal or professional issues my organization extends necessary help and support.

<u>Loneliness in the workplace</u>
Loneliness at workplace scale by Wright et al. (2006)
2 dimensions
Emotional deprivation
1. I often feel abandoned by my co-workers when I am under pressure at work.
2. I often feel alienated from my co-workers.
3. I feel myself withdrawing from the people I work with.
4. I often feel emotionally distant from the people I work with.
5. I feel satisfied with the relationships I have at work.
6. There is a sense of camaraderie in my workplace.
7. I often feel isolated when I am with my co-workers.
8. I often feel disconnected from others at work.
9. I experience a general sense of emptiness when I am at work.
Social companionship
10. I have social companionship/fellowship at work.
11. I feel included in the social aspects of work.
12. There is someone at work I can talk to about my day to day work problems if I need to.
13. There is no one at work I can share personal thoughts with if I want to.
14. I have someone at work I can spend time with on my breaks if I want to.
15. I feel part of a group of friends at work.
16. There are people at work who take the trouble to listen to me.

<u>Perceived Information Overload</u>
~Revised from Hunter, & Goebel (2008)
1. I feel frustrated during work due to the volume of information i must retain

2. The amount of information that I have to know in order to effectively do my job makes me feel overwhelmed.
3. I sometimes make mistakes due to the large amount of information I must deal with.
4. I sometimes feel like the work demands exceed my capacity to sufficiently carry out tasks.

Work engagement

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli et al. (2006)

1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.
3. I am enthusiastic about my job.
4. My job inspires me.
5. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
6. I feel happy when I am working intensely.
7. I am proud of the work that I do.
8. I am immersed in my work.
9. I get carried away when I'm working.

Organizational commitment

Short version of organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) by Allen and Meyer (1990)

Normative Commitment

1. I do not feel any obligation to remain with my organization.
2. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave.
3. I would feel guilty if I left this organization now.
4. This organization deserves my loyalty.
5. I would not leave my organization right now because of my sense of obligation to it.
6. I owe a great deal to this organization.

Work-Performance

~Revised from Koopmans, et al (2011).

2 dimensions

>*Task performance*

1. I keep in mind the results that I have to achieve in my work
2. I manage to plan out my work so that I finish on time
3. I am able to carry out my tasks efficiently

>*Adaptive Performance*

1. I work at keeping my job knowledge and skills up-to-date
2. I am able to cope well with difficult situations and setbacks at work
3. I easily adjust to changes in the work environment

Debrief

Title of the Research questionnaire: Policies and social relationships in the workplace

Thank you for participating in this study. This survey has been in collaboration with students in the same master's programme. The data has been collected together but will be analyzed through the variables associated with its respected research study.

The first research project involved is: Evaluating the impact of perceived information overload on work performance and the moderating effect of work-life policies. This project aims to answer the question regarding how employees experience work-life policies in organizations and how that may moderate the negative effects of information overload on work performance. In this study, the variables that will be analyzed include measures on perceived work-life policy, perceived information overload, and work performance.

The next research project is: Loneliness in the workplace- consequences of unsatisfactory social relationships at work. In this project, we will answer the question of how workplace loneliness affects work engagement and organizational commitment. The variables that will be analyzed consist of loneliness in the workplace, sense of belongingness at work engagement, and organizational commitment.

The final project examines antecedents of diverse workplace friendships. In this project, we aim to answer the research question: does inclusive climate mediate the influence of transformational leadership on the formation of diverse workplace friendships? The variables analyzed in this study include diverse workplace friendship, transformational leadership, and inclusive climate.

In the information letter, the study was explained in general terms to avoid biases in answering the questions. This is because it is valuable for the study to receive authentic answers to generate reliable data.
Thank you again for helping us with this research. If you want to follow up on the results of this study, contact any of the student researchers with the contact information provided.

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