

MAKING SENSE OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: THE ROLES OF SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB STRESS IN A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

Background: Intense targets, time pressure, policy changes, and blurred work–life boundaries make employee well-being a strategic issue in distribution organizations. **Objective:** This study explores how employees make sense of work–life balance and explains how self-efficacy and job stress interact in shaping well-being. **Methods:** A descriptive phenomenological design was employed at PT Arta Boga Cemerlang JIS Malang. Three informants were purposively selected based on at least one year of tenure and direct experience of work–life balance challenges. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, workplace observation, and documentation in January–February 2026. Analysis involved epoche/bracketing, identification of noema and noesis, intentional analysis, NVivo-assisted coding, and eidetic reduction. **Results:** Five themes emerged: work–life balance as control over time, roles, and recovery; well-being as comfort, security, appreciation, and support; self-efficacy as an agentic resource; stress as a dual experience of distress and eustress; and a dynamic psychological process connecting demands and resources. **Conclusion:** Employee well-being is not a static outcome but a dynamic process resulting from reciprocal interactions among personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Managerial implications include calibrating workloads, clarifying policies, protecting work–nonwork boundaries, strengthening self-efficacy, improving supervisory support, and ensuring recovery resources.

Keywords: work–life balance; employee well-being; self-efficacy; job stress; phenomenology.

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation, service-speed expectations, and target-oriented work have made the boundary between work and private life increasingly permeable. In distribution organizations, daily targets, administrative accuracy, cross-functional coordination, and rapid problem solving may extend employees' psychological involvement beyond formal working hours. Such involvement is reflected in persistent work-related thoughts, limited recovery, emotional fatigue, and reduced engagement in family and social roles. Recent studies consistently link work–life balance to mental health and well-being, while imbalance increases stress and exhaustion (Akbar & Zona, 2025; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Stankevičienė et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

A similar phenomenon is evident at PT Arta Boga Cemerlang JIS Malang. The distribution setting requires speed, accuracy, target attainment, and intensive interdepartmental coordination. Initial observations and employee narratives indicated overtime during closing periods, rapidly changing policies, compressed deadlines, and work concerns spilling into personal life. However, employees did not respond uniformly. Under comparable pressure, some lost focus and postponed tasks, whereas others set priorities, sought solutions, and interpreted pressure as a challenge. These variations suggest the importance of personal resources—especially self-efficacy—as well as social and organizational resources (Bandura, 2001; Hardianty et al., 2025).

Quantitative research generally demonstrates that work–life balance supports employee well-being and reduces stress (Akbar & Zona, 2025; Frisdayanti et al., 2021; Kurnia & Widigdo, 2021). Occupational self-efficacy also contributes positively to well-being (Dinarwati & Purba, 2023), while supervisor support and flexible work systems strengthen balance and recovery (Alzadjali & Ahmad, 2024; Stankevičienė et al., 2021). Nevertheless, previous findings do not fully explain how employees subjectively connect balance, efficacy, stress appraisal, support, and well-being in everyday work.

This study addresses three gaps. First, work–life balance, self-efficacy, job stress, and well-being are commonly treated as separate variables, leaving their experiential integration underexplored. Second, qualitative evidence remains limited in Indonesian distribution companies characterized by high targets and fast work rhythms. Third, stress is usually framed as a negative outcome, although it may be experienced as either distress

or eustress. The study therefore aims to explore employees' meanings of work–life balance, understand the role of self-efficacy in dealing with job stress, and explain how personal and contextual resources interact to shape employee well-being.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Model

2.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) conceptualizes human functioning through triadic reciprocal determinism among personal factors, behavior, and the environment (Bandura, 2001). In work settings, personal factors include self-efficacy, cognitive appraisal, and emotion; environmental factors include workload, policies, supervisory support, and social relationships; behavior includes time management, coping, communication, and boundary setting. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can organize and execute actions required to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997). It influences action choices, effort, persistence, and emotional responses. In this study, SCT is used as an interpretive lens rather than a statistical causal model.

2.2 Work–Life Balance and Employee Well-Being

Work–life balance refers to relatively compatible involvement and satisfaction across work and nonwork roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003). It does not require an equal division of time; rather, it involves aligning time, energy, attention, and values with individual needs. Employee well-being comprises psychological, social, and physical experiences that enable positive functioning, safety, meaningful relationships, and purpose. Healthy work design, fairness, flexibility, support, and recovery resources are central well-being practices (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024).

2.3 Job Demands–Resources, Stress Appraisal, and Resource Conservation

Job Demands–Resources theory distinguishes energy-depleting demands from resources that facilitate goal attainment and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Targets, time pressure, overtime, and policy ambiguity are demands, whereas autonomy, procedural clarity, support, competence, and self-efficacy are resources. Transactional stress theory explains that stress depends on whether employees appraise demands as exceeding available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Conservation of Resources theory further suggests that employees seek to protect and restore time, energy, relationships, and a sense of competence (Hobfoll, 1989).

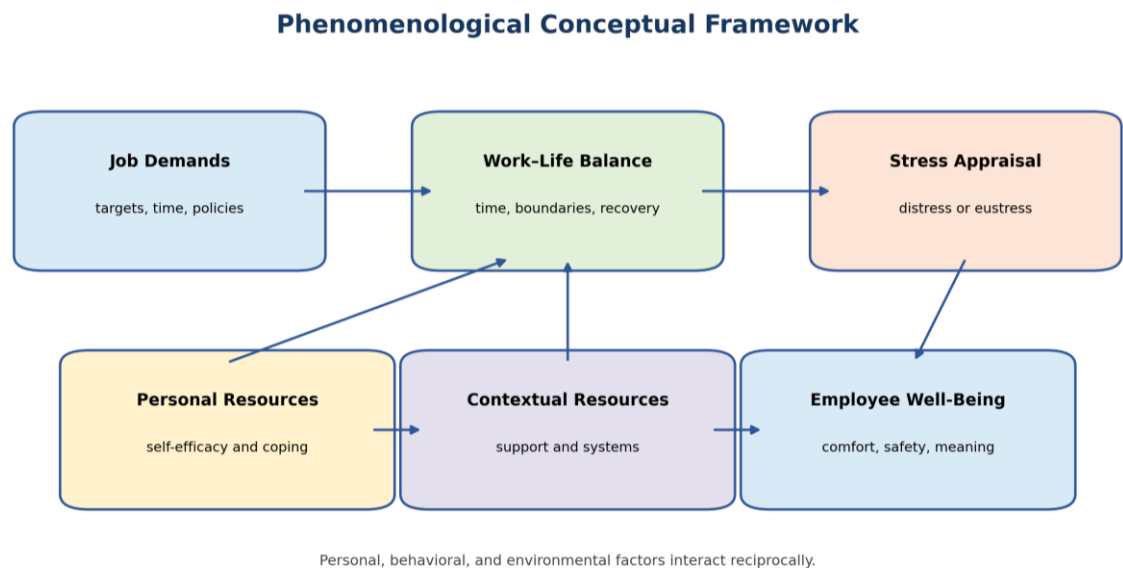


Figure 1. Phenomenological conceptual model of employee well-being

3. Method

3.1 Research Design and Site

A qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was used to identify the essential structure of employees’ lived experiences. Phenomenology was appropriate because the study sought meaning rather than hypothesis testing or statistical generalization (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Englander & Morley, 2023). The research site was PT Arta Boga Cemerlang JIS Malang, a consumer-products distribution company with intensive operational rhythms, targets, and interdepartmental coordination.

3.2 Informants and Data Collection

Informants were purposively selected using four criteria: employment at the company, at least one year of tenure, direct experience of work–life balance challenges, and willingness to provide detailed narratives. Three informants offered sufficient information power because the research objective was narrow, their experiences were relevant, and the interviews were information-rich (Malterud et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted on 17 January, 6 February, and 9 February 2026. Workplace observation and documentation were used to contextualize the narratives. Participation was voluntary and identities were coded as I1–I3.

Code	Gender/Age	Position	Tenure/Status	Relevant Experience
I1	Female/30	Recruitment supervisor	≈4 years/permanent	Recruitment targets and work–family roles
I2	Male/24	HR manager	≈2 years/permanent	Policy changes, deadlines, managerial decisions
I3	Female/33	Finance staff	≈3 years/contract	Closing periods, overtime, work–life boundaries

3.3 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analysis was iterative. The researchers repeatedly read the transcripts, identified noema (what was experienced) and noesis (how it was interpreted), connected them through intentional analysis, organized meaning units into codes and themes with NVivo 12 Pro, and conducted eidetic reduction. Software supported data management but did not replace interpretation. Trustworthiness was strengthened through methodological triangulation, variation in occupational positions, verbatim quotations, reflexive

bracketing, and an audit trail. Quotations were translated from Indonesian by the authors.

4. Results and Discussion

Five interdependent themes described how employee well-being was constructed. They were not linear stages; instead, they formed a dynamic configuration of personal resources, boundary management, stress appraisal, organizational support, and recovery.

Theme	Dominant Subthemes	Experiential Essence	Theoretical Dialogue
1. Meaning of work–life balance	Time management; work–life boundaries; role balance; social support; flexible and clear systems	Control over time, energy, roles, and recovery.	Work–life balance; COR.
2. Experience of well-being	Positive emotions; support; rights; safety; calmness	Feeling comfortable, valued, secure, supported, and able to maintain private life.	Psychological well-being; HR well-being practices.
3. Meaning of self-efficacy	Mastery; emotion regulation; conflict; performance; stress reduction	An agentic capacity directing cognition, emotion, and action.	SCT; occupational self-efficacy.
4. Experience of stress	Targets; time pressure; ambiguity; divided attention; distress–eustress	Stress is dual and depends on appraisal, resources, and coping.	JD-R; transactional stress.
5. Psychological dynamics	Interdependence; adaptation; boundary management; recovery	Well-being emerges when personal and contextual resources balance demands.	SCT; JD-R; COR.

4.1 Work–Life Balance as Control over Time, Roles, and Recovery

Informants did not define balance as a rigid or equal division of time. Balance existed when work could be completed without dominating all available time, attention, and emotion. Scheduling, prioritizing, maximizing office hours, and protecting nonwork roles were forms of agency.

“As employees, we need to manage our time wisely. I try to maximize task completion during office hours.” (I1, translated)

“I have arranged my daily schedule. As long as I can handle it, I complete tasks based on priority.” (I3, translated)

These narratives show that balance is a sense of control rather than simply free time. The finding extends Greenhaus et al. (2003): balance does not necessarily require equal involvement but the ability to shift attention intentionally. Supportive relationships and small forms of flexibility also reduced worry and protected recovery resources, consistent with Stankevičienė et al. (2021) and Alzadjali and Ahmad (2024).

4.2 Well-Being as Comfort, Security, Appreciation, and Support

Well-being was expressed through positive affect and everyday quality of life: feeling comfortable, calm, safe, respected, and able to perform work without losing private life. Material rights were important but insufficient; interpersonal relations, policy clarity, recognition, and support also shaped well-being.

“The company provides employee rights according to the proportion of our responsibilities.” (I1, translated)

The findings align with psychological well-being, particularly environmental mastery, positive relations, and purpose (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). They also support the view that well-being-oriented HR practices require healthy work design, fairness, and recovery rather than recreational programs alone (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024).

4.3 Self-Efficacy as an Agentic Resource

Self-efficacy was built through mastery experiences and repeated exposure to diverse situations. It helped informants prioritize tasks, regulate emotions, communicate during conflict, and maintain performance. Realistic confidence encouraged a challenge appraisal rather than helplessness.

“I believe in my own ability. Over more than four years, I have met thousands of people.” (I1, translated)

“The greatest challenge comes from within: managing emotions so that stress at home is not carried to work, and vice versa.” (I1, translated)

This supports SCT: mastery experiences strengthen efficacy, which then influences cognition, emotion, and behavior (Bandura, 1997, 2001). The findings are also consistent with Dinarwati and Purba (2023) and Hardianty et al. (2025), who reported that higher self-efficacy helps employees maintain work-life balance and perform effectively when facing work demands. However, the findings do not support an individualistic interpretation in which employees must absorb all pressure; organizational resources determine whether efficacy can be translated into effective action.

4.4 Stress as Distress and Eustress

Targets, time pressure, workload, ambiguous or changing policies, interpersonal conflict, and divided attention were central stressors. Stress reduced focus and

delayed task completion, yet some pressure was interpreted as motivational when demands were controllable, procedures were clear, and support was available (Akbar & Zona, 2025).

“When my mind is divided, my focus at work is also disrupted.” (I3, translated)

“Sometimes stress becomes motivation to complete the task quickly, as long as it remains controllable.” (I2, translated)

The pattern reflects transactional stress theory because consequences depend on appraisal and coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). JD-R likewise predicts that high demands become harmful when resources are insufficient (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The results

therefore distinguish manageable challenge demands from hindrance demands such as policy ambiguity and systemic obstacles.

4.5 The Dynamic Psychological Process of Well-Being

The themes formed a reciprocal process. Self-efficacy provided agency; work–life balance organized boundaries and recovery; stress represented the critical point at which demands were compared with resources; and social-organizational support replenished resources. The essence of the phenomenon was that employees felt well when they maintained control over time, energy, emotion, and roles; believed they could manage demands; received fair support and clear systems; and had opportunities to recover.

Emergent Model: The Dynamics of Employee Well-Being

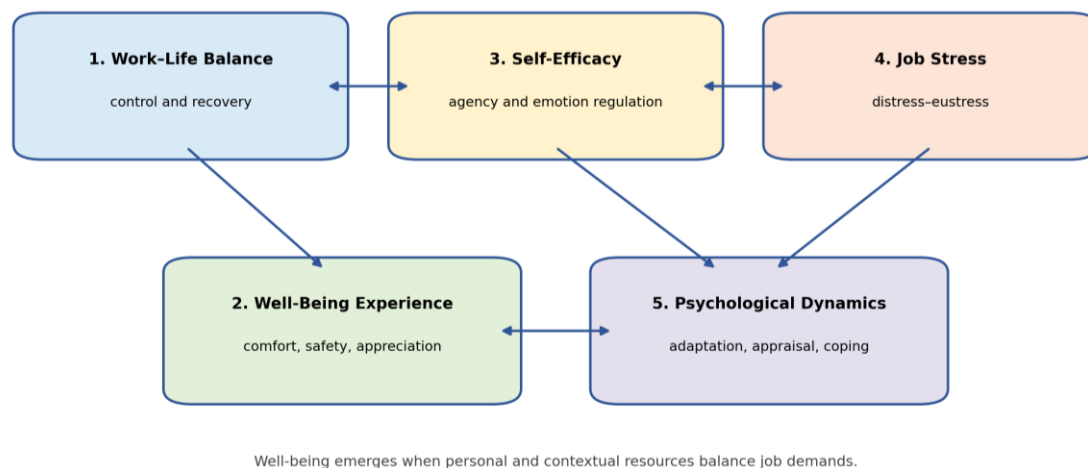


Figure 2. Emergent model of the psychological dynamics of employee well-being

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical Implications

- SCT is extended by showing that self-efficacy operates through boundary management, appraisal, emotion regulation, and coping.
- Work–life balance is better understood as control and recovery rather than equal time allocation.
- Job stress is dual; its effect depends on clarity, control, support, and recovery opportunities.
- Employee well-being is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to job satisfaction or the absence of stress.

5.2 Managerial Implications

- Calibrate targets and workloads based on actual capacity, especially during closing periods.

- Improve policy clarity through concise briefings, written documentation, and transition periods.
- Establish norms for after-hours communication, leave, and post-peak recovery.
- Build self-efficacy through coaching, problem-solving training, graded mastery experiences, and specific feedback.
- Strengthen supervisor and coworker support through well-being check-ins and non-stigmatizing help-seeking.
- Align well-being programs with fair rights, healthy work design, and access to psychological support.

6. Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

For employees at PT Arta Boga Cemerlang JIS Malang, work–life balance meant maintaining control over

time, energy, thought, and role boundaries so that work did not occupy the whole of life. Self-efficacy supported task management, emotion regulation, conflict handling, and constructive appraisal. Stress became distress when demands exceeded resources, but could function as eustress when employees had control, clarity, confidence, support, and recovery. Employee well-being was therefore a dynamic product of reciprocal interactions among personal, behavioral, and environmental factors.

6.2 Limitations

The study was conducted in one distribution unit and involved three informants; the findings are contextually rich but not statistically generalizable. The researcher's proximity to the site through an internship improved contextual understanding but introduced potential bias managed through bracketing and an audit trail. Leadership, compensation, family status, personality, and longitudinal change were not examined in depth.

6.3 Recommendations

Future research should include operational, sales, logistics, and administrative employees across multiple companies. Longitudinal studies could compare ordinary and closing periods, while mixed-method designs could test the emergent process model. Future studies should also distinguish challenge from hindrance stressors and examine leadership, psychological capital, family support, and organizational justice.

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