The Future of Work-Life Balance in the Tech Sector

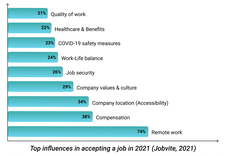
01. What is the problem and why does it matter?

In a labour market that is competing for tech talent, offering remote work and work-life balance in compensation and culture can help attract and retain top performers, creating a high performing team, reducing retraining costs and allowing access to top talent remotely from around the world. Remote work and work-life balance were some of the top trends for technology job seekers in 2021.

In practice, having employees that feel able to achieve a good work-life balance, translates to better inter-team communication, more ability for individuals to focus on the job tasks and a greater capacity for creativity. Additionally, workplaces where employees are able to manage and minimise their stress have better mental and physical health, reducing workplace accidents and mental health leaves. Employee presence, energy and focus contribute to individual productivity for the employer and can positively impact the company's bottom line.

Unfortunately work-life balance is a very individual measure and there is no one-size-fits-all solution for a company to implement. Older definitions of work-life balance such as equally allotting time and energy across activities deemed to be "work" and "life" are antiquated and do not translate easily to a remote workplace where work and home are frequently the same physical location. Additionally, the individual is the same person in both the work and life settings and stresses and successes in one realm have real affects on behaviours and performance in the other. Good work-life balance is employee directed but can be facilitated by the employer.

Creating policies and practices that function and are more than just lip service to helping employees achieve good work-life balance require looking at the system and listening to the requirements of the employees. This map outlines the problem space and how the different systems interact. It showcases where interventions could be helpful across two very different, successful employees.



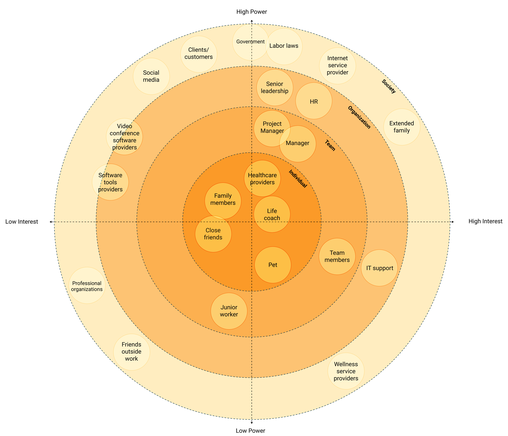
Top influences in accepting a job in 2021 (Jobvite, 2021)

Jobvite. (2021). *Job Seeker Nation Report 2021*. https://www.jobvite.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Jobvite-Job-2021-03-29.pdf.

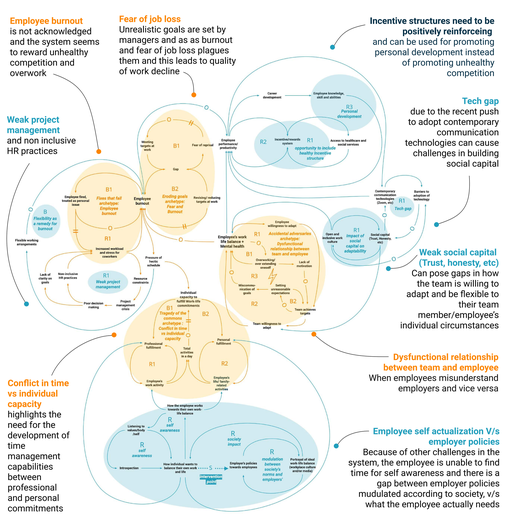
> *Good **work-life balance** looks like an understanding of self needs within the employee and curating their activities to achieve satisfaction and the flexibility and the resources to realize these individually determined needs.*

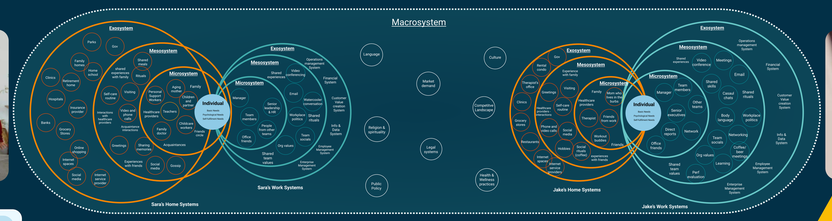
02. Who is involved in this problem?

This is an **Actors Map** that outlined the key Actors in the intertwined work-life balance system of remote technology workers. Within this system, there is the "open" system that includes the Individual, Team, and Organization, and a "soft" system at the outer most ring that is typically use to describe social system. The matrix indicates the system Actors' power to change and interest in investing a positive work-life balance.



03. Where is the problem?



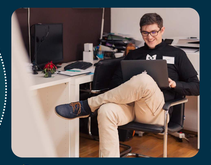


Sara Paulson

Age 40
Profession Software developer at Company X
Location Toronto
Relationship status Married, partner works full time
Dependents 2 sons, 9 and 10 y.o., aging parents
Ethnicity East-Asian
Gender identifies as cis female

Sara's Home-Work Systems

This is **Sara**'s work and life systems examined through a socio-ecological model. As a working mom and a caregiver for her aging mother, Sara's life/ home systems are much larger than her work systems. They only partially intersect at the micro and exosystem levels.

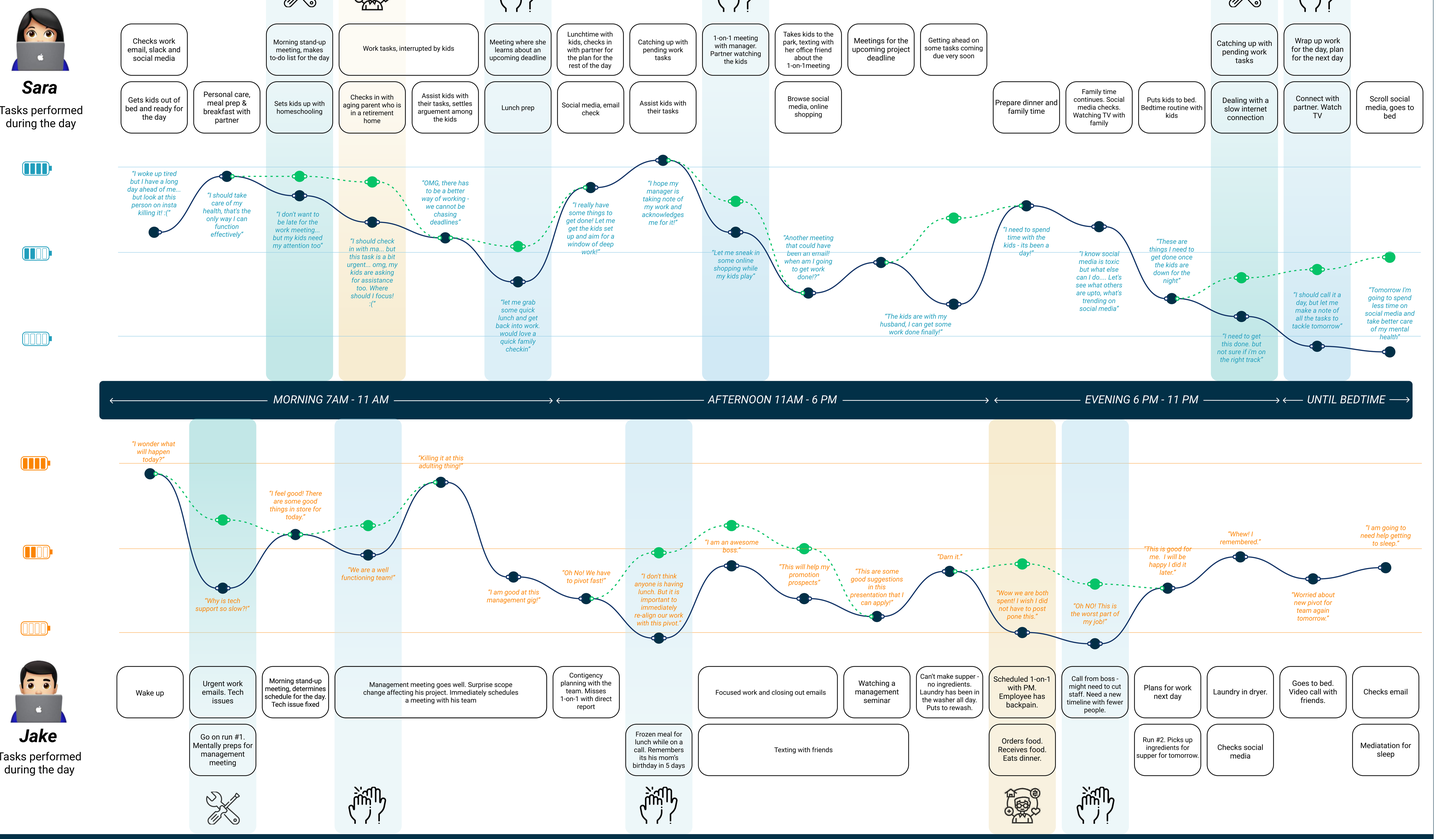


Jake Mann

Age 30
Profession Product design manager at Company X
Location Toronto
Relationship status Single
Dependents None
Ethnicity Italian- American
Gender identifies as cis male

Jake's Home-Work Systems

As a young, ambitious tech professional, **Jake's** work system is far larger than his home systems that mainly pertain to his circle of friends and his immediate family. For him, there is a greater overlap in the two systems across the meso, micro and exo levels.



The Toxic work-life imbalance
Horizon 1
The current situation: How systems supporting today's work-life balance are challenged

Litany
Sudden drastic change of workplace situation. Always on call, never ending work. Individual distraction, difficulty balancing physical and mental health.

Social Causes
The Pandemic.
Costs to provide a personalized solution are seen as prohibitive.
Uncertainty of viability of business pushing individual to work more. Work-life balance is stigmatized.

World View
Individualism and meritocracy.

Metaphor
Burnt out, Run into the ground.

Turbulent Transformation
Horizon 2
Transformation: emerging practices that could aim at the future we desire

Some companies pivot to remote, while others retain the status quo.

Proliferation and increased success in technology communication tools.

Increased understanding of the cost of burn out and valuing of retention of employees increases.
General increase in technology skills.

Trial and error and self reflection to create new culture and practices that work with the teams and business models.

Breaths of fresh air

Individual Lead work-life balance
Horizon 3
Viable future: tomorrow's vibrant and thriving work-life balance in remote work

Workplaces acknowledges and accommodates individual work-life balance systems

Remote work is planned and intentional.
Work-life balance is championed.

Diversity and new perspectives celebrated.
Pushing towards self organizing teams

"Diversity is like an orchestra you have different people playing together, the parts and whole, all making beautiful sounds"

Pockets of Future in the Present
Champion organizations like Shopify setting example for healthy remote work cultures

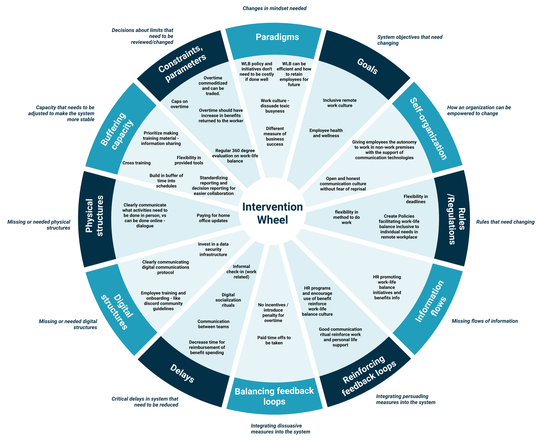
Elements of current system we can reuse
Other organizations catching up to Shopify-esq policies to attract and retain talent

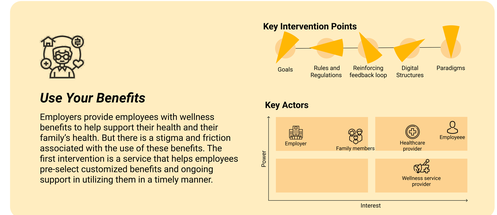
Elements of current system we need to sustain
Successful nimble and innovative companies that understand WLB to be central to their success.

05. How can your company make a difference?

The possibility space for interventions is complex and infinite. Several possible interventions to help with work-life balance are laid out on a continuum to broadly show the scale of impact that the intervention could command and the relative scale of difficulty to achieve, from the smallest and simplest being the 'Goals' all around the wheel in a clockwise direction to the 'Paradigm shifts'. Frequently, a fully realized intervention will touch on many different spokes of the wheel.

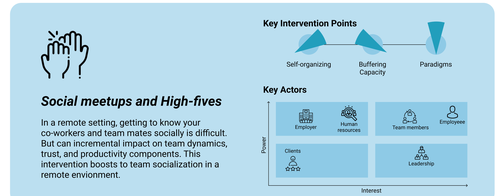
We have expanded on three services presented on the intervention wheel to see how it might impact the journeys of our personas. These interventions include **Use your Benefits**, **Social Meetups & High-Fives** and **Tool Fit & High Flex**. On the journey map, we have depicted how these interventions can improve the experince of remote work for employees from a variety of backgrounds with widely differing needs.





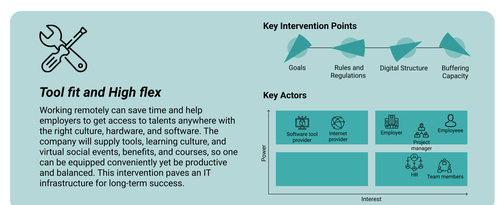
Use Your Benefits

Employers provide employees with wellness benefits to help support their health and their family's health. But there is a stigma and friction associated with the use of these benefits. The first intervention is a service that helps employees pre-select customized benefits and ongoing support in utilizing them in a timely manner.



Social meetups and High-fives

In a remote setting, getting to know your co-workers and team mates socially is difficult. But can incremental impact on team dynamics, trust, and productivity components. This intervention boosts to team socialization in a remote environment.



Tool fit and High flex

Working remotely can save time and help employers to get access to talents anywhere with the right culture, hardware, and software. The company will supply tools, learning culture, and virtual social events, benefits, and courses, so one can be equipped conveniently yet be productive and balanced. This intervention paves an IT infrastructure for long-term success.

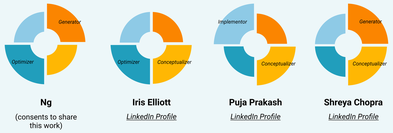
06. Conclusion and DIY Intervention Strategy

The interventions we have explored here may not fit the needs and constraints of your organization and employees. Here are some design considerations to bear in mind while creating your own customized intervention strategy.

Understanding employee needs | Ethical employee segmentation | Align with business objectives | Adopt an experimentation mindset | Design for diversity

The team

We conceptualized and designed this map. Here are our names and Basadur profiles.



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