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**Better work-life balance through Digital Parenting.**

Journal:	<i>Strategic HR Review</i>
Manuscript ID	SHR-08-2022-0048
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	Digital work, Digital parenting, Telework, Agile Working, Work-Life Conflict, Work-Life Boundary Management

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3 **Title:** Better work-life balance through Digital Parenting.
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5 **Key Words:**

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7 Digital work, Digital parenting, Telework, Agile Working, Work-Life Conflict, Work-Life Boundary
8 Management
9

10 **Article Classification:** Research Paper

11
12 **Structured Abstract:**

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14 Purpose: The study explored how working parents utilize personal technology to manage parenting
15 responsibilities and identifies how technology use might help to support work-family balance.
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17 Research Design: In-depth telephone interviews with U.S. and U.K. working parents with children under
18 the age of 18.
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20 **Findings:** Findings suggest that personal technology can facilitate work and family activities and reduce
21 work-family conflict by enabling parents to perform certain parenting duties remotely. However,
22 parental attitudes toward technology and children's rights to privacy influence both technology use and
23 work and family outcomes.
24

25 **Originality:** While substantial research has been conducted on employee use of work-enabled
26 technology to facilitate work-life balance, less attention has been paid to how working parents are using
27 personal forms of technology to achieve this same outcome. This exploratory study establishes certain
28 parenting functions that are facilitated by personal technology use and identifies some parental
29 attitudes that influence technology adoption.
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32 **Research Implications:** By better understanding employee personal technology use, and how this use
33 facilitates reduced conflict between work and family roles, organizations might look to creatively expand
34 their benefits offerings to include access/discounts to personal technology platforms that support
35 parenting activities (e.g. Uber One, Amazon Prime, DoorDash, etc.).
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38 **Introduction:**

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40 Working parents are increasingly dependent on technology to meet the requirements of work and
41 family roles. Substantial research has examined how organizations can provide employees with
42 technology solutions that improve the work-family interface. However, much of the prior research has
43 focused on technology specifically designed to facilitate working and the impact of this technology on
44 work-to-family spillover. More limited research has examined how use of personal technology impacts
45 family-to-work spillover. With the emergence of new personal technologies that do everything from
46 unlocking doors to tracing children's locations, further research is needed to understand how working
47 parents utilize these technologies and what impact they have on work and parenting roles. Through in-
48 depth interviews with working parents in the UK and the USA, this study explores technology use that
49 facilitates parenting functions. Findings suggest that parents can use personal technology to
50 communicate with, monitor, entertain/occupy and generally manage their relationships with their
51 child(ren). Findings also suggest that personal technology can facilitate work and family activities and
52 reduce work-family conflict by enabling parents to perform certain parenting duties remotely. However,
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3 parental attitudes toward technology and children's rights to privacy influence both technology use and
4 work and family outcomes.
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6 *Use of 'Professional Technology' to Manage Home and Work Roles*

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8 A substantial body of research exists on the impact of professional (work-originating) technology on the
9 work-life interface. Most technology examined in this research can be considered 'professional' in the
10 sense that it has been provided by workplaces to facilitate work-related activities. For example,
11 employees use cell phones, laptops and even hotspots provided by their employers to work in more
12 flexible ways that support their work and family lives. The use of professional technology to support
13 flexible working has led to both positive outcomes, such as temporal and spatial flexibility, and negatives
14 outcomes, such as isolation, reduced knowledge transfer, and work intensification (Beauregard, Basile &
15 Canonico, 2019).
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18 *Use of 'Personal Technology' to Manage Home and Work Roles*

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20 More recently, new forms of personal (nonwork-originating) technology have emerged that also help
21 working parents manage the demands of their work and family roles. These new personal technologies
22 help to create 'presence' in a family role, while one is physically located at work or engaged with work
23 activity. For example, an app like Life360™ can let a working parent know that their child has arrived
24 home from school safely. DoorDash can allow a working parent to deliver a meal when they are held up
25 with work. FaceTime can allow a working parent to engage in rich communication with their children
26 when they are out of town. While 'professional technology' can help us to facilitate our work role
27 remotely, these new forms of 'personal technology' may help to facilitate our parenting role remotely.
28 Prior research on personal technology has focused on the home environment, examining the use and
29 implications of technology for activities such as parental monitoring (Boesen, Rode & Mancini, 2010),
30 entertainment and education (Wartella, Rideout, Lauricella & Connell, 2014) and communication (Devitt
31 & Roker, 2009). The current study broadens this focus to explore use and implications in both home and
32 work environments.
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36 **Research Focus:**

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38 The research presented here explores the use of technology to engage in 'digital parenting' among
39 working parents. Specifically, this study seeks to explore what forms of personal technology are being
40 utilized, which parental functions the technology assists with and the impact of this technology use on
41 work-life balance. The data presented here is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with
42 working parents in the U.S. and U.K.
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45 ***Communication is a key parenting function that personal technology can facilitate.***

46

47 Communication was the most commonly noted technology-enabled parenting function. Forms of
48 communication ranged from phone calls to group chats and even social media interactions. Reasons for
49 communicating also varied. Some communication related to ensuring a child's well-being, while other
50 forms of communication were used to support parent-child/family relationships.
51

52 *"I don't want him to walk home from the bus alone, but he asked to, I said, call me please. So we can talk*
53 *a lot more throughout the day or text and I can talk to him while he's walking home from the bus. It*
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3 *makes it a lot easier for us to communicate that way.” (Full-time Property Manager, single mother of 12*
4 *y/o son)*

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6 *“We do have a family text going. Sometimes there's jokes going back and forth or pictures of something*
7 *which is kind of fun.” (Full-time Teacher, married mother of 14 y/o twins)*

8
9 *“If Sal was away on a business trip, it would be to say hello and show us where he is at. He'd show us his*
10 *hotel room, just so we can get a feel for where he's going to be spending the next few days. Or if he's*
11 *outside just to show us the scenery.” (Full-time HR Director, married mother of 12 y/o daughter)*

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14 ***New forms of technology allow caregivers to provide basic care such as food, transportation or***
15 ***money.***

16
17 Participants also identified various elements of basic care that were aided by the use of personal
18 technology. Personal technology allowed parents to order and deliver meals, schedule and monitor
19 transportation and even transfer funds to their children without significant interruption to their work
20 schedules. Often, the ability to provide these forms of basic care remotely helped to provide greater
21 peace of mind and reduce anxiety that might be caused by unexpected delays or schedule changes at
22 work.

23
24 *“For instance, if I'm stuck at work and I know that I can't get out, then it's a huge relief to me that I can*
25 *order a black cab using technology and that I can communicate with a black cab driver using an app and*
26 *that I can convey that to Ava (daughter) with a text and that the minute the guy arrives, I phone her and*
27 *I'm on the phone with her and I can hear her voice as she's getting in the car and I can hear the door*
28 *closing.” (Full time, Private Banker, married mother of 14 y/o son and 16 y/o daughter)*

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31 ***Technology allows working parents to monitor their children's activities and location at times when***
32 ***they can't be physically present in the home.***

33
34 Parents also use technology to monitor children's movements and activities. Monitoring through
35 technology can take multiple forms. While some parents, particularly those of younger children, may
36 utilize video monitoring through web cams or other video surveillance apps, others use location tracking
37 apps such as Life 360 or 'Find my Friends'. Some apps even allow for detailed updates such as when
38 children arrive at home or other designated locations, driving speed and location histories. According to
39 our study participants, technology-enabled monitoring may allow for greater flexibility in working hours
40 as well as peace of mind.

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43 *“Just being able to click on that button and see, okay, Ashley's still at school for volleyball and the boys*
44 *are still at school for soccer. And just knowing where everyone is can be very helpful.” (Part-time, Skin*
45 *Care Consultant, married mother of 14 y/o daughter, 17 y/o son and 19 y/o son)*

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48 *“It impacts the safety net that I feel, that I can be in Boston and I can check on my kids, whereas without*
49 *technology I wouldn't be able to do that. I guess the impact is a feeling of reassurance that my kids are*
50 *fine.” (Full-time, Academic, married mother of 16 y/o daughter and 18 y/o daughter)*

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52 ***Technology can also be used to entertain or occupy younger children while parents are engaged in***
53 ***work activities.***

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3 Parents, particularly those with younger children, also use technology to entertain and occupy their
4 children when busy with other responsibilities. While not always the preferred method of engaging
5 children, technology can be a support when working parents need to engage in work activities
6 simultaneously with their parenting activities.
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9 *“Especially if it's just one of us, we resort to giving them screen time because we need to do something
10 else so it can be a facilitator to get other things done.” (Full-time, Lecturer, married mother of 6 y/o
11 daughter and 2 y/o son)*
12

13 ***Personal forms of technology can also provide added support for parents seeking to manage and
14 maintain family relationships.***
15

16 Study participants frequently noted that they used technology to manage family relationships. For
17 example, shared technology, such as Google calendars and Google docs, allow for remote management
18 of schedules and family information. Further, parents also noted that using technology-enabled
19 communication, such as texting, facilitated information sharing and could even facilitate discussing more
20 difficult issues.
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23 *“We use technology when someone receives some piece of information and then needs to pass it on to
24 someone else in some ridiculous timeframe in order to get something done, like fill out this form in the
25 next two hours, because we need to order the sports uniform now and can't if we don't get it in by then.”
26 (Full time, Private Banker, married mother of 14 y/o son and 16 y/o daughter)*
27

28 *“Instead of having that confrontational discussion in person I send a text like we're going to have to talk
29 later and we kind of hash it out in a text chain before we actually talk in person. I'm missing some of the
30 actual interpersonal communication and using technology as kind of a buffer to those tough
31 conversations, but I also think that's a good thing too, because then maybe it doesn't explode like it
32 would, if, if we started the conversation right away in person. We've already hashed out some of the
33 stuff technology-wise.” (Part-time, Skin Care Consultant, married mother of 14 y/o daughter, 17 y/o and
34 19 y/o sons)*
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37 ***While personal technology can facilitate some parenting activities, parent and child attitudes about
38 technology use can impact the extent of its application.***
39

40 In addition to the specific types of parenting activities impacted by personal technology use, two key
41 considerations emerged from the interviews that may influence parental use of personal technology to
42 facilitate parenting. First, parents often noted differing attitudes toward technology in general, with
43 some indicating that they feel too 'plugged in' to use technology for personal activities.
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46 *“This feeling like you have to be constantly plugged into your device as a worker.... it just feels invasive. I
47 should be able to just put that aside when I'm parenting or I'm at home.” (Part-time, Research Assistant,
48 single mother of 17 y/o son)*
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50 Further, some study participants felt conflicted about their children's right to privacy. Certain forms of
51 technology may seem to encroach on older children's ability to make their own decisions and manage
52 personal information.
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54 *“There was a period a year or two ago where I confiscated phones and I wanted to see texts that were
55 going on. I stopped that... Ben kept saying, that's an invasion of my privacy. I'm like, well, you don't own
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3 *the phone.... now I try very hard to give them a long leash and have them make their own choices, given*
4 *that I can pull back that leash at any time.” (Part-time, Skin Care Consultant, married mother of 14 y/o*
5 *daughter, 17 y/o and 19 y/o sons)*
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7 **Implications for HR:**

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9 Personal forms of technology that can assist with balancing the demands of work and caring roles create
10 a unique opportunity for HR practitioners to consider offering new types of benefits or ‘perks’ which
11 could help to engage working parents and reduce the anxiety/conflict they experience in juggling their
12 work and non-work roles. For example, employers might offer ride share subscriptions which reduce the
13 cost paid by employees if they use ride share service for child pick-ups. Similarly, employers might
14 subsidize monthly subscriptions for meal delivery services, reducing the pressure on working parents to
15 fit meal preparation in their schedules.
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18 Along with subsidizing the cost of personal technology or app subscriptions, HR managers might also
19 reconsider policies that restrict employees from the use of personal technology during work hours. By
20 allowing parents to ‘check in’ or ‘parent’ virtually during the workday, employers might find that
21 working parents are more willing to spend time in the office, have less anxiety about managing their
22 parental responsibilities while working and feel better supported by their employer.
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25 **Conclusion:**

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27 This research suggests that broadening our focus beyond professional technology, to the use of personal
28 technology in the workplace, might provide a wider range of solutions that support working parents
29 who are trying to balance the responsibilities of their work and family roles. Further, in addition to
30 providing a tangible ability to enact parenting functions virtually, certain forms of personal technology
31 can also lead to the more intangible benefit of reducing anxiety associated with balancing work and
32 family roles and increasing working parents’ peace of mind. This wider range of solutions afforded by
33 personal technology gives HR administrators an opportunity to develop creative benefits and ‘perks’
34 that might foster a more supportive work-family environment.
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