

The Impact of Home Office on Employee Productivity: A Conceptual Study on Boundary Blur, Burnout, and Work Performance in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia's rapidly transforming work landscape, where over 55% of knowledge workers engage in remote or hybrid arrangements, a paradoxical problem has emerged: remote work increases flexibility but simultaneously blurs boundaries between work and personal life, leading to burnout and reduced work performance. This conceptual paper proposes an empirical investigation into the impact of home office on employee work performance in Malaysia. Drawing on Border Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, this conceptual paper examines three predictors (remote work intensity, boundary management behaviour, and organisational availability expectations), with burnout as a mediator, and work performance as the outcome variable. Methodologically, this conceptual paper provides a framework for a cross-sectional survey design targeting knowledge worker across three Malaysian regions (Greater Klang Valley, Penang, Johor). Knowledge workers are operationally defined as full-time employees in IT, finance, shared services, marketing, engineering, or professional services whose primary work activity involves information processing or digital collaboration. A purposive sampling technique is proposed, with five screening criteria to ensure respondent eligibility. Target sample size is 250 usable responses, determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table for a population of 50,000 knowledge workers (N=250 for 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error). Data will be analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. Theoretically, this conceptual paper applies Border Theory and the JD-R model to the under-researched Malaysian remote work context. Practically, the findings are intended to provide Malaysian employers with evidence-based guidance on managing remote work to prevent burnout and sustain work performance.

Keywords: Remote work, home office, burnout, work performance, boundary management, knowledge workers,

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia's rapidly evolving work landscape, flexible working arrangements (FWAs) have become an established feature. Following amendments to the Employment Act 1955, FWAs were codified into Malaysian labour law, and by 2025, approximately 55% of knowledge workers in Malaysia were engaged in remote or hybrid work arrangements [1]. TalentCorp Malaysia reported that nearly 474,400 workers were supported through the FWA@Workplace initiative [2]. For Kuala Lumpur commuters who lose approximately 580 hours annually to traffic congestion, remote work may provide a solution for reclaiming productive time [3].

However, emerging evidence suggests a potential paradox. Global data from Microsoft (2025) reveals that remote employees receive an average of 117 emails and 153 Teams messages daily, with 30% active at 10 PM and 20% checking email before noon on Saturdays [4]. Google's internal data (2025) showed that engineers working from home five days per week experienced a 20 to 45% reduction in code submissions, with only 31% reporting

sustained high performance [5]. In Malaysia, employees report that always-on expectations create sustained pressure that leads to sudden, dramatic decrease in motivation [6].

The Malaysian government has acknowledged these challenges. The Occupational Safety and Health Guide for Flexible Work Arrangement 2026 requires employers to assess psychosocial risks including work-related stress and mental fatigue [7]. However, Malaysia has yet to legislate a right to disconnect, leaving employees exposed to workplace cultures that normalise 24/7 availability [8].

The term work performance in this study refers to current, sustainable task execution, including task completion, quality of work, and efficiency [9]. This is distinct from measuring productivity decline retrospectively, which introduces recall bias.

The significance of sustainable remote work policies extends beyond individual employee welfare to national economic competitiveness. Particularly with the increasing digital transformation of the Malaysian economy under the 13th Malaysia Plan (2026-2030), ensuring that remote work arrangements enhance rather than undermine work performance is important for maintaining Malaysia's competitiveness in the regional economy [10].

While various factors may influence remote work outcomes, this study focuses on three core predictors. First, remote work intensity (days per week working from home) is the most studied predictor in remote work literature and represents the work-design dimension [11]. Second, boundary management behaviour is the primary individual-level mechanism for work-life separation and represents the personal resource dimension [12]. Third, organisational availability expectations are the primary organisational-level mechanism for after-hours pressure and represent the job demand dimension [13]. These three predictors thus capture individual, organisational, and work-design factors, providing a parsimonious yet comprehensive model for the Malaysian context.

Therefore, this conceptual paper proposes a systematic investigation of three factors influencing employee work performance under remote work conditions: remote work intensity, boundary management behaviour, and organisational availability expectations, with burnout as the mediating mechanism. A methodological framework for subsequent empirical testing is provided.

UNDERPINNING THEORY

This study draws on two complementary theories to explain the proposed relationships in the conceptual framework. Specifically, Border Theory provides the basis for understanding how individuals manage work-life boundaries in remote work settings, while the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model explains how work demands and resources influence burnout and work performance outcomes. The theoretical support for each hypothesised relationship is summarised in Table 1.

Border Theory

Border Theory (Clark, 2000) conceptualises work-life boundaries as physical, temporal, and psychological domains that individuals navigate daily [14]. Two key characteristics are flexibility (the degree to which a boundary can expand or contract) and permeability (the degree to which elements from one domain enter another). In remote work contexts, information and communication technologies enable workers to cross boundaries with greater ease, thereby increasing both flexibility and permeability.

When boundaries become highly permeable, employees may experience difficulty disengaging from work, potentially leading to extended work hours and cumulative fatigue. According to Border Theory, individuals who actively manage boundaries, such as through dedicated workspaces, clear stop times, and digital shutdown practices, experience lower permeability and more favourable outcomes [15].

Accordingly, Border Theory supports the negative relationship between boundary management behaviour and burnout (H2).

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) proposes that job characteristics can be categorised into demands (aspects requiring sustained effort) and resources (aspects that assist in achieving work goals or reducing demands) [16]. When demands exceed available resources over sustained periods, burnout is likely to occur.

Within remote work contexts, high remote work intensity and high organisational availability expectations may function as job demands that deplete employee energy. Burnout, in turn, contributes to adverse outcomes including reduced work performance [17].

The JD-R Model supports the positive relationship between remote work intensity and burnout (H1), the positive relationship between organisational availability expectations and burnout (H3), the negative relationship between burnout and work performance (H4), and the indirect role of burnout in explaining the relationships between the independent variables and work performance (H5,H6,H7).

Summary of Theoretical Support

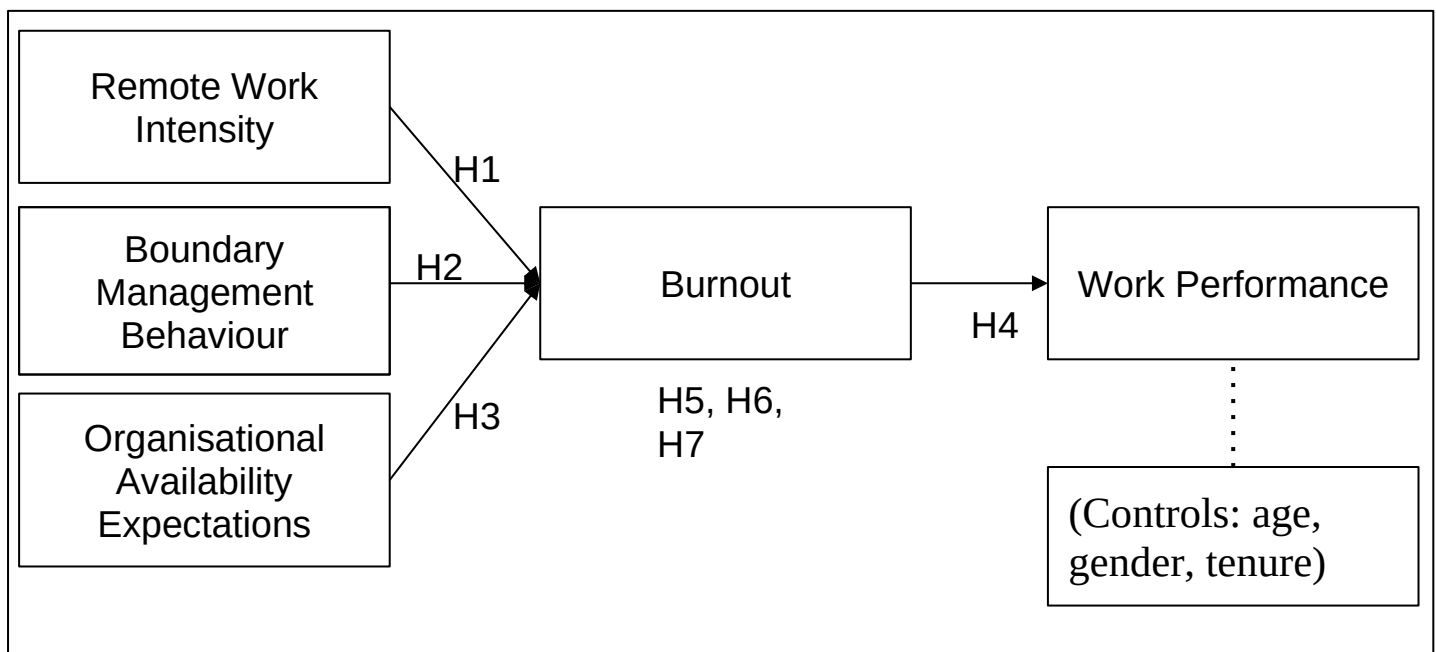
Table 1 presents the theoretical support underlying each proposed hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Supporting Theory
H1	Remote work intensity → Burnout (positive)	JD-R Model
H2	Boundary management behaviour → Burnout (negative)	Border Theory
H3	Organisational availability expectations → Burnout (positive)	JD-R Model
H4	Burnout → Work performance (negative)	JD-R Model
H5,H6,H7	Burnout plays an indirect role in the relationship between IVs and work performance	JD-R Model

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the theoretical frameworks, this study proposes the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



As illustrated in Figure 1, remote work intensity, boundary management behaviour, and organisational availability expectations are proposed as independent variables. Burnout is proposed as a mediator. Work performance is the dependent variable. Age, gender, and organisational tenure are included as control variables.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Remote Work Intensity and Burnout

Remote work intensity refers to the number of days per week an employee works from home rather than from a central workplace [11]. High remote work intensity, such as working from home four to five days per week, reduces the physical separation between work and home domains.

According to the JD-R Model, high remote work intensity may function as a job demand. When employees work remotely most or all of the time, they may lose the natural boundaries typically provided by commuting and physical office environments. Consequently, work emails, messages, and tasks may become continuously accessible, making psychological disengagement from work more difficult. Sustained exposure to these demands may deplete employee resources and contribute to burnout [16].

Empirical evidence supports this relationship. A meta-analysis by Allen et al. (2015) found that high-intensity telecommuting was associated with increased work-family conflict and burnout [18]. Similarly, Google's internal data (2025) showed that employees working from home five days per week reported higher exhaustion levels than hybrid employees [5].

Within the Malaysian context, the absence of right-to-disconnect legislation may further intensify always-on expectations, thereby strengthening the relationship between remote work intensity and burnout [8]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Remote work intensity is positively associated with burnout among Malaysian knowledge workers.

Boundary Management Behaviour and Burnout

Boundary management behaviour refers to the deliberate actions individuals take to separate work and personal life domains [15]. These behaviours include maintaining a dedicated workspace, establishing clear start and end times, shutting down digital devices after work hours, and resisting the urge to check emails during personal time.

Border Theory proposes that individuals differ in their preference for boundary segmentation versus integration [14]. Employees who actively manage boundaries are theorised to experience lower boundary permeability. Lower permeability reduces the extent to which work demands intrude into personal time, thereby preserving personal resources and reducing the likelihood of burnout.

Empirical research indicates that boundary management behaviours significantly reduce work-life conflict and burnout among remote workers [19]. Kossek and Lautsch (2016) found that employees who maintained clear boundaries reported lower emotional exhaustion compared to employees with more blurred boundaries [20].

Within the Malaysian context, traditional cultural values such as *Ugahari* (moderation) may reinforce boundary-setting behaviours, potentially strengthening the protective role of boundary management behaviour [21]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Boundary management behaviour is negatively associated with burnout among Malaysian knowledge workers.

Organisational Availability Expectations and Burnout

Organisational availability expectations refer to the implicit or explicit demands placed on employees to remain available outside normal working hours [13]. These expectations may be communicated through managerial behaviour, organisational culture, or technology-related practices, such as expectations for immediate responses to after-hours messages.

According to the JD-R Model, organisational availability expectations may function as an additional job demand when they exceed reasonable work boundaries [17]. When employees perceive that their organisation expects

after-hours availability, they may experience pressure to extend work hours, monitor messages continuously, and remain psychologically vigilant during personal time. Sustained exposure to these expectations may deplete employee resources and increase burnout risk.

Empirical research supports this relationship. Previous studies have shown that perceived availability expectations significantly predict burnout among remote workers [22]. Mazmanian et al. (2013) found that mobile email devices created an autonomy paradox, whereby employees experienced flexibility in work location while simultaneously becoming continuously connected to work [13].

Within the Malaysian context, the absence of legal right-to-disconnect protections may increase the influence of organisational norms on employee availability expectations [8]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Organisational availability expectations are positively associated with burnout among Malaysian knowledge workers.

Burnout and Work Performance

Burnout is a psychological syndrome characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment [23]. Work performance in this study refers to current and sustainable task execution, including task completion, quality of work, and efficiency [9].

According to the JD-R Model, burnout represents the consequence of sustained job demands exceeding available resources [16]. Burnout may reduce work performance through several mechanisms. Emotional exhaustion may reduce energy available for cognitive tasks, depersonalisation may reduce engagement with work, and reduced personal accomplishment may diminish work motivation [24].

Empirical evidence supports this negative relationship. A meta-analysis by Lesener et al. (2019) confirmed that burnout significantly predicts reduced job performance across multiple occupational and organisational contexts [25].

Within the Malaysian context, reduced work performance may have broader implications for organisational competitiveness and workforce sustainability. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Burnout is negatively associated with work performance among Malaysian knowledge workers.

The Indirect Role of Burnout

The preceding hypotheses propose direct relationships between the study variables. However, the underlying theoretical mechanism of the remote work performance paradox suggests that remote work conditions, specifically high remote work intensity, poor boundary management behaviour, and high organisational availability expectations, contribute to burnout, which subsequently influences work performance. This represents an indirect effect model.

According to the JD-R Model, job demands and resources influence work outcomes indirectly through burnout [17]. In this context, remote work intensity, organisational availability expectations represent job demands, whereas boundary management behaviour represents a personal resource. Burnout functions as the intervening mechanism that explains why certain remote work conditions may contribute to reduced work performance.

Empirical research supports this indirect effect relationship. Studies applying the JD-R framework have consistently demonstrated that burnout explains the relationship between job demands and performance-related outcomes [25,26].

It is important to note that, because this study employs cross-sectional data, the analysis examines indirect effects consistent with mediation rather than establishing causal mediation. Temporal precedence cannot be confirmed without longitudinal data [27].

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Burnout indirectly mediates the relationship between remote work intensity and work performance

H6: Burnout indirectly mediates the relationship between boundary management behaviour and work performance

H7: Burnout indirectly mediates the relationship between organisational availability expectations and work performance

Control Variables

Within the Malaysian context, age has been associated with differences in work attitudes and levels of technostress, with younger workers reporting higher technostress levels [28]. Gender differences in work-life conflict have also been documented among Malaysian professionals [29]. In addition, organisational tenure has been associated with variations in organisational commitment among Malaysian employees [30]. Therefore, these variables are included as controls in the proposed framework.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the proposed relationships. Although a longitudinal design would provide stronger support for causal inference, a cross-sectional design is appropriate at this conceptual stage when common method variance is adequately addressed [31]. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that cross-sectional data permit the examination of associations and indirect effects consistent with mediation but do not establish causal mediation [27].

Operational Definition of Knowledge Workers

For the purpose of this study, knowledge workers are operationally defined as full-time employees whose primary job responsibilities involve non-routine problem-solving, information processing, decision-making, or creative output, and who primarily utilise digital tools and communication technologies to perform their work [32]. Eligible job roles include software developers, IT analysts, financial analysts, accountants, project managers, marketing specialists, HR specialists, operations analysts, consultants, and lecturers.

Screening and Eligibility Criteria

To ensure that only eligible respondents participate in the study, five screening criteria will be applied at the beginning of the questionnaire. These criteria are summarised in Table 3.

First, respondents must be currently employed on a full-time basis. Part-time and casual workers are excluded to ensure adequate exposure to organisational expectations and remote work routines.

Second, respondents must hold a job role classified as knowledge work, including positions in information technology, finance and banking, shared services, digital marketing, engineering, higher education, or professional services. Manual workers, retail staff, production line workers, and hospitality workers will be excluded.

Third, respondents' primary work activities must involve creating, analysing, or interpreting information, or communicating and collaborating through digital tools. Individuals whose primary activities involve routine or manual tasks, such as data entry, filing, or operating equipment, will be excluded.

Fourth, respondents must have worked from home at least one day per week on average over the previous three months. Fully office-based workers will therefore be excluded.

Fifth, respondents must have at least three months of tenure within their current organisation to ensure familiarity

with workplace norms and organisational expectations. New employees who are still undergoing probation or training will be excluded.

Table 3: Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Employment status	Full-time employed	Part-time, casual, self-employed, unemployed
Job role	IT, finance, shared services, marketing, engineering, professional services	Manual, retail, production, hospitality
Primary work activity	Information processing, digital collaboration	Routine tasks, manual labour
Remote work intensity	≥ 1 day/week WFH (past 3 months)	0 days/week WFH
Tenure	≥ 3 months in current organisation	< 3 months

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from the Management and Science University Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All participants will provide informed consent before proceeding with the survey. Participation will be voluntary, and respondents may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participant anonymity will be maintained, and no personally identifiable information, such as names, identification numbers, or employer names, will be collected. Data will be stored on a password-protected server accessible only to the research team. Overall, the study is considered to pose minimal risk to participants.

Common Method Variance Prevention

Self-report surveys inherently carry a risk of common method variance (CMV) [33]. Several procedural safeguards will therefore be implemented, including: (a) separating independent variable, mediator, and dependent variable items into distinct questionnaire sections, (b) guaranteeing respondent anonymity to minimise social desirability bias, (c) incorporating reverse-scored items, and (d) varying Likert scale anchors across constructs.

In addition, statistical safeguards will be employed. Harman's single-factor test will be conducted, whereby a single factor accounting for the majority of variance (exceeding 50%) would indicate potential CMV concerns [33]. Furthermore, the full collinearity test will be applied, with variance inflation factor values below 3.3 indicating that CMV is unlikely to substantially distort the findings [34].

Pilot Study

A quantitative pilot study involving 30 to 50 knowledge workers who satisfy the eligibility criteria will be conducted to assess internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$), item clarity, and questionnaire completion time [35].

Population and Sampling

The target population comprises knowledge workers, as operationally defined above, located within three Malaysian regions: Greater Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Putrajaya), Penang, and Johor. These regions were selected because they represent major technology and higher education hubs in Malaysia and contain a high concentration of knowledge workers [36].

Based on Department of Statistics Malaysia (2025) labour force data, the total population of knowledge workers within these three regions is estimated to be approximately 50,000 individuals [36]. Purposive sampling will be employed to target employees who satisfy all five eligibility criteria outlined in Table 3.

Sample Size Determination

Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table [37]. For a

population of 50,000 knowledge workers, representing the estimated accessible population across the three selected regions, the Krejcie and Morgan table recommends a minimum sample size of $N = 250$ to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

The Krejcie and Morgan formula is widely accepted in social science research and is particularly suitable for cross-sectional survey studies where the population size is known or can be reasonably estimated [38].

Table 4: Sample Size Determination Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

Parameter	Value
Estimated population of knowledge workers (three regions)	50,000
Confidence level	95%
Margin of error	$\pm 5\%$
Required sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970)	250
Anticipated attrition/incomplete responses	20%
Initial surveys to distribute	~ 300

Accordingly, this study aims to obtain 250 usable responses from eligible knowledge workers. Approximately 300 surveys will be distributed to account for an anticipated 20% attrition rate arising from incomplete responses, failed attention checks, or missing data.

Measurement Instruments

All constructs will be measured using previously validated scales on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), unless otherwise specified.

Remote work intensity will be measured using three items adapted from Gajendran and Harrison (2007), Golden (2006), and Bloom et al. (2025) [11,39,40]. These items capture related dimensions of remote work intensity, specifically frequency (days per week), proportion (percentage of work time), and duration (length of remote work experience). Collectively, the items are expected to load onto a single latent construct representing remote work intensity.

Code	Item	Response Scale
RWI1	In a typical week, how many days do you work from home?	0 to 5 days
RWI2	Over the past three months, what percentage of your work time has been spent working from home?	0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%
RWI3	How long have you been working from home on a regular basis?	1 = Less than 3 months to 5 = More than 24 months

Boundary management behaviour will be measured using a six-item scale adapted from Kreiner (2006), including items such as I have a clear time when I stop working each day and I physically leave my workspace at the end of the workday [15].

Organisational availability expectations will be measured using a four-item scale adapted from Mazmanian et al. (2013), including items such as My manager expects me to be available outside normal hours and I worry that not responding quickly in the evening will hurt my career [13].

Burnout will be measured using the five-item version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey (MBI-GS), including items such as I feel emotionally drained from my work and I feel burned out from my work [23].

Work performance will be measured using the four-item current work performance subscale developed by Koopmans et al. (2014), including items such as I was able to plan my work well and I was able to perform my work well [9]. This instrument measures current work performance rather than retrospective performance decline, thereby minimising recall bias.

Control variables will include age (years), gender (male/female/other), and organisational tenure (months).

Table 5: Summary of Measurement Instruments

Construct	Number of Items	Sample Item	Source
Remote work intensity	3	In a typical week, how many days do you work from home? (0-5 days)	Gajendran & Harrison (2007); Golden (2006); Bloom et al. (2025)
Boundary management behaviour	6	I have a clear time when I stop working each day	Kreiner (2006)
Organisational availability expectations	4	My manager expects me to be available outside normal hours	Mazmanian et al. (2013)
Burnout	5	I feel emotionally drained from my work	Maslach et al. (2016)
Work performance	4	I was able to perform my work well	Koopmans et al. (2014)
Control variables	3	Age, gender, tenure	Self-constructed

Analytical Approach

Data will be analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software [41]. PLS-SEM is considered appropriate for this study for three primary reasons: (a) the proposed model includes indirect effects (H5,H6,H7), (b) the study is exploratory within the Malaysian context, and (c) PLS-SEM does not require multivariate normality assumptions [42].

The analysis will proceed in two stages [43]. The first stage involves evaluation of the measurement model through assessment of indicator reliability, with factor loadings expected to exceed 0.70, internal consistency reliability through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding 0.70, convergent validity through average variance extracted values exceeding 0.50, and discriminant validity through HTMT ratio values below 0.85 [44].

The second stage involves evaluation of the structural model through examination of path coefficients (β), t-values, significance levels (p-values), and coefficients of determination (R^2). Predictive relevance will also be assessed using the Stone-Geisser Q^2 statistic [45].

For the indirect effect hypothesis (H5,H6,H7), bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples will be employed to estimate indirect effects and confidence intervals. An indirect effect will be considered statistically supported when the confidence interval does not include zero [46]. Nevertheless, because the study employs cross-sectional data, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of indirect effects consistent with mediation rather than proof of causal mediation [27].

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

First, this conceptual paper applies Border Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to the under-researched context of Malaysian knowledge workers. While both theories have been extensively validated in Western contexts [14,16], their applicability to Southeast Asian work settings with distinct cultural values and infrastructure conditions has received limited attention. Malaysia's collectivist culture and the absence of right-to-disconnect legislation create a unique context that may moderate the relationships observed in Western studies [6,8].

Second, this conceptual paper specifies burnout as the indirect mechanism linking remote work conditions to work performance. Prior remote work research has often examined direct effects between remote work and performance [11,18]. By proposing burnout as an indirect pathway (H5,H6,H7), this conceptual paper responds to calls in the literature for clearer specification of how remote work produces negative outcomes [9,17].

Third, this conceptual paper introduces boundary management behaviour as a key predictor of burnout in the remote work context. While boundary management has been studied in work-family conflict research [15,20], its

role in remote work performance has received less attention. This conceptual paper positions boundary management as an individual-level resource that can buffer the negative effects of remote work.

Fourth, this conceptual paper provides a clear operational definition of knowledge workers with specific screening criteria, addressing a common methodological weakness in remote work research where samples are often poorly defined.

Fifth, this conceptual paper responds to recent calls for more rigorous methodological reporting in organisational research [47]. By using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table for a population of 50,000 ($N=250$), specifying procedural and statistical remedies for common method variance, recommending a pilot study, and adopting PLS-SEM with bootstrapping for indirect effect testing (5,000 resamples), this conceptual paper establishes a transparency benchmark for future Malaysian remote work research.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

For Malaysian employers, human resource practitioners, and policymakers, this conceptual paper outlines several practical implications that will be relevant following empirical validation of the proposed model.

If H1 is supported, indicating that higher remote work intensity increases burnout, employers should exercise caution in mandating full-time remote work arrangements. Instead, hybrid work structures that balance remote and office-based work may help maintain flexibility while reducing sustained boundary erosion.

If H2 is supported, suggesting that boundary management behaviour reduces burnout, organisations should prioritise interventions that strengthen employees' ability to separate work and non-work domains. This may include providing ergonomic support for home workspaces, establishing clear organisational expectations regarding work start and end times, integrating digital tools that facilitate boundary control such as scheduled email delivery and status management features, and offering access to shared workspaces for employees without suitable home environments.

If H3 is supported, indicating that organisational availability expectations increase burnout, attention should be directed towards managerial practices and organisational culture. Employers may need to ensure that leader's model appropriate boundary behaviours by avoiding unnecessary after-hours communication, clearly communicating that immediate responses outside working hours are not expected, minimising non-urgent communication during personal time, and shifting performance evaluation towards outcomes rather than availability.

If H4 is supported, demonstrating that burnout negatively affects work performance, organisations may benefit from implementing mechanisms for early identification of burnout risk among remote employees. This may include periodic anonymous assessments using validated burnout measures, supported by timely interventions such as workload adjustments, temporary changes in work arrangements, or access to psychological support services.

If H5, H6 and H7 is supported, confirming that burnout functions as an indirect mechanism linking remote work conditions to work performance, the findings would suggest that managing burnout is central to sustaining performance in remote work environments. In this regard, interventions such as employee assistance programmes, structured rest policies, and workload management systems may be particularly relevant in mitigating downstream performance effects.

For policymakers in Malaysia, the findings may also contribute to ongoing discussions surrounding the regulation of after-hours work expectations. Should organisational availability expectations emerge as a significant predictor of burnout, this would provide empirical support for policy considerations related to establishing clearer boundaries for digital connectivity outside formal working hours, in line with international developments in comparable jurisdictions [8].

For human resource practitioners, the operational definition and screening criteria for knowledge workers developed in this study may also serve as a practical reference in designing and implementing remote work

policies. This is particularly relevant in recognising that remote work suitability varies across occupational groups, and policy design should reflect these differences rather than adopting a uniform approach across all employees.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations of the proposed study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions or establish causal mediation [31]. Although the proposed relationships are theoretically grounded, the direction of effects cannot be confirmed empirically, and reverse causality remains possible, for example burnout influencing boundary management behaviour. As a result, the study examines associations and indirect effects consistent with mediation rather than causal mediation. Future research should employ longitudinal designs with multiple waves of data collection to better establish temporal ordering and strengthen causal inference.

Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the risk of common method variance [33]. While procedural and statistical remedies are incorporated, future studies would benefit from incorporating multi-source or objective indicators of performance, such as supervisor ratings, system-generated productivity metrics, or digital trace data. This would reduce single-source bias and strengthen the robustness of findings.

Third, the geographical scope is limited to three Malaysian regions: Greater Klang Valley, Penang, and Johor. Although these regions represent major knowledge work hubs, the findings may not be fully generalisable to other parts of Malaysia, particularly East Malaysia and rural areas where differences in infrastructure and work conditions may influence remote work experiences. Future research should broaden the sampling frame to improve national representativeness.

Fourth, the model focuses on a limited set of predictors and does not include other relevant individual, organisational, and contextual factors that may influence burnout and work performance. Variables such as personality traits, job autonomy, organisational culture, and home working conditions may provide additional explanatory power. Future studies may extend the framework by integrating these factors to develop a more comprehensive model of remote work outcomes.

Fifth, the study does not capture objective measures of work intensity or working hours. Self-reported measures may be subject to recall bias and perception effects. Future research should consider alternative approaches such as experience sampling methods or digital trace data from organisational systems to obtain more precise behavioural indicators of remote work patterns.

Sixth, the current model does not specify interaction effects among the independent variables. While relationships among them are expected and will be examined through correlations, future research may benefit from explicitly testing moderation or interaction effects to better understand how these predictors jointly influence burnout and performance outcomes.

Seventh, culturally embedded constructs such as Ugahari, which reflects moderation and boundary discipline in the Malaysian context, are not included in the current framework. Future research should consider developing and validating culturally grounded measures and examining their moderating role in shaping boundary management and burnout relationships.

Eighth, the use of strict screening criteria enhances internal validity by ensuring a focused sample of knowledge workers, but it also limits generalisability to other occupational groups. Future research should test the model across a wider range of professions to assess whether the observed relationships hold beyond knowledge-intensive work.

Finally, the study does not include turnover intention or actual turnover behaviour as outcome variables. Given the established link between burnout and withdrawal behaviours, future research may extend the model to include retention-related outcomes alongside work performance to provide a more comprehensive understanding of organisational impact.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper has proposed an empirical investigation into the impact of home office on employee work performance in Malaysia. Against the backdrop of widespread remote work adoption, approximately 55% of Malaysian knowledge workers now engage in flexible arrangements, the performance paradox (short-term gains masking long-term decline) represents a critical challenge for organisations and employees alike.

Drawing on Border Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, this conceptual paper proposed five hypotheses examining three predictors (remote work intensity, boundary management behaviour, organisational availability expectations), with burnout as a mediator, and work performance as the outcome variable. The JD-R model supports hypotheses linking remote work intensity and organisational expectations to burnout (H1, H3), linking burnout to work performance (H4), and specifying the indirect role of burnout (H5,H6,H7). Border Theory supports the negative relationship between boundary management behaviour and burnout (H2).

Methodologically, a cross-sectional survey design with 250 eligible knowledge workers across three Malaysian regions (Greater Klang Valley, Penang, Johor) was proposed. Knowledge workers were operationally defined as full-time employees in IT, finance, shared services, marketing, engineering, or professional services whose primary work activity involves information processing or digital collaboration. Five screening criteria were specified to ensure respondent eligibility. Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for a population of 50,000, yielding a target of 250 respondents. Data will be analysed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0, with specific procedures outlined for measurement model evaluation, structural model testing, common method variance assessment, and indirect effect testing using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

Theoretically, this conceptual paper applies Border Theory and the JD-R model to the under-researched Malaysian context, specifies burnout as the indirect mechanism linking remote work conditions to work performance, introduces boundary management behaviour as a key individual-level resource, and provides a clear operational definition of knowledge workers with specific screening criteria. Practically, the findings will provide Malaysian employers with evidence-based guidance on optimal remote work policies, manager training, boundary management resources, and burnout prevention strategies.

As Malaysia pursues digital transformation under the 13th Malaysia Plan (2026-2030), ensuring that remote work arrangements are sustainable rather than exploitative is essential for maintaining a productive, healthy, and competitive workforce. This conceptual paper provides the foundational framework for the empirical research needed to inform evidence-based policy and practice.

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