
Work-Life Balance Challenges of Young Startup Entrepreneurs

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article aim was to analyze the challenges related to work-life balance (WLB) among young entrepreneurs running startups in Poland. Particular emphasis is placed on the psychosocial consequences of imbalance and on identifying factors that may support better time and stress management. The article also presents two research hypotheses: H1: Young startup entrepreneurs often experience a lack of balance between professional and private life. H2: A high level of stress and professional burnout among young startup founders is associated with a low level of time management skills and a lack of team support.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The theoretical part of the article was written following a thorough review of the leading literature on the subject. The empirical part was based on a survey conducted among 100 young entrepreneurs aged up to 35. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions—5 related to the characteristics of the entrepreneurs and 15 specifically focused on WLB, assessing the respondents' subjective perception of work-life balance using a 5-point Likert scale.

Findings: The article presents the results of a study conducted in January 2025 among 100 respondents. The findings indicate that the vast majority of participants work more than 40 hours per week and experience high levels of stress. Respondents report difficulties in separating professional and private life and express a need for greater psychological and organizational support.

Practical Implications: The article suggests the need to develop support programs for entrepreneurs—such as mentoring, coaching, and education in time management—already at the early stages of a startup's development.

Originality/Value: The issue of work-life balance is rarely analyzed in the context of young startup leaders, despite the fact that their work style involves unique challenges. This article contributes value by offering an empirical perspective on the issue, combining insights from both management and psychological well-being.

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1. Introduction

Young entrepreneurs are increasingly choosing to start their own startups in pursuit of independence, passion, and the opportunity to bring innovative ideas to life. Poland ranks among the leading EU countries in terms of the number of new businesses founded by individuals under the age of 35, which is reflected in the growing number of incubators, acceleration programs, and venture capital funding (brandsit.pl).

However, running a startup also comes with numerous challenges, including time pressure and stress. The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life has become a widespread phenomenon—startup "hustle" culture promotes constant availability and full commitment to business development (Papageorgiou, 2020). As a result, symptoms of chronic stress, fatigue, and professional burnout emerge, threatening not only the well-being of founders but also the stability of their companies (Ammirato *et al.*, 2024).

Stress has been identified by 32% of Polish entrepreneurs as the main "dark side" of running a business (brandsit.pl). In another study, 82% of entrepreneurs admitted that over the past year, they had lost sleep due to work-related issues (<https://www.adobe.com>). Such statistics demonstrate that maintaining a balance between professional and personal life—commonly referred to as work-life balance (WLB)—is a pressing issue in the startup environment.

The concept of work-life balance refers to a state in which professional and personal responsibilities are in harmony, and an individual feels engaged and satisfied both in their role as an employee or entrepreneur and in their private life. Maintaining this balance contributes to overall well-being and effectiveness. On the other hand, disruptions in WLB can lead to professional burnout, health problems, and a decline in business productivity (Wójtowicz, Stadnicki, and Lipa, 2019).

In light of the above challenges, it is worth examining how young entrepreneurs assess work-life balance (WLB) and what factors facilitate or hinder its maintenance. The aim of this article is to identify and analyze the challenges related

to maintaining a balance between professional and private life (work-life balance) among young entrepreneurs running startups in Poland.

To achieve this aim, the following research hypotheses were adopted:

H1: Young startup entrepreneurs often experience a lack of balance between professional and private life.

H2: A high level of stress and professional burnout among young startup founders is associated with a low level of time management skills and a lack of team support.

2. Work-Life-Balance in Management

The concept of WLB—work-life balance—has been the subject of research in management theory for many years. It is classically defined as the degree to which individuals are able to effectively manage the demands of both professional and personal life, while minimizing conflicts between these spheres (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Norena-Chavez and Thalassinos, 2022).

The literature identifies three fundamental models of work-life balance, the role conflict model, the role enrichment model, and the integration model (Frone, 2003). The role conflict model assumes that fulfilling multiple roles (e.g., as an entrepreneur and a family member) leads to tensions that negatively affect both spheres.

In contrast, the role enrichment model emphasizes that experiences gained in one role can positively influence the other (e.g., the development of management skills at work can support the organization of family life). The integration model suggests a blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, which takes on particular relevance in the context of entrepreneurship (Thalassinos *et al.*, 2019).

In the context of entrepreneurship, the issue of work-life balance takes on particular significance. Owners of small businesses and startups tend to exhibit a strong time and emotional commitment to running their ventures, which often results in the spillover of professional life into the personal domain. Adisa *et al.* (2019) point out that entrepreneurs frequently "push the boundaries," treating flexibility as a privilege that, in practice, turns into excessive availability and an inability to disconnect after working hours.

Researchers point out that startup culture promotes an attitude of total work commitment—commonly referred to as *hustle culture*—which can lead to chronic stress and professional burnout (Tahir, 2024; Papageorgiou, 2020). The WHO (2019) defines burnout as a state of chronic fatigue, cynicism, and reduced effectiveness resulting from prolonged work-related stress. The literature emphasizes that a lack of balance between personal and professional life is one of the main risk factors for burnout (Wójtowicz, 2017).

Moreover, young startup leaders typically operate under conditions of high uncertainty and without well-established organizational structures, which increases their vulnerability to psychological overload. As Vallerand (2015) notes, only harmonious passion—supported by a healthy environment and life balance—leads to long-term well-being, in contrast to obsessive passion, which is driven by pressure to succeed and a lack of boundaries.

Work-life balance within the startup environment transcends the notion of mere time management and should be understood as the outcome of complex interactions between organizational, psychological, and cultural dimensions.

In the context of accelerating digitalization and increasing demands for constant innovation, the development of systemic support mechanisms for maintaining this balance emerges as a critical challenge for contemporary management theory and practice.

3. Research Methodology

The aim of the empirical research conducted for this article was to identify the main challenges related to maintaining work-life balance (WLB) among young entrepreneurs running startups in Poland. The study focused on both the subjective perception of WLB and the psychosocial consequences of its absence—including levels of stress, professional burnout, and time management skills. The research was diagnostic and exploratory in nature, and its target group consisted of entrepreneurs up to the age of 35 who were actively managing startup ventures.

The research method applied was a quantitative survey conducted using a proprietary questionnaire. This method was selected due to the need to reach a broad group of young entrepreneurs operating in various regions of Poland, as well as the necessity to collect data in a remote and flexible manner.

The study was conducted in January 2025 and included 100 respondents. The inclusion criteria required participants to be actively operating as startup founders and to be no older than 35 years of age. The sample structure was purposive in nature—respondents were recruited through social media platforms, startup groups, business incubators, and networking communities for young entrepreneurs.

The study was exploratory and cross-sectional in nature, which entails certain limitations. First, the sample of 100 respondents is not fully representative of the entire population of young entrepreneurs in Poland.

Second, the data are declarative and may be subject to subjectivity, which is a common characteristic of survey-based research. Despite the aforementioned limitations, the results provide valuable empirical material for further, in-depth quantitative and qualitative analyses in this area.

4. Results

In January 2025, a survey was conducted among 100 young entrepreneurs aged up to 35. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, 5 related to the demographic and professional characteristics of the entrepreneurs, and 15 specifically focused on WLB, assessing the subjective perception of the balance between professional and personal life using a 5-point Likert scale.

Based on the data collected in the first part of the survey, the structure of the respondents was determined, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Sample Characteristics*

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	23	23%
	Male	77	77%
Age	18–23	17	17%
	24–29	49	49%
	30–35	34	34%
Years in Startup Operation	Less than 1 year	27	27%
	1–2 years	41	41%
	2–3 years	25	25%
	Over 3 years	7	7%
Weekly Working Hours in Startup	Less than 30 hours	8	8%
	30–40 hours	26	26%
	41–50 hours	27	27%
	51–60 hours	26	26%
	Over 60 hours	13	13%

Source: *Authors' own research.*

As shown in Table 1, the vast majority of respondents were male (77%), while females accounted for 23% of the sample. This outcome reflects the well-documented phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women in the tech and startup sectors, which has also been noted in the literature (Lyons and Zhang, 2023).

In terms of age, the largest group of respondents fell within the 24–29 age range (49%), which aligns with the typical age of entry into the startup path. Respondents aged 30–35 accounted for 34% of the sample, while the youngest group (18–23) represented 17%.

As for professional experience and time spent running a business, the largest proportion of respondents (41%) had been operating their startups for 1 to 2 years, and another 25% had between 2 and 3 years of experience. Only 7% of participants had been running their ventures for more than 3 years. This indicates the relatively young age of the firms and their early development stage, which may be associated with the lack of organizational structures that support work-life balance.

It is also worth highlighting that 39% of respondents reported working more than 50 hours per week, with 13% exceeding 60 hours. Only 8% worked fewer than 30 hours. In total, 66% of participants worked more than the standard 40 hours per week. These findings support earlier hypotheses and existing literature that point to the above-average time burden experienced by startup founders (Papageorgiou, 2020; Adisa *et al.*, 2019). This distribution also reinforces the hypothesis regarding the lack of work-life balance in the startup environment, particularly during the initial years of business operation.

Subsequently, Table 2 presents the results of the analysis and assessment of 15 observable variables, as evaluated by the respondents, regarding their perception of work-life balance (WLB) among young entrepreneurs running startups.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of observable variables

No.	Variable Name	Mean	Std. Dev.	CV
V1	I believe I have a balance between professional and personal life.	3.56	1.34	0.38
V2	I often feel that work dominates my personal life.	3.72	1.16	0.31
V3	I have enough time for family and friends.	3.55	1.28	0.36
V4	Working in my startup takes time away from hobbies and rest.	3.72	1.14	0.31
V5	I mentally disconnect from work after hours.	4.14	1.07	0.26
V6	I have a flexible schedule that supports WLB.	4.08	1.10	0.27
V7	I experience stress related to professional responsibilities.	4.00	1.11	0.28
V8	I feel professionally burned out.	3.92	1.11	0.28
V9	I have enough time for recovery and sleep.	3.94	1.03	0.26
V10	My startup gives me a sense of meaning and fulfillment.	3.86	1.13	0.29
V11	I know and apply time management techniques.	3.99	1.09	0.27
V12	I know how to manage stress at work.	3.67	1.23	0.34
V13	I need more support (e.g., from a mentor or team).	3.76	1.19	0.32
V14	Sometimes I consider reducing my involvement in the startup.	3.46	1.17	0.34
V15	I need psychological or coaching support.	3.63	1.13	0.31

Source: Authors' own research.

Based on the conducted statistical analysis, it can be concluded that all variables obtained mean values above 3.5, which suggests a moderately positive perception of work-life balance aspects among young entrepreneurs running startups.

The highest mean scores were recorded for the statements: "I mentally disconnect from work after hours" ($M = 4.14$), "I have a flexible schedule that supports WLB" ($M = 4.08$), and "I experience stress related to professional responsibilities" ($M = 4.00$). This may indicate a high psychological burden despite the declared flexibility in managing working time.

The variable with the lowest mean value was "I have enough time for family and friends" ($M = 3.55$), suggesting that professional responsibilities often limit the

private sphere of life. High average values for items related to the need for psychological and organizational support confirm that respondents perceive decision-making loneliness and lack of mentoring as significant challenges.

The range of standard deviations falls between 1.07 and 1.34, indicating a varied level of agreement among respondents regarding different aspects of work-life balance. In most cases, the coefficient of variation (CV) does not exceed 35%, which suggests a relatively low dispersion of responses. However, for certain indicators—particularly those related to professional burnout, recovery, and stress management—the variability is noticeably higher, reflecting more diverse experiences and perceptions within the sample.

The statistical analysis suggests that respondents rate their sense of purpose in startup work relatively high, yet simultaneously report experiencing chronic stress, insufficient recovery, and a need for support. The variability of responses in areas related to burnout and time management may indicate the necessity for further in-depth research—particularly of a qualitative nature—to better understand individual coping strategies within the startup environment.

Hypothesis H2 assumed that high levels of stress and professional burnout correlate with low levels of time management skills and lack of team support. To verify this hypothesis, Spearman's rank correlation test was applied, which is appropriate for ordinal scale data. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Spearman Correlations for Selected Variable Pairs*

Variable Pair	ρ (Spearman)	p-value	Interpretation
I experience stress ↔ I know and apply time management techniques	0.60	< 0.00001	Strong positive correlation
I feel professionally burned out ↔ I know and apply time management techniques	0.46	< 0.00001	Moderate positive correlation
I feel professionally burned out ↔ I need more support (e.g., mentor, team)	0.37	0.00017	Moderate positive correlation

Source: *Authors' own research.*

All of the reported correlations are statistically significant, which confirms the assumptions of Hypothesis H2. The results indicate that:

- Individuals with lower time management competencies are more prone to stress and burnout.
- The need for mentoring or team support increases alongside the intensification of burnout symptoms.

In conclusion, the results of the empirical study confirm that young entrepreneurs running startups in Poland face significant challenges in maintaining a balance between professional and personal life. Time overload, high levels of stress, limited free time, and a strong need for both team-based and psychological support are common elements in the experiences of most respondents. The identified correlations confirm that deficiencies in time management competencies and decision-making isolation significantly increase the risk of professional burnout.

The diversity of responses suggests that some participants have already implemented individual coping strategies; however, without adequate institutional support, long-term improvement remains difficult to achieve. The collected empirical material provides a solid foundation for further analysis of the work-life balance phenomenon in the startup environment, both from quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

5. Discussion

The conducted research confirms both hypotheses proposed in the article. First, the analysis of working hours, subjective assessments of WLB, and the frequency of stress-related experiences clearly indicates that young startup entrepreneurs often struggle with a lack of balance between professional and personal life (H1). As many as 66% of respondents work more than 40 hours per week, which—combined with high ratings of stress and limited time for close relationships—reflects significant difficulties in separating professional and personal spheres.

The demonstrated correlation between levels of stress and burnout and the low level of time management competencies, as well as the need for organizational support (H2), serves as a significant warning signal. This highlights the necessity of developing soft skills in areas such as self-management, teamwork, and the effective use of mentoring support.

The research findings confirm that the lack of team and mentoring support is one of the key factors contributing to overload and burnout among young entrepreneurs. This is supported, among others, by the study conducted by Weinert, Banaś, Wójtowicz, and Luft (2024), which, based on a pre-incubation program carried out within a corporate incubator, demonstrates that fostering a collaborative environment and providing access to resources not only enhances innovation but also reduces stress, strengthens psychological resilience, and improves work-life balance.

The authors emphasize that mentoring, access to experts, and opportunities to test ideas without market pressure promote the psychosocial well-being of participants. In the startup context, this implies that incubators can act as a buffer against burnout, particularly in the pre-seed phase when stable organizational structures are not yet in place.

Importantly, despite the subjective difficulties reported, many respondents simultaneously declare a sense of purpose in working on their own startup ($M = 3.86$) and acknowledge having a flexible work schedule ($M = 4.08$). This may indicate the presence of so-called emotional ambivalence, in which passion and commitment coexist with psychological strain and fatigue.

In this context, Vallerand's (2015) concept of harmonious vs. obsessive passion proves useful. According to this framework, only harmonious passion—nurtured by a supportive environment and healthy boundaries—contributes to long-term well-being.

Finally, the findings of this study have important practical implications. They indicate that effective strategies for preventing burnout and improving work-life balance should include not only individual-level interventions but also systemic approaches—focused on fostering a supportive organizational culture, ensuring access to mentoring, and promoting the development of local and industry-specific entrepreneurial communities.

6. Conclusion

Conducted empirical research, along with a comprehensive literature review and analysis of survey data, provided detailed insight into the challenges of maintaining work-life balance among young startup entrepreneurs in Poland. Statistical analysis enabled the identification of key variables and confirmed both research hypotheses.

The research results indicate that young startup founders face significant difficulties in balancing professional and personal life. A substantial share of respondents reported working over 40 hours per week, experiencing elevated levels of stress, and expressing the need for psychological and organizational support. These findings confirm that high stress levels and symptoms of burnout are closely linked with low time management skills and a lack of team or mentoring support.

Moreover, the results show that the absence of structured support systems, such as mentoring and collaborative environments, contributes significantly to founder overload and burnout. This is consistent with the findings of Weinert, Banaś, Wójtowicz, and Luft (2024), who demonstrated that access to resources, expert guidance, and stress-free experimentation environments, as seen in preincubation programs, can substantially improve participants' psychological well-being and work-life balance.

In conclusion, the literature review and the conducted research confirm that maintaining work-life balance remains a critical challenge in the startup environment. Addressing it requires systemic solutions such as mentoring, access to support networks, and targeted training in time and stress management—especially in the early stages of startup development.

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