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**Title: “The Flight for Equilibrium: A Qualitative Exploration of Work-Life Balance
Experiences among British Airways Employees”**

Supervisor: Ebad Banissi

Submitted by: Soheli Rana

Student ID: 2427128

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how employees associated with British Airways construct and experience work-life balance through publicly available narratives on Glassdoor. Using an interpretivist, inductive case study design, 61 employee reviews filtered under the platform's work-life balance dimension were manually collected, cleaned, and organised in a secure Excel database. Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted through repeated reading, line-by-line coding, memoing, and iterative theme development.

Three themes were generated. First, temporal and structural work demands were described as the most immediate constraint on balance, especially long and unsociable hours, night duties, roster changes at short notice, and operational delays that extend shifts. Second, these demands were often narrated as interference with family life and personal routines, with judgements about the organisation shaped by perceptions of managerial care, fairness, and responsiveness to caring responsibilities. Third, organisational resources sometimes buffered strain, including flexible scheduling, travel benefits, pay, and strong team communities, although flexibility could also be experienced as fragmented time, split shifts, or implicit availability.

Across the dataset, work-life balance emerged as a negotiated and uneven equilibrium rather than a stable condition. Some reviewers framed the role as sustainable and even enriching, while others depicted chronic depletion and a lack of recognition. The study contributes a fine-grained account of employee sense-making in a safety-critical, customer-facing context using naturally occurring digital texts.

Practical implications point towards prioritising roster predictability, transparent allocation of unpopular duties, supervisor capability in supporting boundary management, and credible voice channels that connect wellbeing with safety and retention. Limitations relate to self-selection, variable detail across reviews, and limited demographic information.

Declaration

Hereby, I declare that the dissertation titled “The Flight for Equilibrium: A Qualitative Exploration of Work-Life Balance Experiences among British Airways Employees” is my independent and original research work. I confirm that this work is a result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other academic degree.

I acknowledged and mentioned all sources and references utilised in this dissertation, including data from previous publications, published or unpublished. This declaration affirms my academic integrity and research ethics. Any replication from other sources is coincidental and unintentional. This dissertation demonstrates my commitment to academic rigour and the pursuit of knowledge in Human Resource Management.

Sohel Rana

2nd of February 2026

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

Work has always been essential to adulthood, yet many employees struggle to keep it in its place. Work-life balance has been stretched by service economies, irregular shift work, and constant availability requirements (Guest, 2017). Safety-critical operations, high customer demands, and tight deadlines intensify pressure on the work-life boundaries in commercial aviation. British Airways, a major full-service carrier, has complex route networks, jobs, and rosters that affect work-life balance.

British Airways employees' narratives on work-life balance are investigated in this dissertation. It draws on publicly available employee reviews and adopts an interpretivist, inductive, qualitative approach to examine the meanings, tensions and trade-offs embedded in these narratives. The chapter introduces the broader context of work-life balance in aviation, sets out the research problem, articulates the aim, objectives and research questions, outlines the theoretical and conceptual framing, and concludes with an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

Work-life balance (WLB) has developed from a relatively narrow concern with work and family arrangements to a broader focus on the compatibility between work and multiple spheres of life, including health, relationships, rest and personal projects (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Guest, 2017). Early scholarship framed the issue largely as work–family conflict, emphasising the ways in which incompatible role demands produce time-based, strain-based or behaviour-based tensions (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Later work drew attention to the possibility that work and non-work roles can also support each other, as resources, skills and positive affect spill over between domains. This shift introduced the notion of work-family enrichment and a more nuanced appreciation of dual experiences of strain and gain (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

More recent discussions tend to conceptualise WLB as a subjective sense of fit or equilibrium, in which individuals judge whether the distribution and quality of their role investments align with personal values and social expectations (Clark, 2000; Guest, 2017). In this view, balance is not simply the absence of conflict or the mechanical division of hours, but a lived evaluation of whether work and life feel sustainable, meaningful and reasonably fair. What counts as balance is therefore contextually grounded and open to negotiation over time.

In aviation, however, the pursuit of such equilibrium unfolds under distinctive conditions. Airline staff often work irregular hours, nights, weekends and holidays, with schedules that

respond to fluctuating passenger demand, network disruptions and regulatory constraints (Harrington, 2001; Costa, 2010). Flight and cabin crew manage jet lag, circadian disruption and extended periods away from home. At the same time, ground staff and operational controllers may experience intense peaks of workload with limited control over timing (Powell et al., 2007). Across these groups, the emotional and cognitive demands of safety-critical, customer-facing service work interact with physical fatigue and recovery needs, creating a complex backdrop for any discussion of balance (Goode, 2003; Hochschild, 2012).

The concept of work-life balance in such settings is deeply entangled with scheduling practices, perceived fairness in the allocation of duties and the quality of supervisory relationships. Evidence from hospitality and tourism suggests that unpredictable rosters, insufficient recovery time and inflexible policies erode both wellbeing and retention. In contrast, supportive supervisors and fair rostering arrangements can offset some inherent demands (Deery, 2008). Studies guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model likewise emphasise that high demands need not always result in strain if employees have sufficient resources, such as autonomy, social support and opportunities for recovery (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

British Airways, a long-standing UK flag carrier with a diverse workforce and complex short- and long-haul operations, sits within this demanding landscape. Airline employees in varied roles have diverse experiences. A cabin crew member near a major hub may cite early starts, sleep interruptions, and demanding passengers. Time-pressed engineers may prioritise airworthiness and turnaround. Corporate staff may be more preoccupied with project deadlines, performance targets and expectations around flexible or hybrid working. These varied experiences contribute to public narratives about British Airways as an employer, including those expressed in online reviews.

Online platforms such as Glassdoor have become important venues through which current and former employees share experiences of organisational life, including assessments of culture, management and work-life balance (Kozinets, 2020). Such reviews do not constitute representative surveys, yet they provide candid, unsolicited accounts that can reveal how organisational practices are felt and interpreted on the ground. For British Airways, these narrative traces offer a window into how employees talk about balance, fatigue, support and sacrifice, and how they stitch together their professional identities with the rest of their lives.

1.2. Research Problem and Justification

Much of the academic and practitioner discussion of work-life balance in aviation has focused on regulatory aspects, measurable fatigue indicators or survey-based measures of work-family conflict, particularly among pilots (Goode, 2003; Powell et al., 2007). These contributions are valuable, yet they tend to foreground quantifiable aspects of workload and performance. Less attention has been devoted to how employees themselves narrate and interpret balance in everyday terms, especially across different occupational groups within the same airline.

There is also a tendency in organisational discourse to treat work-life balance as a policy label rather than as a contested, lived experience. Airlines may present flexible rostering, wellbeing programmes or hybrid working arrangements as evidence of commitment to balance. At the same time, employees may still encounter persistent unpredictability, emotional strain or trade-offs between career progression and personal life. The gap between formal arrangements and lived experience has been documented in other service sectors, where employees sometimes describe a sense of dissonance between official rhetoric and day-to-day realities (Deery, 2008; Guest, 2017). Understanding how this tension manifests in an airline context requires qualitative engagement with employee voice.

The present study responds to three interrelated problems. First, interpretivist, employee-voiced accounts of work-life balance in aviation remain relatively underdeveloped. Secondly, research has not sufficiently integrated boundary theories, resource-based models and emotional labour perspectives when examining work-life balance in airlines as complex, multi-role organisations. Thirdly, naturally occurring online employee narratives have been underused as a source of data for understanding how work-life balance is constructed in practice (Kozinets, 2020). Addressing these issues is important not only for scholarship but also for management at British Airways and comparable carriers that seek to balance operational reliability with humane, sustainable working lives.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of the dissertation is to interpret how employees associated with British Airways construct and experience work-life balance, and to identify the organisational conditions that they perceive as enabling or constraining that equilibrium.

Building on this aim, the study pursues three specific objectives:

1. To surface and interpret the dominant themes through which employees describe work-life balance in publicly available review narratives. It involves attending both to explicit references to balance and to more subtle language about time, energy, control and sacrifice.
2. The second objective is to identify organisational practices, structural features and interpersonal dynamics that employees describe as shaping their experience of work-life balance, such as rostering patterns, managerial behaviours, peer support, customer demands and recovery opportunities.
3. The third objective is to synthesise the implications of these themes for management practice and human resource policy in British Airways and, by extension, in similar safety-critical service organisations.

These objectives are deliberately focused and achievable given the nature of the secondary data and the qualitative design. They emphasise depth of understanding rather than statistical generalisation, and they align with an interpretivist concern with meaning-making within a specific organisational case (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

1.4. Research Questions

In order to address the aim and objectives, the study is guided by three research questions:

1. How do British Airways employees narrate and make sense of work-life balance in publicly available review narratives?

This question directs attention to the language, metaphors and evaluative judgements that employees use when talking about balance, and to the ways in which they rationalise the attractions and costs of working for the airline.

2. What organisational practices, demands and resources are perceived as enabling or constraining work-life balance for British Airways employees?

The focus here lies on the aspects of scheduling, workload, managerial support, peer relationships and customer interactions that emerge in the narratives as important levers or barriers.

3. What implications do these employees' constructions of work-life balance have for management practice and policy in British Airways and comparable airlines?

This question encourages a move from descriptive themes to considered reflection on how organisational actors might respond, while recognising that employees' accounts are situated, partial and at times conflicting.

Taken together, the questions invite an exploration of work-life balance as experienced and narrated by employees, rather than as defined solely by formal policy or aggregate metrics.

1.5. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework Overview

The study is informed by a set of complementary theoretical lenses that together help illuminate the complexity of work-life balance in a safety-critical service context. Work-family conflict theory provides an initial frame by specifying how incompatible demands can generate time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts, which is particularly relevant where long or irregular hours intersect with family or social obligations (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Work-family enrichment theory adds a more optimistic perspective, suggesting that resources, skills and positive emotions can sometimes transfer beneficially between domains (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

Boundary and border theories help to conceptualise how individuals manage the interface between work and non-work domains. Boundary theory, for example, describes a continuum between segmentation and integration, and highlights the cognitive and emotional work involved in transitioning between roles (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000). Work-family border theory emphasises that borders are socially constructed and negotiated, and that border-keepers such as supervisors and organisational policies strongly influence how permeable and flexible those borders become (Clark, 2000).

Resource-based models offer an additional layer. Conservation of Resources theory proposes that individuals strive to protect valued resources such as time, energy and social support, and that chronic resource loss can trigger stress and burnout (Hobfoll, 1989). The Job Demands-Resources model synthesises this insight into a framework in which job demands, such as workload, emotional labour and time pressure, drain energy, while job resources, such as autonomy, schedule control, support and recovery opportunities, foster motivation and buffer the impact of demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Emotional labour theory further enriches the conceptual framing. In high-contact service roles, employees are expected to manage their emotional displays in line with organisational feeling rules, which can involve surface acting or deep acting and can have significant implications for exhaustion, satisfaction and authenticity (Hochschild, 2012; Hülshager and Schewe, 2011). In an airline, such emotional work intertwines with fatigue and safety concerns in ways that are likely to be reflected in employee accounts of work-life balance, even when not explicitly labelled as such.

Finally, the study draws on netnographic and qualitative organisational research that treats online reviews as meaningful cultural artefacts rather than simple ratings. Netnography offers guidance on how to interpret digital narratives as expressions of situated experience, while also cautioning about selection bias and contextual integrity (Kozinets, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). Together, these frameworks provide a lens through which to read the employee narratives and to connect emergent themes to existing knowledge about work-life balance, demands, resources and emotion in organisations.

1.6. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organised into six substantive chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a critical literature review that examines conceptualisations of work-life balance, boundary and resource-based theories, emotional labour, aviation-specific research and the emerging use of online employee narratives. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, including the interpretivist philosophical stance, qualitative case study design, data collection from Glassdoor, sampling strategy, reflexive thematic analysis and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 reports the findings, presenting the main themes that emerged from the employee reviews and illustrating them with selected extracts. Chapter 5 discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and existing literature and draws out implications for management and human resource practice. Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarising the key contributions, acknowledging limitations and suggesting directions for future research on work-life balance in aviation and related sectors.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter builds a conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding work-life balance (WLB) in a safety-critical service firm like British Airways. First, WLB's definition and conceptual evolution from conflict-based constructs to more nuanced views are examined. Explaining work-life boundaries with boundary and border theories follows.

Resource-based theories like Conservation of Resources (COR) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model explain how demands and resources affect wellbeing and balance. After examining emotional labour as a hallmark of client-facing service employment, the chapter analyses aviation and hospitality evidence to show how emotional control, customer intensity, and organisational expectations affect WLB. Conceptual strands for interpreting employee narratives from online evaluations are emphasised.

2.2. Conceptual Foundations of Work-Life Balance (WLB)

2.2.1. Defining Work-Life Balance

The term work-life balance has become pervasive in policy discourse and popular management writing, yet there is no universal agreement on its definition. Early work tended to focus on the interface between employment and family roles, often treating “life” as synonymous with family responsibilities (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). This focus reflected social norms around dual-earner households and the challenges of combining paid work with caregiving. Over time, scholars and practitioners have increasingly recognised that non-work life encompasses a broader range of activities, including friendships, community involvement, leisure, education and personal health (Guest, 2017).

One influential way of thinking about WLB emphasises role compatibility. Balance is achieved when participation in multiple roles is experienced as congruent with an individual’s values and expectations, rather than when time is simply divided equally across domains (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003). Objective indicators such as weekly hours, shift patterns, or commute length can influence this perception, but they do not determine it. Two employees with similar schedules may evaluate their balance quite differently, depending on perceived control, support and the meanings they attach to work and non-work roles (Guest, 2002).

A second strand highlights the dynamic and subjective nature of balance. Clark (2000) argues that balance exists when individuals feel comfortable with the level of integration between work and family, and when they perceive mutual satisfaction across domains. Guest (2017) similarly suggests that balance involves a reasonable level of satisfaction and functioning at work and outside work, with minimum conflict between roles. This notion of “reasonable” balance introduces an element of negotiation and context: employees may accept periods of high work intensity if they trust that demands are temporary, fairly distributed and offset by opportunities for recovery or progression.

The literature also points to the role of broader organisational and societal contexts in shaping what counts as balance. Expectations regarding availability, overtime, weekend work or digital connectivity vary across sectors and countries, which means that the threshold for judging whether work has become intrusive is not fixed (Kossek, Baltes and Matthews, 2011). In safety-critical and customer-facing sectors, employees may internalise strong professional norms around service and reliability, which complicates decisions about when to say “enough”.

2.2.2. Work-Family Conflict Theory

Work-family conflict theory offers one of the earliest and most enduring conceptualisations of the work-life interface. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work-family conflict as a form of interrole conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible. They distinguish three forms of conflict: time-based, where time devoted to one role makes it difficult to participate in another; strain-based, where stress or fatigue from one role impairs performance in another; and behaviour-based, where behaviours required in one role are incompatible with expectations in another.

Subsequent empirical research has supported the idea that both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict are associated with reduced wellbeing, lower job satisfaction and poorer family functioning (Allen et al., 2000). However, the strength and direction of these associations can vary by occupation, gender and organisational culture. In high-demand occupations such as aviation, time- and strain-based conflict are particularly salient, given irregular shifts, long duty periods and the cognitive demands of safety-critical work (Goode, 2003; Harrington, 2001).

2.2.3. Work-Family Enrichment

Recognition that work and non-work roles can also benefit one another led to the development of work-family enrichment theory. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) define enrichment as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role, through instrumental or affective pathways. Resources such as skills, perspectives, psychological capital or social support gained in one domain can transfer to another, potentially enhancing performance or satisfaction.

The enrichment perspective challenges an overly zero-sum view of roles and suggests that balance is not only about reducing conflict, but also about enabling positive cross-domain spillover. In practice, employees may experience conflict and enrichment concurrently. For example, an airline employee might feel exhausted by irregular hours yet also value the sense of pride, cultural exposure or interpersonal skills gained through the role. This duality complicates any simplistic categorisation of jobs as either “good” or “bad” for balance, and points to the importance of understanding how employees themselves narrate these trade-offs.

2.3. Boundary and Border Theories of WLB

2.3.1. Boundary Theory

Boundary theory examines how individuals create, maintain and negotiate psychological and behavioural boundaries between life domains such as work and home (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). These boundaries can be more or less segmented or integrated. In highly segmented arrangements, work and non-work are separated in terms of time, space, roles and mental focus. In more integrated arrangements, boundaries are permeable, and activities, thoughts or relationships overlap across domains.

Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) argue that each configuration has advantages and drawbacks. Segmentation can protect non-work life from intrusion and support recovery, yet excessive rigidity may limit flexibility when urgent work demands arise. Integration may enable flexibility and reduce transition costs, but it can also blur distinctions between “on” and “off” time, making it harder to disengage. Individuals often develop personal tactics for managing boundaries, such as rituals at the start and end of shifts, rules around mobile phone use at home, or symbolic artefacts that signal role transitions.

In contemporary work contexts, boundaries are influenced not only by personal preferences but also by organisational practices and technologies. Schedules, staffing levels, expectations about responding to messages and the design of physical workplaces can either support or undermine employees’ efforts to shape boundaries in line with their needs (Kossek, Baltes and Matthews, 2011). In a 24-hour service such as aviation, the temporal and spatial organisation of work can constrain how far employees are able to segment or integrate roles, even when they have strong preferences in one direction.

2.3.2. Work-Family Border Theory

Work-family border theory extends boundary thinking by emphasising that borders between work and family are socially constructed and negotiated, rather than purely individual (Clark, 2000). Clark conceives of work and family as distinct domains separated by borders that vary in permeability (the extent to which elements of one domain can enter another) and flexibility (the extent to which borders can move or change). Individuals are described as “border-crossers” who move daily between domains. At the same time, actors such as supervisors, colleagues and family members act as “border-keepers” who can either facilitate or hinder balance.

A central proposition is that balance is more likely when compatible cultures characterise domains and when border-keepers are supportive of the individual's efforts to align demands and responsibilities. For example, a supervisor who respects off-duty time and offers some input into schedules may help an employee construct more manageable border. Conversely, an organisational culture that glorifies constant availability can increase border permeability in ways that compromise non-work life.

Work-family border theory is particularly relevant in contexts where temporal and spatial boundaries are inherently unstable. Airline employees frequently cross physical borders (airports, hotels, home), work across time zones and experience changing crew compositions. The degree to which they can create predictability or "islands" of non-work time depends not only on personal strategies, but also on rostering practices, crew briefings, communication expectations and the stance of local managers. Understanding employee narratives about work-life balance, therefore, requires attention to how borders are experienced and negotiated, rather than assuming a simple segmented or integrated pattern.

2.4. Job Demands-Resources and Resource-Based Models

2.4.1. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resources theory explains stress and wellbeing using resource dynamics. Hobfoll (1989) says people strive to obtain, retain, and defend valued resources like time, energy, self-esteem, material possessions, and social support. Threats, losses, or insufficient resources cause stress. Resource loss matters more than gain, and loss cycles can occur when initial depletion leads to further vulnerability.

According to the COR theory, persons who invest a lot of time and energy in demanding jobs without sufficient recovery or support may experience cumulative stress in their personal lives. Supporting connections, autonomy, and organisational recognition can reduce resource loss. The theory indicates that people have diverse resource reservoirs and control over resource investment decisions, adding fairness to balancing considerations (Hobfoll, 2011).

Applied to aviation, COR theory helps to frame how prolonged irregular hours, sleep disruption and emotional demands might gradually erode energy and psychological resources if not matched by adequate rest, support and meaningful rewards. Employee narratives about exhaustion, cynicism or withdrawal can be interpreted as signals of resource loss spirals rather than isolated complaints.

2.4.2. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R model translates the logic of resource dynamics into a work design framework by distinguishing between job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Job demands are aspects of work that require sustained physical, cognitive or emotional effort and therefore entail physiological or psychological costs, such as workload, time pressure, role ambiguity or emotional labour. Job resources are aspects of work that help achieve work goals, reduce demands or stimulate learning and development, such as autonomy, feedback, social support and opportunities for recovery.

The model proposes two intertwined processes. A health-impairment process links excessive demands to strain and burnout, particularly when resources are insufficient. A motivational process links abundant resources to engagement and positive outcomes, especially when they help employees cope with demands. The balance between demands and resources is crucial for understanding whether employees experience work as depleting, sustainable or even energising.

In relation to work-life balance, the JD-R perspective suggests that high demands need not inevitably result in imbalance if organisations provide strong resources, such as predictable scheduling, supportive supervisors and meaningful control over time off. However, when demands accumulate and resources are thin, spillover into non-work domains is likely, with consequences for health, family life and retention (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Airline work often features high and variable demands, including irregular hours, customer intensity and safety responsibilities; stories of balance told by employees can be read as situated commentaries on how demands and resources are configured in specific roles and units.

2.5. Emotional Labour in Customer-Facing Service Work

2.5.1. Emotional Labour Framework

Emotional labour refers to the requirement to manage feelings and emotional displays in line with organisational expectations during interpersonal interactions (Hochschild, 2012). In service roles, employees are expected to express friendliness, calmness or concern, and to suppress irritation, boredom or anxiety, even when internal feelings do not match these display rules. Hochschild's seminal study of flight attendants and bill collectors demonstrated how such emotional regulation can become a form of labour that is sold and supervised, with consequences for workers' identities and wellbeing.

Subsequent work has elaborated two main strategies of emotional regulation in service roles. Surface acting involves modifying outward expressions while feelings remain unchanged, often by “putting on a mask”. Deep acting involves attempts to alter internal feelings to align more genuinely with display rules, for example, by reframing the customer or situation (Grandey, 2000). Research suggests that surface acting is more strongly associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced job satisfaction, whereas deep acting may be less detrimental or even positively related to some outcomes (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Hülshager and Schewe, 2011).

Emotional labour has direct implications for work-life balance. Continuous regulation of emotions can be draining, particularly when combined with other demands such as time pressure or role conflict. After sustained episodes of surface acting, employees may have little energy left for family or personal pursuits and may find it difficult to “switch off” intrusive thoughts or residual tension. Where organisational support and discretion are limited, emotional labour can contribute to burnout, which in turn affects non-work life through irritability, withdrawal or impaired social functioning (Hülshager and Schewe, 2011).

At the same time, emotional labour is not uniformly negative. Some employees derive pride and satisfaction from providing excellent service, de-escalating difficult situations or forming genuine connections with customers. These experiences can contribute to work-family enrichment when skills and emotional competencies developed at work are used to manage relationships in non-work domains. Organisational norms, training, staffing levels, and opportunities for decompression shape the balance between emotional costs and benefits.

2.5.2. Evidence from Aviation and Hospitality

Aviation is a dramatic backdrop for emotional labour due to confined spaces, safety concerns, and anxious, exhausted, or frustrated passengers. Hochschild (2012) showed that flight attendants were expected to stay calm and warm even when dealing with challenging behaviour, which empowered and strained them. Sustained regulation demands, irregular schedules, and sleep disruption enhance burnout and work-life imbalance in aviation (Goode, 2003; Powell et al., 2007).

Hospitality research provides comparable insights. Long, anti-social hours, emotional labour, and customer intensity at hotels and resorts generate stress and turnover; hence, work-life balance is being used strategically to retain staff (Deery, 2008). In cultures that value “service with a smile,” emotional labour in hospitality can make it hard to express tiredness or

unhappiness. Hülshager and Schewe (2011) discovered that emotional labour in such situations generates fatigue and tension, especially when institutional support is weak or perceived as unfair.

Evidence from aviation and hospitality suggests emotional labour, scheduling, workload, and supervisory support affect work-life balance. Where staffing levels permit brief recovery periods after intense interactions, where supervisors acknowledge emotional demands, and where rosters avoid excessive sequences of demanding shifts, employees may be more able to sustain both service quality and personal wellbeing. Where these conditions are absent, emotional labour may become a key mechanism through which work encroaches on life, even if organisational policies nominally support balance. These patterns provide an important backdrop for interpreting British Airways employees' own accounts of how work and life mesh or collide.

2.6. WLB in Aviation Contexts

2.6.1. Shift Work, Fatigue, Sleep Cycles

Aviation work is organised around irregular, extended, and often overnight shifts that disrupt circadian rhythms and recovery opportunities. Research on shift work has long associated night work and rotating schedules with sleep disruption, chronic fatigue, and heightened risks to physical and psychological health (Harrington, 2001; Costa, 2010). In airline operations, rosters often combine early starts, late finishes, multiple sectors per duty, and rapid time zone changes, which compress recovery windows and fragment off-duty time. Cabin crew and ground staff struggle to balance work and family due to irregular routines in sleep, eating, and family life (van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020).

Workers assess physiological and lived fatigue by their ability to participate in family and social activities. Qualitative cabin crew studies show that demanding schedules cause chronic exhaustion, annoyance, and social withdrawal, lowering work-life balance (Ulufer Kansoy and Erduran Tekin, 2024). When organisational regulations compress layovers or reduce days off, crew members regard off-duty time as rehabilitation rather than pleasure, confining “life” to recovering to return to work. Not peripheral constraints, but temporal structures and sleep cycles explain aeronautical WLB.

2.6.2. Safety-Critical Demands

Fatigue and time strain are harsher in safety-critical aviation. Flight crew studies show that sleep loss, attentiveness, and performance reductions can compromise safety margins (Goode, 2003; Powell et al., 2007). Safety cultures encourage awareness, procedural compliance, and attentiveness, but they may also create operational interruptions, including increased duty times, last-minute alterations, and fewer staff. European airlines' cost-cutting and staffing issues have created deteriorating working conditions, fatigue, and concerns that scheduling may trump safety considerations (Folke and Melin, 2024).

This environment complicates work-life balance in at least two ways. First, employees may feel morally obliged to accept personal strain in order to uphold safety and service standards, which normalises self-sacrifice and overwork. Second, the psychological weight of responsibility for passenger safety may follow employees' home, making psychological detachment more difficult. For cabin crew and ground staff, the interplay between safety expectations, organisational rostering practices, and individual coping strategies becomes part of how "balance" is constructed and narrated.

2.6.3. Customer-Facing Pressures in Airlines

Customer-facing roles in airlines involve intense interpersonal demands, often in confined spaces and under time pressure. Cabin crew manage passenger expectations, emotions, and conflicts while simultaneously enforcing safety procedures and commercial priorities. Studies of airline and hospitality workers show that customer intensity, frequent disruptions, and extended exposure to complaining, or distressed customers increase emotional exhaustion and strain, which can spill over into family life (Hülshager and Schewe, 2011; Deery, 2008).

Passengers increasingly expect both seamless service and personalised attention, while post-pandemic protocols, staffing reductions, and higher load factors have made flights busier and more complex (Tremblay and Nogues, 2024). Cabin staff may feel "always on" from boarding to disembarkation, with little decompression. When demanding client interactions coincide with poor sleep and recovery habits, employees may feel emotionally fatigued and unable to support partners, children, and friends. Customer-facing pressures bridge in-flight experiences to off-duty wellbeing, highlighting emotional and relational aspects of WLB along with hours worked.

2.6.4. Organisational Practices Affecting WLB

Organisational behaviours affect WLB performance beyond individual coping. Cabin crew and airline workers report that roster design, job allocation fairness, schedule predictability, and stand-by obligations affect perceived control and family planning (Deery, 2008; van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020). Childcare, social events, and rest are hard to schedule due to “back-to-back” sectors, reduced planning time between jobs, and last-minute changes.

Studies in different airline contexts also emphasise the importance of company support and explicitly resourced fatigue risk management systems. In organisations where management is perceived as attentive to rest needs and open to fatigue reporting, crews are more likely to describe sustainable forms of balance, even under high operational demands (van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020). By contrast, cultures that treat fatigue complaints as weakness or disloyalty encourage concealment and self-silencing, which may intensify both risk and strain. For British Airways employees, such dynamics are likely to interact with the legacy of a national flag carrier identity, union relationships, and ongoing competitive pressures in the European and global markets.

2.7. Managerial and HRM Influences on WLB

2.7.1. Supervisor Support and Schedule Control

Managerial behaviour often mediates how structural demands are experienced. Work-family scholarship shows that supportive supervision, understood as empathy, flexibility, and open communication about non-work commitments, can substantially reduce work-to-family conflict and burnout (Kelly et al., 2014). Interventions that increase perceived schedule control, such as participatory rostering or predictable scheduling windows, are associated with improved sleep, reduced stress, and better work-life outcomes in service and high-tech contexts.

Aviation line managers and rostering teams are ‘border-keepers’ who affect work-life balance (Clark, 2000). Qualitative research shows that employees see supervisors who accept switch requests, consider caring obligations, or advocate for fair division of disagreeable chores as acknowledging their whole-life conditions. Feeling like “just a number” under authoritarian or punitive supervisors’ damages trust and disengages employees from WLB discussions. Since British Airways frontline managers balance safety, service quality, and cost control, their scheduling flexibility may be a central theme in employee narratives.

2.7.2. Organisational Justice and Perceived Fairness

Perceptions of fairness are closely tied to wellbeing and WLB. Guest (2017) argues that human resource management systems, which foreground employee wellbeing and a positive employment relationship, are more likely to generate mutual gains for employees and organisations. In airlines, procedural justice in duty allocation, transparency in promotion and bidding systems, and equitable access to desirable routes or rest periods signal whether the organisation values employees as partners or cost units.

Research on aviation and other service sectors shows that when employees perceive rostering and rewards as arbitrary or politically driven, they are more likely to report cynicism, stress, and intentions to leave (Deery, 2008; Tremblay and Nogues, 2024). Fair procedures do not remove the strain of irregular hours. Nevertheless, they can influence how that strain is interpreted: as a shared operational necessity or as an avoidable burden imposed on specific groups. For WLB, perceived unfairness often appears in complaints about “always getting the worst shifts” or feeling punished for having caring responsibilities.

2.7.3. Wellbeing, Retention and Safety Culture

Work-life balance boosts job satisfaction, engagement, and retention in airlines and other service industries (Deery, 2008; Amiruddin and Monil, 2022). When employees perceive a persistent imbalance that cannot be resolved, experienced crew and specialists leave for other carriers or leave the industry. Staffing, safety, and service quality are affected by attrition.

Making WLB part of the safety culture is vital. Cabin crew fatigue studies show that long-term wellbeing, perceived organisational support, and the freedom to speak up about rest needs reduce operational risk (van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020; Folke and Melin, 2024). If employees feel unable to decline duties when exhausted, or fear reprisal for raising concerns, they may comply outwardly while privately feeling unsafe. In this sense, WLB cannot be treated as an optional “perk” but as part of the conditions under which safe and reliable service is delivered.

2.8. Employee Voice, Digital Narratives and Netnography

2.8.1. Online Employee Reviews as Data

Digital platforms have transformed how employees express their views about work. Glassdoor, in particular, enables current and former employees to provide anonymous ratings and narrative reviews of employers across multiple dimensions, including work-life balance (Glassdoor,

2025b). These online reviews are increasingly consulted by job seekers and used by organisations as indicators of employer reputation. At the same time, they offer researchers a naturally occurring corpus of organisational talk, written outside formal research settings and often in reflective, candid tones (Landers, Brusso and Auer, 2019).

Studies mining Glassdoor reviews have applied topic modelling, sentiment analysis, and other computational techniques to understand employee opinions about culture, leadership, and job satisfaction (Lee, Lee and Kim, 2025; Bajpai et al., 2018). These approaches demonstrate that online reviews can capture both structural issues, such as workload and pay, and more subjective themes, such as feeling valued or respected. At the same time, the voluntary and public nature of posting introduces selection effects, with reviewers more likely to have strong positive or negative experiences. For an interpretivist study of WLB, such reviews provide rich, situated accounts of how employees make sense of balance, sacrifice, and organisational support.

2.8.2. Methodological Relevance

Netnography, as developed by Kozinets (2010, 2020), provides a methodological framework for qualitatively analysing online communities and digital narratives. Applied to sites such as Glassdoor, netnographic approaches invite researchers to treat reviews not as isolated scores but as socially and culturally embedded texts that reflect shared norms, discourses, and expectations. Within management research, scholars have begun to use such methods to explore how employees construct identities, articulate grievances, and negotiate meanings in digital spaces (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

For the present dissertation, online reviews are conceptualised as “naturally occurring” organisational texts that align well with an interpretivist stance. They are written without researcher prompts, at times of the employee’s choosing, and often in a storytelling mode that foregrounds subjective evaluation. A netnographic and reflexive thematic analysis can therefore surface how British Airways employees frame work-life balance, what metaphors they use, and how they position themselves in relation to management, customers, and colleagues. Ethical considerations remain salient, particularly given evolving debates about anonymity and identifiability on review platforms, yet established guidance for internet research offers ways to engage respectfully with publicly accessible data.

2.9. Key Studies, Contradictions and Debates

The wider literature on WLB in aviation and related service sectors reveals a number of tensions. Quantitative studies often emphasise structural variables such as hours worked, number of sectors, or commute time, and typically confirm associations between high demands, work-family conflict, and strain (Harrington, 2001; Costa, 2010). Qualitative work, however, suggests that employees' subjective evaluations of control, fairness, and recognition can moderate these relationships (Deery, 2008; van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020). Some research finds that flexible scheduling practices and supervisor support significantly improve perceived WLB. At the same time, other studies caution that flexibility without real reductions in workload may simply shift responsibility for managing conflict onto individuals (Kelly et al., 2014).

Debates also persist about the extent to which formal WLB or wellbeing policies translate into lived experiences. In airlines, official rhetoric about safety and wellbeing sometimes sits uneasily alongside reports of work intensification, reduced crew complements, and pressure to prioritise sales and productivity (Tremblay and Nogues, 2024; Folke et al., 2024). Likewise, although Glassdoor and similar platforms present themselves as vehicles for transparency and employee voice, questions remain about representativeness, potential strategic posting, and the influence of platform governance on what is visible. These contradictions point to the need for interpretive studies that attend to employees' own narratives rather than treating balance as an objective condition.

2.10. Research Gap

Drawing together the preceding strands, three interrelated gaps become apparent. First, while there is a growing body of research on WLB in aviation, much of it focuses on pilots or treats cabin crew and ground staff primarily as subjects of fatigue management, not as meaning-makers who articulate how they live with imbalance over time (van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020; Ulufer Kansoy and Erduran Tekin, 2024). Qualitative work does exist, yet interpretivist, employee-voiced accounts that centre subjective constructions of WLB in a major legacy carrier such as British Airways remain limited.

Second, theoretical perspectives are often applied in isolation. Studies may draw on work-family conflict, JD-R, or emotional labour frameworks, but relatively few integrate boundary theory, resource-based models, and emotional labour to examine how temporal, emotional, and relational demands interact in airline roles (Deery, 2008; Hülshager and Schewe, 2011). A

more integrative conceptual lens could illuminate how employees negotiate boundaries, mobilise or lose resources, and manage emotional display in ways that shape perceived balance.

Third, naturally occurring online employee narratives are underused for studying WLB. Although computational work on Glassdoor reviews has demonstrated their potential for capturing employee sentiment and organisational reputation (Lee, Lee and Kim, 2025; Landers, Brusso and Auer, 2019), there is relatively little interpretive, fine-grained analysis of how employees construct and narrate work-life balance in these texts, particularly in aviation settings. Given that British Airways employees actively post on such platforms, this represents a valuable yet underexplored data source.

2.11. Summary

This chapter has traced the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical terrain surrounding work-life balance, with a particular focus on safety-critical, customer-facing aviation work. It has reviewed core WLB constructs, boundary and resource-based theories, and research on emotional labour, before situating these ideas in the specific context of airline operations and HRM practices. The discussion has also highlighted the emergence of digital review platforms as spaces where employees publicly articulate their experiences of balance, strain, and support. In doing so, the chapter has identified three main gaps: the relative scarcity of interpretivist, employee-voiced accounts of WLB in aviation; limited integration of boundary, JD-R, and emotional labour perspectives in airline contexts; and the underutilisation of naturally occurring online employee narratives as data. These gaps provide the rationale for the present qualitative, inductive case study of British Airways, grounded in reflexive thematic analysis of Glassdoor reviews. The next chapter develops the methodological choices required to address the research questions and to engage rigorously and ethically with this form of digital employee voice.

3. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter explains how the study is designed to explore British Airways employees' experiences of work-life balance through their public reviews on Glassdoor. The methodological choices are grounded in an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive, qualitative case study of a single organisation. Ontology and epistemology are discussed first, followed by the inductive approach and why British Airways was picked. Next, the research design (using naturally existing online texts, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a 61-review sample size) is explained. Sections on data gathering, sampling, and reflective thematic

analysis follow. Next, quality, reliability, internet-mediated research ethics, and viability are discussed. The conclusion briefly links methodological choices to the research aim and questions.

3.2. Research Philosophy

3.2.1. Interpretivism

Interpretivism characterises this study. Interpretivism maintains that social reality is created by people's interpretations of their experiences, not a single objective entity that can be appraised regardless of context (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Personal histories, organisational practices, and socioeconomic circumstances affect work-life balance perceptions of equilibrium, pressure, and enrichment. Interpretivism highlights how employees narrate and symbolically define their working lives, rather than treating work-life balance as a fixed variable.

Qualitative methodologists prefer rich, situated narratives that reveal nuance and contradiction to understand welfare, justice, and organisational climate (Denzin and Lincoln, 2023). Employees publish employer assessments on Glassdoor in their own words, often while reflecting, annoyed, or thankful. Interpretivism allows viewing these passages as sense-making, not complaints or affirmations.

3.2.2. Ontology & Epistemology

Ontologically, this relativist study assumes multiple realities. The balance between work and life is not binary. Each review allows for investigating how British Airways balances work and non-work activities in its operational and cultural context. Realities may overlap, clash or shift over time.

Epistemologically, this study assumes that interpreting meaning-laden texts produces knowledge, rather than being discovered as facts. Employee scheduling, fatigue, supervisory behaviour, and personal priorities appear in Glassdoor reviews. Memory, emotion, and the platform's public persona mediate these narratives. Understanding accounts requires rigorous, theoretically informed pattern analysis, not frequency counts (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022).

3.2.3. Justification for Interpretivism in This Study

Interpretivism is ideal for this study for three reasons. First, work-life balance is subjective. Two workers with similar rosters may view their balance differently based on family, health,

and career aspirations. Prioritising lived meaning is better than considering work and home hour ratios.

Second, Glassdoor reviews are naturally occurring narratives, not responses to standardised surveys. Interpretivist traditions recommend considering these texts as contextually embedded stories about experience construction and communication (Denzin and Lincoln, 2023). Online reviews let employees voice issues they cannot discuss internally.

Third, the study emphasises depth above statistical generality. It aims to demonstrate how British Airways employees balance work and life in safety-critical, customer-facing workplaces, rather than estimating population parameters. It aligns with qualitative organisational research and interpretivism's depth, complexity, and context (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.3. Research Approach

3.3.1. Inductive Orientation

The study is inductive. Instead of testing predefined work-life balance theories, detailed engagement with employee reviews reveals patterns. Current conceptions inform initial readings, and growing interpretations are refined in discussion with the literature during qualitative research induction (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Borderline theory, job demands-resources, and emotional labour are conceptual resources in this study; however, they do not dictate the coding scheme. Reflexive thematic analysis is used to develop themes that “speak back” to these frameworks, revealing where employees’ perspectives agree or disagree with dominant work-life balance models (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2022). This approach refines theory rather than simply applying it.

3.3.2. Qualitative Case Study of British Airways

The research design involves a qualitative case study focused on British Airways. Case study research analyses contemporary events in their real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context blur (Yin, 2018). British Airways’ safety-critical operations, global routes, sophisticated rostering, and visible brand provide a rich background. In this company, operational constraints, customer expectations, and corporate culture may define work-life balance.

The single-organisation design allows examined work-life balance experienced at a single organisation rather than a sector. It limits statistical generalisability but allows analytic

generalisation, where readers consider how the patterns may apply to other organisational contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2023).

3.4. Research Design

3.4.1. Use of Naturally Occurring Text

Glassdoor (2025a) reviews from British Airways employees are the primary data sources. These texts were produced naturally – for sharing experiences, warning prospective employees, or showing appreciation – not at the researcher’s request. Netnographic methods suggest digital footprints may disclose how employees construct meaning online (Kozinets, 2020).

Online reviews offer several advantages. Reviewers discuss scheduling, supervision, and sacrifices in their own words. They may disclose issues staff cannot discuss internally. However, the method has downsides. Autonomous reviewers may be motivated by particularly positive or unpleasant encounters. Glassdoor ratings and prompts also affect how employees communicate. These constraints are considered as communication contexts, not data flaws.

3.4.2. Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

The data corpus is defined through inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria:

- Only reviews under British Airways employer profile on Glassdoor are analysed.
- Only reviews under the platform’s work-life balance filter are captured.
- Reviews must contain sufficient textual content.
- Reviews for British Airways are included regardless of job role, status, or location.

Exclusion criteria:

- Very brief comments with a score or general term (like “good company”) are excluded.
- Reviews entirely unrelated to work-life balance are omitted.

3.4.3. Sample Size & Information Power

After applying the “work-life balance” filter in British Airways’ employer profile on Glassdoor, 62 reviews were found. Excluding one review for being entirely irrelevant, the final sample contained a total of 61 reviews. Qualitative sampling is not governed by statistical power. However, by what Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) describe as information power: the more relevant information a sample holds for the study aim, the fewer cases are needed.

Several aspects of this project support a moderate sample size. The research aim is relatively narrow, focusing specifically on work-life balance in one organisation, and the use of established theoretical frameworks increases the likelihood that each review can be interpreted in depth. At the same time, the heterogeneity of employee roles and the need to explore both positive and negative experiences suggest that a sample that captures variation is important. The sample size of 61 reviews is therefore judged to provide adequate information power while remaining manageable for detailed reflexive analysis conducted by a single researcher.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was transparent and reproducible. After locating the British Airways profile on Glassdoor (2025a), the work-life balance dimension filter identified reviews about this topic. Then, all reviews matching the inclusion requirements were read and manually downloaded for analysis into a secure document. Text, date, star rating, and role or location were included in each review. Reviews were kept anonymous.

Duplicate reviews and entries on non-employee experiences were removed. For anonymous analysis, each review was assigned a unique identifier. A password-protected device stored the dataset. The procedure aligns with secure qualitative data handling required in organisational research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.6. Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling was employed. The goal was an information-rich work-life balance review corpus, not statistical representativeness. Within the filtered set, reviews were selected that contain substantive reflection on the interaction between work schedules, personal life, wellbeing, or family responsibilities. Reviews that include vivid examples, such as descriptions of overnight patterns, holiday restrictions, or the emotional impact of fatigue, were prioritised.

Where metadata were available, attention was paid to achieving maximum variation across roles, locations, and time periods. Including accounts from long-haul and short-haul crew, ground staff, and office-based employees, where possible, permitted exploration of how work-life balance is constructed across different parts of the organisation. The strategy acknowledges that online reviewers are self-selected and that those with extreme experiences may be more likely to post. This bias is not ignored; instead, it is treated as part of the phenomenon of employee voice in digital contexts, and it is considered in later interpretation.

3.7. Data Analysis

3.7.1. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data are analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2022). This method is chosen because it offers a theoretically flexible yet coherent framework for identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative data. Reflexive thematic analysis treats themes as actively constructed by the researcher through a process of engagement with the data, rather than as entities that simply emerge. It is consistent with the interpretivist stance of the study. The analysis follows the six familiar phases:

- First, familiarisation involves repeated reading of all selected reviews, noting initial impressions of how employees talk about schedules, rest, and personal life.
- Second, initial codes are generated, capturing both semantic content (for example, “unpredictable rosters”, “supportive manager”) and more latent ideas such as “trading flexibility for benefits” or “normalising fatigue”.
- Third, codes are collated into potential themes, capturing broader patterns.
- In the fourth phase, candidate themes are reviewed in relation to both the coded extracts and the full dataset, with attention to coherence and distinctiveness.
- The fifth phase involves defining and naming themes, which includes writing detailed theme summaries and exploring subthemes.
- Finally, a narrative account is produced that weaves thematic insights together with illustrative extracts, while remaining attentive to counterexamples and internal tensions. Guidance on maintaining rigour in thematic analysis, including clear documentation of analytic decisions, is also drawn from Nowell et al. (2017).

3.7.2. Coding Strategy

Coding proceeds in an inductive yet theoretically sensitised manner. Initial coding is undertaken line by line to avoid premature closure and to allow unexpected ideas to surface.

Short, active code labels are preferred, which capture the action or evaluation expressed in the text, such as “missing family events”, “finding community in crew”, or “feeling punished by shifts”.

Both semantic and latent coding are used. Semantic codes stay close to the surface content of the reviews. In contrast, latent codes attend to underlying assumptions or cultural narratives, for example, the idea that sacrifice is an inevitable price of aviation work. Analytic memos are written throughout coding to capture early thoughts about possible connections, contradictions, and questions. These memos form part of an audit trail and support reflexivity about how the researcher’s own assumptions may shape interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Tracy, 2010).

3.7.3. Use of Software

Computer-assisted qualitative software such as NVivo could have been used to support the analysis. However, given the relatively modest size of the dataset and the mixed structure of the material (numeric ratings, textual reviews, timestamps, job locations), the decision was taken to manage the corpus using Microsoft Excel. All reviews were entered into a secure Excel workbook, where data cleaning, de-duplication, sorting and basic categorisation were carried out.

Additional columns and simple colour-coding were used within Excel to record initial codes, developing themes and analytic notes. It provided a transparent, traceable structure without introducing unnecessary technical complexity. The interpretive work of reading, coding, memo writing and refining themes remained with the researcher, in line with the view that software can facilitate organisation and retrieval but does not perform analysis itself (Nowell et al., 2017). Manual reflective thematic analysis and Excel-based data management were considered sufficient for analytic rigour, given the dataset and study scope.

3.8. Ensuring Quality & Trustworthiness

This interpretivist study defines quality using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria. Long-term data engagement, iterative coding, and meticulous investigation of negative or disconfirming cases build credibility. Instead of consensus coding or statistical reliability, which would clash with the reflective technique, the study supports theme construction transparency.

Transferability is ensured by thoroughly explaining the organisational setting and themes, enabling readers to determine if the findings apply to other airlines or services. Maintaining an

audit trail of analytical decisions, like code frameworks and theme revisions, improves dependability. Reflective memoing and linking interpretations to examples inform readers how data support conclusions, ensuring confirmability. Tracy's (2010) big tent principles of rich rigour, sincerity, and meaningful coherence guide qualitative quality.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibilities remain even though Glassdoor reviews are publicly available. Internet-mediated research guidelines from the British Psychological Society and the Association of Internet Researchers emphasise respect for autonomy, privacy, and contextual integrity when working with online data (BPS, 2021; Franzke et al., 2020). In this study, no attempt is made to identify individual reviewers. Usernames are not recorded, and any potentially identifying details within extracts are paraphrased or removed.

Platform terms of use are respected by collecting data manually for academic purposes rather than employing automated scraping that might breach conditions. The study focuses on employee experiences rather than on third parties, and care is taken not to reproduce highly sensitive personal information. Because the research involves analysis of texts that reviewers have chosen to make public, the risk of harm is relatively low, but it is not treated as negligible. Permission and ethical clearance are sought from the university, and data are stored securely in line with institutional data protection policies. Where direct quotations are used in the dissertation, they are de-identified and, where necessary, lightly edited for clarity without altering their meaning.

3.10. Feasibility

The design of the study is highly feasible within the constraints of an MBA dissertation. The data are already available online, so there is no need for recruitment, scheduling interviews, or gaining organisational access. The corpus 61 reviews is of a manageable size for a solo researcher to code and interpret in depth, particularly when supported by systematic organisation and tracking of codes within Microsoft Excel. The primary resource requirements are time for iterative reading and analysis, access to Glassdoor, and access to the necessary academic literature and software. Within the given timeframe, these demands are realistic, and the absence of travel or fieldwork costs further supports feasibility (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.11. Summary

This chapter discusses the study's methodology. A relativist, interpretivist, inductive qualitative case study of British Airways exploits naturally available online reviews. The study uses purposive sampling and a small, informative Glassdoor work-life balance review sample. Manual coding and controlled data management in Microsoft Excel make reflexive theme analysis a flexible but rigorous framework for finding patterns in these narratives. Online data use is governed by quality and trustworthiness standards and internet-specific ethics. These methodological choices allow the study to provide nuanced insights into British Airways employees' work-life balance views, which are examined in the findings and discussion chapters.

4. Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of 61 British Airways employee reviews posted on Glassdoor. The purpose is to show how employees narrate work-life balance, how organisational practices and conditions appear to shape those narratives, and how these patterns connect back to the research questions.

The analysis followed the reflexive thematic approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022), with codes and themes developed inductively from the review texts but informed by the conceptual lenses discussed in earlier chapters. The findings are organised into three overarching themes that emerged from the open, axial, and selective coding processes:

1. Temporal and structural work demands shaping work-life balance.
2. Work-life interference and perceived organisational (un)support.
3. Organisational resources and flexibility enabling or constraining balance.

Each theme is illustrated with excerpts from the reviews and interpreted in light of existing theory on work-life balance, job demands and resources, and emotional labour.

4.2. Overview of Dataset and Reviewer Profile

The dataset consists of 61 reviews posted between 2013 and 2025. Reviews are associated with a range of locations, mostly in the United Kingdom (for example, London, Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne), but also in the United States (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Jacksonville, Michigan City), as well as Doha and Mumbai. A number of

reviewers chose to remain “Anonymous” or did not list a location. This geographical spread suggests that the dataset captures experiences from both UK bases and international stations, although the exact roles are not always stated.

Each review includes an overall rating from one to five stars, short “Pros” and “Cons” sections, and, in some cases, a short headline comment. Ratings range from highly positive to very negative. There is a noticeable cluster around three and four stars, suggesting a mix of ambivalent and generally satisfied experiences, with more polarised views at the extremes. Some of the lowest ratings combine severe criticism of pay, hours and management, while higher ratings often highlight strong team culture, travel benefits and opportunities for personal growth.

Not every review explicitly uses the phrase “work-life balance”, yet references to time, shifts, being “away from home”, “missing events”, “unsociable hours” and “zero work-personal life balance” are common. Positive comments about balance also appear, for instance, “Great work life balance and pay” (Review 27, Michigan City, 2023) and “Job gave a great work/life balance” (Review 54, London, 2018). Several reviews describe the job as “flexible” or speak of “flexible schedule” or “flexible working hours”, which suggests varying experiences of control and adaptation over time.

The reviews also differ in temporal positioning. Some reflect long careers, including one from an employee who worked for the airline for 33 years (Review 19, Anonymous, 2024), whereas others speak from the perspective of newer staff or those on part-time contracts. A few explicitly describe the role as “great for school leavers and people who live at home” (Review 5, Gatwick, 2021), highlighting how life stage may shape perceptions of what counts as acceptable work-life trade-offs.

The associated data fields (year, location, overall rating) were used descriptively, not for statistical analysis. They helped to contextualise patterns, for example, by suggesting that some accounts of deteriorating conditions may cluster in more recent years, especially in comments about management not caring for front-line workers (Review 24, Heathrow, 2023), or “zero work-personal life balance” (Review 39, Anonymous, 2022). Given the modest sample and self-selected nature of reviewers, these temporal patterns are treated with caution, but they provide useful context for interpreting the themes.

4.3. Analytical Process Recap

The analysis proceeded in three broad stages, consistent with the reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2022). First, familiarisation involved reading and re-reading each review, while noting early impressions of how employees talked about hours, fatigue, flexibility, management and personal life. During this stage, the Excel database was used to group reviews by year and location and to mark initial observations in adjacent columns.

Second, open coding was conducted at the level of meaningful segments within each review. Codes were kept close to the language used by employees, for example “unsociable hours and a gruelling new contract with poor pay” (Review 2, London, 2013), “being away from home and family at Christmas due to long hours” (Review 19, Anonymous, 2024), or “flexible schedule with the option to increase earnings through overtime” (Review 8, Anonymous, 2013). Eighteen such open codes, summarised previously, captured recurring ideas around long hours, rostering, family impact, managerial consideration, community, and flexibility.

Third, axial and selective coding involved clustering these open codes into higher-order categories. The open codes were grouped into six axial codes, such as “Long hours and unsociable shift demands” and “Disrupted family life and missed personal events”, which were then combined into three selective codes. These selective codes became the three themes presented in this chapter: temporal and structural demands; work-life interference and (un)support; and organisational resources and flexibility (*see Appendix for the code development process*). This movement from detailed codes to broader themes reflects the iterative nature of qualitative analysis, where interpretation deepens as links between segments of data and theoretical concepts are gradually refined. The following sections present each theme in turn, drawing on a range of reviews to illustrate both dominant patterns and points of tension.

4.4. Theme 1: Temporal and Structural Work Demands Shaping Work-life Balance

The first theme was built from British Airways reviews that talk about balance in practical, time-based terms. Reviewers rarely start with an abstract definition of work-life balance. Instead, attention is drawn to long duty days, nights, weekends and rosters that shift with limited warning. These comments were grouped because they point towards the same

underlying issue: time is structured by the organisation in ways that leave limited room for planning and recovery.

Long hours sit at the centre of this theme. The point is made in blunt language, sometimes almost as a statement of fact. Review 37 (Heathrow, 2022) writes, “Long hours and is a lifestyle rather than a job”. The word “lifestyle” is significant because it suggests that work does not simply take up hours. It reshapes routines and expectations outside work as well. Review 26 (Anonymous, 2023) lists “Tiring. Long hours. Work during all holidays” as cons. The details about holidays signal that work is experienced as intruding on times normally reserved for family and rest. Reviews 12 and 13 (Anonymous, 2024; Heathrow, 2024) mention “Long hours holidays and weekends” and “Long hours, old planes and funny customers”. In these cases, the timing of work is not described in isolation; it sits alongside ageing equipment and difficult interactions, which makes the working day feel heavier than the clock time alone suggests.

A second strand includes unsociable hours. Review 2 (London, 2013) links “Unsociable hours” to a demanding “Mixed Fleet” contract and salary unhappiness. The assessment criticises the contract, not the hours. Review 28 (2023) summarises, “Night flights Quiet spells Missing events Unsocial hours.” The shift from operational language to “Missing events” introduces a social cost to the schedule. Work hours may delay birthdays, family meals, and scheduled weekends.

Third, rostering and time unpredictability. Several reviews say late changes hinder planning. Review 20 (Heathrow, 2024) notes rosters “can change at short notice”. Review 45 (London, 2021) mentions “Lack of consistency with scheduling and planning time off”. Commenting on “Forced OT when last flight of the night is delayed multiple days a week”, Review 35 (Los Angeles, 2022) indicates operational delays often disrupt personal time. Along with the time worked, the volatility is the key issue. The conditionality of time off makes mental disengagement challenging.

Language signalling depletion typically results from temporal and structural demands. Review 47 (Anonymous, 2020) writes “Fatigue, long hours, away from home”. Exhaustion and being away from home provide a relational dimension. Review 6 (London, 2019) describes joining as “tiring and thankless and you have no work life balance”. The inclusion of “thankless” suggests that strain becomes harder to tolerate when recognition feels absent. It may also hint that, for some employees, the emotional tone of the job makes long hours feel longer.

At the same time, the theme includes a counter-current that prevents a single, uniform interpretation. Review 29 (Heathrow, 2023) describes “Mundane, but easy work” and “somewhat flexible hours”. Review 40 (Chicago, 2022) notes “very flexible hours” and calls the job “ideal for part time work”. These accounts imply that some roles or locations offer schedules that can be fitted around life rather than constantly overruling it. The dataset does not explain why these differences occur, but the contrast suggests that “British Airways work” is not one schedule, and that the lived experience of balance depends on where and how the role is organised.

Overall, the theme indicates that work-life balance is regularly judged through the design and stability of schedules. Long hours, night duties and last-minute changes are described as core barriers, while predictability and genuine flexibility appear as valued exceptions. The next theme shifts from the schedule itself to the interference it creates, and the organisational responses employees believe they receive.

4.5. Theme 2: Work-life Interference and Perceived Organisational (Un)support

The second theme takes a step beyond the timetable itself and looks at what the timetable seems to do to people’s lives outside work in British Airways roles. The reviews that formed this theme tend to describe work as interfering with relationships, family roles and personal routines. They also contain a second layer: an evaluation of how the organisation responds to that interference, whether through support, indifference, or perceived unfairness.

A group of reviews emphasises the cost of being away from home. Review 19 (Anonymous, 2024) writes, “Extremely hard work. Away from home and family ie, Christmas etc. Long hours.” The reference to Christmas is especially concrete. It signals that the conflict is not only about missing generic leisure time, but about absence from meaningful shared occasions. Review 41 (London, 2021) is shorter, “Away from home. Missing family events”. The brevity makes it sound routine, as if this is simply what the job does and has done for a while.

Other reviewers name work-life balance directly, without much elaboration. Review 4 (Anonymous, 2013) describes a “Struggle with work life balance” alongside positive remarks about culture and aviation exposure. Review 39 (Anonymous, 2022) states “Zero work-personal life balance.” Review 51 (Anonymous, 2019) lists “No work life balance” under cons. These short statements can be read in two ways. On the one hand, they may indicate that the experience is so common that it does not need explanation. On the other hand, they may show

how tired the reviewer is of explaining, especially if similar points have been raised before without change.

Perceived organisational care, or the lack of it, is woven through many accounts. Review 24 (Heathrow, 2023) claims that “Company and management don't care about their front line workers anymore”. Review 5 (Gatwick, 2021) writes “Company doesn't care about you” and pairs this with “Bad management, Long Hours”. Review 46 (London, 2020) uses the phrase “Just a number”, which frames the issue as depersonalisation rather than merely poor scheduling. In these reviews, interference and unsupportiveness reinforce each other. Difficult schedules are presented as harder to accept when employees feel they are not respected, or when they believe management is distant from front-line realities.

Family responsibilities appear as a particular flashpoint. Review 32 (Anonymous, 2023) states: “Work-life balance. No consideration from senior managers for those with children.” The wording suggests that the perceived problem is not only the schedule, but a lack of adjustment for predictable caring duties. It is easy to picture the practical details behind the comment: childcare that must be booked in advance, school times that do not move, and the knock-on stress when days change late. Whether the review says so or not, criticism suggests that organisational decisions ignore basic constraints of employees' lives.

Employees also feel unfairly burdened by procedures. Review 26 (Anonymous, 2023) mentioned “Unfair distribution of work”, and long hours and holidays. The combination shows that task allocation, not workload, is the core issue. Uneven workloads can cause dissatisfaction and unwanted interference in personal life. Review 34 (Anonymous, 2023) deems management “money driven,” emphasising financials above people. That view perceives missed family events or power loss as a habit, not an exception.

Though employee accounts mostly emphasise interference, contrasting accounts exist. Review 50 (London, 2020) lists “Values and Culture. Benefits. Career Opportunities. Work/life balance” as positives without any obvious disadvantages. Review 44 (London, 2021) promotes “Stability, long-term contracts. Good support,” while the same report notes low pay for London. These accounts do not erase the negative ones, but they complicate the picture. They suggest that the experience of interference may vary depending on whether employees feel secure, supported, and treated fairly, even if the underlying demands of the job remain.

Overall, this theme indicates that work-life balance is not described purely as time management. It is treated as a judgment about whether work respects the person who does it.

Interference with family and personal life is a repeated thread, but dissatisfaction intensifies when employees believe the organisation is indifferent, unfair, or primarily cost-focused. Where support, stability and respect are perceived, some employees present similar demands as acceptable trade-offs rather than evidence of neglect.

4.6. Theme 3: Organisational Resources and Flexibility Enabling or Constraining Balance

The third theme focuses on the resources employees point to when describing balance in these British Airways accounts, and on the moments where those resources seem to break down. Flexible hours, travel benefits, pay, team culture and part-time arrangements all appear as potential supports. At the same time, the reviews suggest that these supports are not evenly experienced and can sometimes turn into new demands.

Flexibility is frequently named as a positive. Review 8 (Anonymous, 2013) lists “Flexible schedule” and the chance to “earn more money by working overtime”, implying that extra hours can be framed as a choice rather than an imposition. Review 10 (Boston, 2013) highlights a “Very flexible work schedule” within a part-time role that includes health insurance, suggesting that flexibility is sometimes bundled with security. Review 40 (Chicago, 2022) calls the job “ideal for part-time work” and mentions “very flexible hours”. These assessments define flexibility as control, not unpredictability. That arrangement fits work around other obligations.

Several accounts say the balance is good. “Great work life balance and pay”, writes Review 27 (Michigan City, 2023). Review 46 (London, 2020) suggests pleasant coworkers can make irregular work more sustainable with “work-life balance” and “Great crew community”. Review 49 (New York, 2020) links “Work-life balance” to “people” and “work space,” implying context matters more than roster. Review 54 (London, 2018) says the “Job gave a great work/life balance” but describes changing terms and conditions and feeling unappreciated. Possible but fragile balance depends on timing, station, and stability.

Flexibility does not guarantee freedom. Review 23 (Los Angeles, 2024) writes, “Only part time was offered, had to take split shifts to complete full 8 hours.” Split shifts indicate a long workday, even with limited contracted hours. Not knowing work or home makes the time between split shifts uncomfortable. “Forced OT when last flight of the night is delayed multiple days a week” causes personal difficulty (Review 35, Los Angeles, 2022). Repetition can make

“flexibility” appear as constant availability. That reading makes flexibility seem to benefit the firm above the employee.

Demand perceptions are affected by pay, perks, and flexibility. Review 21 (Doha, 2024) claims “Good pay and flexible working hours”, whereas Review 2 (London, 2013) says “Fast becoming a minimum wage employer” and links poor pay to a gruelling contract. Reviews 44 (London, 2021) lauds “Good support” but notes “Pay is very low for London”. It indicates that pay is a lens. Long hours can be framed as tolerable, worthwhile, or even rewarding when compensation feels fair, but the same hours can be framed as exploitative depending on whether remuneration feels adequate.

Social support and culture are also treated as resources. Reviews refer to a “great team” (Review 20, Heathrow, 2024), “fantastic hotels, Exceptional work colleagues” (Review 56, Gatwick, 2017), “great work culture” (Review 4, Anonymous, 2013), and a “Great crew community” (Review 46, London, 2020). These phrases are not detailed, but they are repeated enough to suggest that colleagues and local teams shape day-to-day experience. A supportive crew does not remove unsociable hours, but it can make difficult shifts feel less isolating.

Finally, some employees say the job is enriching. Review 53 (Anonymous, 2018) mentions “See the world. Meet interesting people”, while Review 33 (Heathrow, 2023) describes “experience a whole new life”. These comments highlight non-salary benefits. They also explain why reviewers simultaneously have positive and negative perceptions. Travel and novelty may make work worthwhile while disrupting family gatherings. Enrichment with “Long hours and last-minute calls” (Review 30, Chicago, 2023) or “Missing events Unsocial hours” (Review 28, Anonymous, 2023) shows strain.

Overall, this theme suggests that organisational resources and flexibility can support or hinder work-life balance depending on how they are structured and who can access them. Where flexibility feels like control, pay feels fair, and teams are supportive, balance is described more positively. Where flexibility becomes fragmented time, where pay is seen as low, or where operational delays repeatedly extend shifts, these same resources lose their protective effect.

4.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of a thematic analysis of 61 British Airways employee reviews, focusing on how work-life balance is described and experienced. Three main themes were identified. The first theme showed how temporal and structural work demands, including long and unsociable hours, roster instability and forced overtime, shape the conditions under

which employees attempt to balance work and life. The second theme highlighted the impact of these demands on family life and personal wellbeing, and the ways in which perceived organisational support, fairness and care colour employees' interpretations of their situation. The third theme examined organisational resources and forms of flexibility, revealing that they can both enable and constrain balance, depending on their form and the extent to which they are matched with demands.

The analysis suggests that work-life balance for British Airways employees is not a simple function of schedule length or pay. It emerges instead from a dynamic interplay between demanding temporal structures, the strength or weakness of organisational support, and the availability of resources such as flexible arrangements, team culture and travel-related benefits. Contradictions within the dataset, where some staff report excellent balance and others declare "zero work-personal life balance", underline the importance of context, role, life stage and local management practices. These themes set the stage for the next chapter, which will interpret the findings more explicitly through the theoretical lenses discussed earlier and consider their implications for management practice and policy in British Airways and comparable airlines.

5. Discussion on Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings from the thematic analysis of British Airways employee reviews considering the conceptual frameworks outlined earlier. Rather than simply repeating the themes, the discussion attempts to situate them within wider debates on work-life balance, boundary management, job demands and resources, and emotional labour. Some tensions and ambiguities are deliberately kept visible, since the reviews themselves contain mixed and sometimes conflicting judgements about the same employer.

The chapter begins by revisiting the research aim and questions. It then discusses the three themes against the theoretical lenses of work-family conflict and enrichment, boundary and border theories, Conservation of Resources (COR) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) models, and emotional labour. The later sections consider implications for managers and HR practitioners at British Airways and in other airlines, reflect on the use of online reviews as data, and close with a summary.

5.2. Revisiting Research Aim and Questions

The overarching aim was to interpret how employees associated with British Airways construct and experience work-life balance, and to identify the organisational conditions they perceive as enabling or constraining that equilibrium. Three research questions guided the study: how employees narrate and make sense of work-life balance, which practices and resources they see as shaping that experience, and what implications follow for management and policy.

The thematic analysis suggests that employees talk about work-life balance through three main lenses. First, they focus heavily on temporal and structural features of work such as long hours, night flights, roster instability and forced overtime. Second, they describe the impact of these patterns on family life, wellbeing and a sense of being cared for or neglected by the organisation. Third, they talk about resources such as flexible scheduling, travel benefits, pay, team culture and part-time options that can soften or amplify the impact of demands.

Taken together, these themes indicate that British Airways employees construct work-life balance not as a single stable condition, but as an ongoing negotiation between demanding schedules, organisational responses, and the benefits and supports that work provides. The following sections explore how this negotiation aligns with, and at times stretches, the theoretical frameworks introduced in the literature review.

5.3. Interpretation of Themes in the Light of Conceptual Frameworks

5.3.1. Reframing WLB: Conflict, Enrichment and Subjective Balance

Work-family conflict theory remains useful for understanding much of the language in the reviews. Time-based conflict is visible where employees speak of “Long hours” and “Work during all holidays”, and strain-based conflict appears in references to “tiring” work and “fatigue” that carry over into non-work life (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Allen et al., 2000). Many reviewers describe missing family events or being away at Christmas, which fits Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) notion of incompatible demands across roles.

However, the data also highlight the limits of a purely conflict-based view. Several reviewers describe seeing the world, meeting people from “all walks of life”, and gaining autonomy and confidence. Phrases such as “Great work life balance and pay” and “Life Balance is very good. Wonderful travel benefits” suggest that, at least for some roles or periods, work and life are not purely in competition. It aligns with work-family enrichment theory, where resources such as skills, perspectives or positive affect gained at work improve life outside work, and vice versa

(Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Travel experiences, cross-cultural interactions and team camaraderie appear to offer enrichment for some employees, even when schedules are demanding.

The reviews also reinforce the idea of work-life balance as a subjective sense of “fit” rather than a fixed state. Guest (2017) describes balance as a reasonable level of satisfaction and functioning in both domains with minimal role conflict, and Clark (2000) suggests that balance exists when individuals feel comfortable with the level of integration between work and family. In the present data, one reviewer can describe “Zero work-personal life balance”, while another, perhaps in a different base or life stage, emphasises how well the job fits a part-time lifestyle. The same organisational context creates different experiences of balance, depending on personal expectations, family responsibilities and the value attached to travel or brand association.

It suggests that work-life balance at British Airways might be better understood as a contested and shifting equilibrium, shaped by both conflict and enrichment, rather than as a simple presence or absence. Employees appear to weigh long hours and missed events against travel, pay, community and identity, and the “balance” they report reflects how they judge those trade-offs at a particular point in time.

5.3.2. Boundary/Border Dynamics in a Safety-Critical Airline Context

Boundary and border theories help to explain why schedules and rosters carry such weight in the narratives. Boundary theory posits that individuals create and manage psychological and behavioural boundaries between work and non-work domains, drifting along a continuum from segmentation to integration (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). In the reviews, strong segmentation is hard to sustain. Night flights, irregular shifts, last-minute changes and stand-by duties blur temporal and spatial boundaries. Working at Christmas, covering holidays, or being called in at short notice makes it difficult to cordon off “family time” or recovery periods.

Work-family border theory adds that borders are socially constructed and negotiated, and that supervisors and organisations act as “border-keepers” who can either support or undermine balance (Clark, 2000). Comments about management not caring about front-line workers, giving “no consideration from senior managers for those with children”, or treating employees as “just a number” suggest that border-keepers are sometimes seen as unsympathetic or

inflexible. In such situations, employees seem to experience not only blurred boundaries but also a lack of support in navigating them.

The safety-critical nature of airline work complicates these dynamics. Employees know that fatigue and distraction can have implications beyond individual wellbeing, which may increase reluctance to refuse duties or speak up. A job described as “a lifestyle rather than a job” hints at internalised norms that work comes first. It echoes research showing that in safety-critical sectors, professional identities and safety discourses can justify continued over-extension, even where formal fatigue risk management exists (Goode, 2003; Powell et al., 2007; van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020). Boundaries are thus negotiated not only with family and managers, but also with safety culture and personal ethics.

5.3.3. Demands, Resources and Resource Loss/Gain Cycles (JD-R and COR)

The JD-R model and COR theory provide a useful lens for understanding how employees interpret long hours, roster patterns and rewards together (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In the dataset, job demands are plentiful: extended duty periods, unsociable hours, night flights, last-minute calls, forced overtime after delays, emotional labour with “funny customers”, working in poor weather or with ageing aircraft. These demands limit time and energy available for family, sleep, and personal pursuits, fitting the health-impairment pathway of the JD-R model (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Resources are present too, though unevenly. Travel benefits, flexible schedules, team support, pay (in some locations), parental leave options and the chance to go part-time after years of service all appear as valued resources. Where resources are strong and visible, reviewers are more likely to describe a “Great work life balance and pay” or to highlight pride in working for a respected brand. Where resources are perceived as weak, such as “very low” pay for London, lack of bonus, or absence of progression, the same or similar demands are framed as unacceptable.

COR theory adds that resource loss tends to weigh more heavily than resource gain, and that loss spirals can develop when demands consistently outstrip resources (Hobfoll, 2011). Statements about “Zero work-personal life balance”, feelings of being ignored, and repeated organisational restructuring may signal such spirals. Employees who have lived through several rounds of contract changes and cost-cutting measures may interpret new demands through accumulated frustration. By contrast, newer employees or those in bases with strong flexibility may still feel that the resource package offsets the demands, at least for a period.

What emerges is not a simple story of “too many demands” but a nuanced picture in which the balance between demands and resources, and how fairly that balance is perceived to be distributed, drives employees’ sense of work-life equilibrium.

5.3.4. Emotional Labour, Recovery and Identity Work

Emotional labour adds another layer to the interpretation of work-life balance. Cabin crew and customer-facing staff are expected to present calm, friendly and professional demeanours in cramped cabins, with delayed flights, anxious passengers and sometimes “demanding customers” as part of daily life. Hochschild’s (2012) classic work on flight attendants highlighted how such emotional regulation becomes a form of labour, and subsequent research has linked surface acting with emotional exhaustion and reduced wellbeing (Grandey, 2000; Hülshager and Schewe, 2011).

In the reviews, emotional labour is not always named as such, yet its traces are visible. References to “stressful” customer interactions, “crazy shifts”, and “too many short turnarounds on long-haul destinations” hint at repeated cycles of emotional performance without sufficient decompression. When long hours and night flights are layered on top of this, recovery becomes more difficult. The result is that emotional depletion can spill into home life, affecting energy for family and social roles, which reinforces work-family conflict (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003).

Identity work and emotional labour are intertwined. Travelling, meeting “interesting people” and being part of a strong crew community are proud experiences for some. These interactions can boost employees’ identities and reduce stress (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Deery, 2008). Data show duality – the same role can be perceived as both “Great job” and “Extremely hard work”. Recognition, support, and fair remuneration affect balance in emotional labour, which may be draining and meaningful.

5.4. Managerial and HRM Implications for British Airways and Aviation

5.4.1. Rostering, Schedule Control and Predictability

One of the best ways managers may enhance work-life balance is through rostering. Predictability and procedural justice are vital in aviation, despite lengthy hours. Short-notice roster changes forced overtime when late planes delay finishing times, and “lack of consistency with scheduling and planning time off” suggest workload and change management dissatisfaction.

Modest increases in predictability and employee input into schedules reduce work-family friction and improve sleep and health (Kelly et al., 2014; Kossek, Baltes and Matthews, 2011). For British Airways, this could mean clearer advance notice windows, transparent rules about overtime allocation, limits on consecutive demanding duties, and participatory processes for managing unpopular shifts. Such measures do not remove demand, but they may help employees feel that their lives outside work are recognised and that they can plan around work more reliably.

5.4.2. Supervisor Capability, Team Climate and Voice Mechanisms

Supervisors appear repeatedly in the reviews as either buffers or amplifiers of strain. Supportive managers who listen, show some flexibility and foster a “great crew community” help employees cope with long hours and demanding customers. In contrast, comments about “Detached management”, “Bad management” and senior managers showing no consideration for staff with children illustrate how unsupportive leadership can convert already high demands into situations that feel personally unfair or even hostile.

Building supervisor capability in people management, especially around sensitive conversations on fatigue, caring responsibilities and schedule changes, seems critical. Training that helps supervisors understand boundary and work-life issues, recognise early signs of burnout and navigate constraints transparently could strengthen trust (Guest, 2017; Deery, 2008). In addition, robust voice mechanisms that allow employees to raise concerns about rosters, safety and wellbeing, without fear of reprisal, would align with both HRM and safety goals (Tremblay and Nogues, 2024; van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020). The tone of some reviews suggests that existing channels are perceived as weak or symbolic in certain areas.

5.4.3. Wellbeing, Safety Culture and Retention

The findings demonstrate interplays between work-life balance, safety, and wellbeing. Long, unpredictable hours and emotional work can damage health, concentration, and judgement (Harrington, 2001; Powell et al., 2007). Jobs as a lifestyle or “no work-life balance” reports raise questions about the perceived sustainability of some employees’ current arrangements.

Poor balance often leads to turnover intentions, especially in service industries with strong external labour markets (Deery, 2008; Amiruddin and Monil, 2022). The loss of experienced staff for British Airways has implications for safety knowledge, mentoring and service quality. Thus, incremental work-life balance improvements may enhance safety culture and retention. Initiatives may include improved cabin crew fatigue risk management, wellbeing programs that

address physical and mental strain, and recognition of the link between rest and safe operations (van den Berg, Signal and Gander, 2020; Folke and Melin, 2024).

5.5. Reflecting on Methodological Choices and Use of Online Reviews

Using Glassdoor reviews as data brings both strengths and limitations. On the positive side, the reviews are unsolicited, written in employees' own words and often rich in examples of how work arrangements affect daily life. It aligns well with interpretivist aims and with netnographic approaches that treat online texts as meaningful cultural artefacts (Kozinets, 2020; Landers, Brusso and Auer, 2019). The diversity of roles, locations and time periods captured in the 61 reviews also offers a broad, if uneven, window into the organisation.

However, it is important to acknowledge that reviewers are self-selecting and may skew towards particularly dissatisfied or particularly loyal employees. Representativeness cannot be claimed. The lack of detailed demographic data also limits the ability to compare experiences across age, gender or family status. Ethical questions about contextual integrity and expectations of anonymity were addressed by anonymising extracts and respecting platform terms, yet debates in internet research continue to evolve (BPS, 2021; Franzke et al., 2020).

These limitations mean that the findings should be read as an interpretive insight into how some employees construct work-life balance, not as a definitive description of conditions across all British Airways staff. Even so, the consistency of themes across multiple reviews and years suggests that the patterns identified carry more than anecdotal weight.

This chapter has interpreted the three themes from the findings in dialogue with theory. Work-life balance narratives from British Airways employees reflect not only traditional work-family conflict, but also enrichment and subjective judgements about acceptable trade-offs. Boundary and border perspectives help explain why unpredictable rosters and unsociable hours feel so intrusive, especially when border-keepers in management are perceived as unsympathetic. JD-R and COR frameworks clarify how high demands and uneven resources combine to produce both strain and, at times, sustainable engagement. At the same time, emotional labour research sheds light on the hidden work of maintaining composure and service standards under pressure. British Airways and other airlines' safety and welfare regulations must address rostering design, scheduling predictability, supervisor capabilities, voice mechanisms, and work-life balance. Online reviews provide honest employee feedback but require careful selection and ethical processing. The last chapter will recap the study's findings, acknowledge its limitations,

and suggest avenues for further research on work-life balance in aviation and other safety-critical service scenarios.

6. Chapter 6: Conclusion

This final chapter draws together the main threads of the dissertation. The study set out to explore how British Airways employees talk about work-life balance in their own words, and what their narratives reveal about the organisational conditions that shape that balance. Using 61 Glassdoor reviews as naturally occurring qualitative data, analysed through an interpretivist, thematic lens, the research has sought to listen carefully to voices that are often reduced to scores and headlines.

The chapter begins with a summary of the key findings in relation to the three research questions. It then outlines the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions, followed by a discussion of the study's limitations. The chapter then suggests directions for future research, before closing with some broader reflections on what the study has learned about work-life balance in a safety-critical airline context.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The first research question asked how British Airways employees narrate and make sense of work-life balance in publicly available review narratives. The analysis shows that employees rarely discuss balance as an abstract construct. Instead, they tell concrete stories about long shifts, unsociable hours, night flights, last-minute calls, and rosters that change at short notice. Work-life balance is often summarised in stark phrases such as “zero work personal life balance”, “struggle with work life balance”, or, at the other end of the spectrum, “great work life balance and pay”. These phrases are embedded in wider comments about pride in the brand, travel experiences, crew camaraderie and a sense that the job is a lifestyle rather than just employment.

The second research question focused on organisational practices, demands and resources that are perceived as enabling or constraining balance. Employees repeatedly identified long and irregular hours, holiday working, forced overtime when flights are delayed, and a general lack of predictability as central demands. Rosters and scheduling practices appear as a constant backdrop, either as a source of frustration or, in a smaller number of cases, as a positive feature where flexibility works in the employee's favour. On the resource side, staff talked about travel benefits, flexible schedules, supportive teams, reasonable pay in some locations, and options

to go part-time after a period of service. Critics applaud balance when resources are strong and obvious, even when the task is challenging.

The third research question concerns management practice and policy implications. Here, a pattern emerges around perceived organisational support and fairness. Comments about management “not caring” for front-line staff, senior managers showing little consideration for those with children, and unfair distribution of work indicate that employees read work-life issues through a relational lens, a structural one. Conversely, reviews that highlight stable contracts, good support and strong crew communities show that employees can accept demanding rosters when they feel respected, heard and reasonably rewarded.

Across these questions, three overarching themes capture how work-life balance is constructed: temporal and structural work demands; work-life interference and perceived organisational (un)support; and organisational resources and flexibility as both enablers and constraints. Work-life balance for British Airways employees comes through as a negotiated equilibrium, rather than a fixed state, where individuals weigh strain, sacrifice and missed events against travel, identity, pay and community.

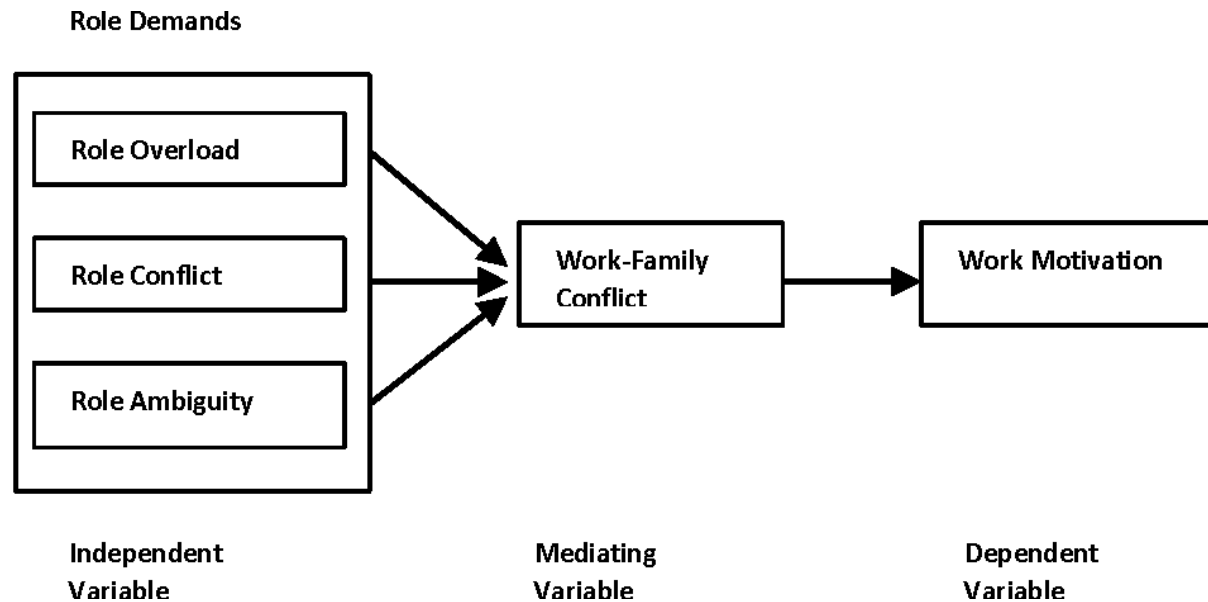
6.3. Theoretical, Methodological and Practical Contributions

Theoretically, the study brings together several strands of work-life research in the specific context of a legacy airline. The findings suggest that classical theories of work-family conflict remain highly relevant, particularly around time-based and strain-based interference, yet they coexist with experiences of enrichment and pride. Employees talk about the job as opening up the world and creating new relationships, even when they also feel exhausted. The study also reveals how boundary and border dynamics, job expectations and resources, and emotional labour affect work-life balance. Thus, balance is not just about hours but also about work-home boundary permeability, demand and resource configuration, and emotional performance at work affecting private life.

This dissertation demonstrates the merits and cons of interpretivist analysis utilising online employee reviews as qualitative data. Short “Pros” and “Cons” sections can be meaningful when read as narratives rather than bullet points. A moderate dataset was organised manually and in Excel, providing a transparent audit trail. The approach also cautions careful consideration of self-selection and limited demographic data on Glassdoor.

The findings apply to British Airways and other airline managers and HR experts. They suggest that interventions around rostering predictability, schedule control, fair distribution of duties,

supervisor capability, and clear voice channels may have a tangible impact on how employees experience balance. The results also hint that work-life initiatives cannot stand apart from safety and retention strategies. When employees feel consistently fatigued, unheard and undervalued, both safety culture and loyalty are likely to suffer.



6.4. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations need to be acknowledged. The dataset consists of 61 reviews, which is a modest number, and the reviewers are self-selected. Those with very positive or very negative experiences may be more inclined to post, which could skew the tone of the corpus. There is also limited information on the specific roles, ages, family situations or contract types of the reviewers. It makes drawing firm conclusions difficult about how work-life balance might differ between, for example, long-haul and short-haul crew, or between operational and office-based staff.

The analysis is cross-sectional and relies on snapshots of experience over a period of years. The reviews sometimes hint at change over time, for example, by comparing past and present conditions. However, they do not allow a precise tracking of how specific policy shifts or external events shaped the balance. In addition, the reliance on English language reviews and on one platform limits the broader generalisability of the findings.

Finally, the interpretivist and thematic approach, while well-suited to exploring meaning, inevitably reflects the researcher's own judgement in grouping codes into themes. Other researchers might have emphasised different aspects of the same data. Every effort was made

to remain close to the text and to document analytic decisions, but subjectivity cannot be removed from the process.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Future work could extend this study in several directions. Comparative research across different airlines, including low-cost, charter and other full-service carriers, would help to clarify how much of what has been found here is specific to British Airways and how much reflects wider patterns in commercial aviation. A multi-case design might also allow more systematic comparison of roster practices, pay structures and work-life policies.

There is also scope for mixed methods research that combines digital trace data with interviews or surveys. Interviews with current employees could deepen understanding of how work-life balance is negotiated within roles, life stages and family situations. At the same time, surveys could provide broader coverage and some sense of prevalence. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable, for example, following a cohort of crew through contract changes, base transfers or major operational disruptions.

Another avenue would be to explore work-life balance from the perspective of specific groups who are only glimpsed in this dataset, such as employees with caring responsibilities, new entrants on different contracts, or staff based in smaller outstations. Research on interventions would also be helpful. Studies that evaluate changes to rostering rules, schedule control mechanisms or supervisor training, and track their impact on fatigue, perceived support and turnover intentions, could provide evidence for more targeted policy decisions.

6.6. Final Reflections and Closing Remarks

The starting point for this dissertation was a simple curiosity about how employees themselves describe work-life balance in a large and well-known airline. The reviews analysed here show that the answer is neither neat nor uniform. Some staff recall “the best years” of their lives, full of travel and teamwork, while others depict their time at the company as gruelling, fragmented and family-unfriendly. Many hold both views at once.

What comes through most strongly is that work-life balance is not a marginal concern or a soft benefit. For the employees who posted these reviews, balance is bound up with how sustainable, fair and meaningful their working lives feel. Long hours, missed events, and constant change take their toll, but so do feelings of being unheard or undervalued. Some employees justify sacrifices with community, recognition, flexibility, and fair incentives.

The study only offers a glimpse, but it suggests that listening to everyday experiences can indicate how organisational decisions affect people's lives. It presents opportunities for British Airways and other airlines. Workplaces where people may have a job and a life they love may be created by prioritising work-life balance in safety, service, and employment relationships.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Thematic Analysis with Systematic Coding

Table 1: Open Coding

Reviewer No.	Excerpt of Review	Open Codes
2	“Cons: Unsociable hours, new ‘Mixed Fleet’ contract is gruelling and pay is very poor...”	Unsociable hours and a gruelling new contract with poor pay
12	“Cons: Long hours holidays and weekends...”	Long hours covering holidays and weekends
37	“Cons: Long hours and is a lifestyle rather than a job.”	Long hours that turn the job into a lifestyle
20	“Cons: Long hours, unsociable, rosters can change at short notice...”	Unsociable hours and rosters changing at short notice
35	“Cons: Forced OT when last flight of the night is delayed multiple days a week...”	Forced overtime when late flights repeatedly delay finishing times
45	“Cons: Lack of consistency with scheduling and planning time off.”	Lack of consistency in scheduling and planning time off
19	“Cons: Extremely hard work. Away from home and family ie, Christmas etc. Long hours.”	Being away from home and family at Christmas due to long hours
28	“Cons: Night flights Quiet spells Missing events Unsocial hours.”	Night flights and unsocial hours leading to missing events
41	“Cons: Away from home. Missing family events.”	Away from home and missing family events
26	“Cons: Tiring. Long hours. Work during all holidays. Unfair distribution of work.”	Tiring long hours, holiday work and unfair distribution of duties
32	“Cons: Work-life balance. No consideration from senior managers for those with children.”	Senior managers showing no consideration for staff with children
39	“Cons: Zero work-personal life balance.”	Experiencing zero balance between work and personal life
27	“Pros: Great work life balance and pay.”	Reporting great work life balance combined with good pay
46	“Pros: Great crew community, work-life balance...”	Crew community helping to sustain work-life balance
54	“Pros: Job gave a great work/life balance...”	Job previously providing great work/life balance before changes
8	“Pros: Flexible schedule Opportunity to earn more money by working overtime...”	Flexible schedule with the option to increase earnings through overtime
10	“Pros: Health insurance... Very flexible work schedule.”	Very flexible work schedule in a part-time role
23	“Cons: Only part time was offered, had to take split shifts to complete full 8 hours.”	Part-time contracts and split shifts needed to reach full hours

Table 2: Axial and Selective Coding

Open Code	Axial Code	Selective Code
Unsociable hours and a gruelling new contract with poor pay	Long hours and unsociable shift demands	Temporal and structural work demands shaping work-life balance
Long hours covering holidays and weekends		
Long hours that turn the job into a lifestyle		
Unsociable hours and rosters changing at short notice	Roster instability and extended working time	
Forced overtime when late flights repeatedly delay finishing times		
Lack of consistency in scheduling and planning time off		
Being away from home and family at Christmas due to long hours	Disrupted family life and missed personal events	Work-life interference and perceived organisational (un)support
Night flights and unsocial hours leading to missing events		
Away from home and missing family events		
Tiring long hours, holiday work and unfair distribution of duties	Perceived organisational disregard for employees' balance	
Senior managers showing no consideration for staff with children		
Experiencing zero balance between work and personal life		

Reporting great work life balance combined with good pay	Positive experiences of balance supported by culture and rewards	Organisational resources and flexibility enabling or constraining balance
Crew community helping to sustain work-life balance		
Job previously providing great work/life balance before changes		
Flexible schedule with the option to increase earnings through overtime	Flexible arrangements and contract structures as double-edged resources	
Very flexible work schedule in a part-time role		
Part-time contracts and split shifts needed to reach full hours		