THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES ON CAREER MANAGEMENT AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A STUDY OF SME PRACTICES

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore work-life balance as an integral part of career management, focusing on how professional careers are developed and managed throughout working life. We examine strategies and actions designed to help employees achieve their professional goals, develop their skills and realise their potential. The study investigates the impact of work-life balance policies on employees, their productivity, business relationships, and overall company performance. These results are influenced by the policies set by senior management, which highlight the importance of awareness and implementation of these policies in achieving a work-life balance. Using a qualitative research approach, based on interviews with managerial decision-makers from 38 small and medium-sized enterprises, this article presents the influence of organizational policies on career management and work-life balance.

Keywords

Career Management, Work-Life Balance, Organizational Policies, Interview

Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB), viewed through the lens of work and personal life, is becoming increasingly important in today's society. A work-life balance fits current trends by improving individual and organizational results (Kalliath, and Brough, 2008). This balance highlights how WLB can improve overall performance and change strategic policies within an organization. Despite its importance, there is academic controversy about the terminology used, and there have been discussions about what constitutes this "balance", which has led to discrepancies in the field (Voydanoff, 2005). Employee assistance programs developed in the 1940s, and wellness programs

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(physical, mental and social well-being) began as early as 1933 and served as models for concepts in professional life. The 44-hour working week was established by the "Law fair labour standards" in 1938 (Raja, and Stein, 2014).. The term "WLB" was officially coined in 1986, and subsequently became a prominent topic in discussions of state policy, governmental, employer, and union decisions, the media, and everyday language (Lewis, 2003). And yet despite some initiatives, employees in some countries or areas continued to have excessive working hours, which harmed their health (Takahashi, 2019). WLB analysis involves studying the antecedents but also its consequences. Background encompasses organizational-level factors such as organizational policies (Saltzstein, 2001), interpersonal factors such as employee relationships with colleagues, and the directly superior hierarchical level (Wu, Kwan, Liu, and Resick, 2012), and the increasing demands of everyday existence, employees are more likely to have a low WLB. To help employees manage their personal and professional lives, it is also necessary to look for strategies and policies to provide professional and family support. A better WLB achievement is more viable when a person receives outstanding organizational support (Jantzer, Anderson, and Kuehl, 2018). Employees who work longer hours could spend less time with their families, leading to a weaker WLB (Kim, and Ryu, 2017). Different organizations have implemented strategic policies to meet the need for flexibility and work-life balance of their employees. However, the choice of strategies depends on the type of industry and the nature of the specific jobs (Cremers, 2010). There are clear directions in the literature that a one-size-fits-all WLB program may not suit everyone, therefore, companies adopt differentiated policies, addressed to different issues faced by different employees at different stages of their professional and personal lives. The WLB literature offers various flexible work arrangements, leave provisions, and family support provisions through childcare (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, and Pettit. 2005). These programs disseminate childcare up to a certain age, temporary provisions such as responding to a family or health crisis, or permanent provisions such as health insurance. Work-life balance (WLB) practices are deliberate organizational initiatives designed to minimize the conflict between employees' work and private lives and enable them to be more effective at work and in other roles. In recent years, companies have become increasingly aware of the need to adopt the concept of work-life balance as an important tool for facilitating sustainable human resources, which is proving to be very important for attracting and retaining talent (Eikhof, Warhurst, and Haunschild, 2007). Considering the literature on the different initiatives available to facilitate work-life balance, as a basis, the present study tries to examine the status of initiatives and the implementation of managerial policies, an analysis of organizational policies and the perspective of future actions of decision management in small and medium-sized enterprises in the realization of WLB.

1. Review of the scientific literature

The concept of WLB has become an important topic in management research and academic debates, especially in the context of changes in the modern work environment. Work-life balance refers to the ability of individuals to effectively manage their professional and personal responsibilities without negatively affecting any of these aspects. As the line between work and personal life becomes increasingly blurred,

especially due to technology and the demands of increased productivity, the issue of balance becomes essential for employee well-being and organizational efficiency. The concept of WLB is defined as a perceived balance between the demands and resources of professional and personal life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It is considered a key indicator of overall well-being, influencing mental health, life satisfaction, and job performance (Haar et al., 2014). One of the oldest theories of WLB is the work-family conflict (WFC) model, proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). According to this model, conflict occurs when the demands of one sphere of life (work or family) make it difficult to fulfill responsibilities in the other sphere. This pattern suggests that individuals have to deal with opposing pressures and that this can lead to stress and burnout. Another important conceptual framework is that of work-family enrichment, which proposes that experiences in one area of life can improve performance and satisfaction in the other area (Carlson et al., 2006). This theory suggests that skills, resources, and knowledge acquired through work or personal life can contribute positively to both spheres. Factors that influence the balance between personal and professional life can be, according to the current literature, grouped into organizational factors, personal factors and technology and digitalization. Organizational culture plays a key role in sustaining or hindering work-life balance. Research shows that organizations that promote flexible policies, such as flexible working hours or teleworking, can significantly contribute to work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2011). Individual perceptions of work-life balance are shaped by personal factors such as personality, psychological resources, and coping strategies (Allen et al., 2000). Coping strategies are psychological and behavioral mechanisms that individuals use to cope with stress, problems, and life difficulties. These strategies have the role of reducing or managing the emotional pressure and tensions caused by various stressful situations, whether they come from the professional, personal or social spheres (Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. 1984). People who practice time management techniques and who have a high level of autonomy in their work are more likely to achieve a healthy balance (Voydanoff, 2005). Over the past decade, technological advancement and the constant availability of mobile devices have further complicated the boundaries between work and personal life. Remote work and permanent connectivity can amplify the difficulty of separating these two spheres, leading to workplace spillover and associated stress (Derks & Bakker, 2014). Workplace spillover refers to the influences and effects that workplace experiences have on an individual's personal and family life. The concept describes how stress, responsibilities, fatigue, but also job satisfactions and achievements "spill over" into private life, affecting relationships, emotional well-being and other aspects of daily life. Workplace spillover is a natural phenomenon because work and personal life are interconnected. Ideally, spillover should be managed to minimize negative effects and maximize positive influences on overall well-being (Grzywacz, J. G., & Marks, N. F. 2000). This paper discusses both the positive and negative aspects of spillover and presents an ecological framework for understanding the interactions between work and family (Grzywacz, J. G., & Marks, N. F. 2000). A number of authors explore the positive effects of work-life spillover and develop a theory of "work-family enrichment" that emphasizes how work experiences can improve personal life (Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. 2006), or conduct a critical

review of research on the work-family link, emphasizing spillover and identifying gaps in the literature (Lambert, S. J. (1990). Aspects related to how workplace demands and resources influence spillover have been studied, both positively and negatively, depending on organizational contexts (Voydanoff, P. 2004). The effect of technology and continuous connectivity on the negative spillover between work and personal life is examined, with a focus on the effects on well-being and burnout risk (Derks, D., & Bakker, A. B. 2014). Based on empirical studies measuring the impact of work-life balance on health and productivity, they have shown that a healthy work-life balance can have positive effects on physical and mental health. For example, research shows that a correlation in work-life balance leads to reduced stress levels, decreased risk of burnout, and increased overall satisfaction (McCarthy et al., 2013). Conversely, a lack of balance can lead to an increase in absenteeism and staff turnover, affecting organizational productivity (Scholarios & Marks, 2004). Organizations around the world have begun to implement, policies and practices to support Work-Life Balance, some of these policies that promote WLB, are: Flexible schedules: Offering flexible working hours or the possibility of working from home is a widespread practice that supports work-life balance; Childcare support: Childcare facilities or vouchers for such services can ease the burden on employees with families; Parental leave and extended sick leave policies. They allow employees to take care of family needs without fear of professional consequences; or more recently reducing the working week to 4 days or working days to 7 hours (www.euronews.com). Although the implementation of WLB policies has seen a significant increase there are many challenges, many organizations still face difficulties in creating work environments that truly support this balance. Remote work and "always-on culture" continue to cause difficulties for many employees, suggesting the need for more robust policies and a change in mindset at the organizational level (Kreiner et al., 2009). "Always-on culture" is a term that refers to the professional environment in which employees are expected or feel obliged to be available and connected to work constantly, even outside of official working hours. This culture is associated with the widespread use of modern technology, such as smartphones, laptops, and emails, which allow uninterrupted access to work tasks, colleagues, and superiors. "Always-on culture" can have negative effects on employee health and well-being, leading to burnout and decreased productivity in the long run. It is important for both employers and employees to be aware of these risks and to find solutions to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Mazmanian, M., Orlikowski, W. J., & Yates, J; Derks, D., van Mierlo, H., & Schmitz, E. B. 2014). The literature review on Work-Life Balance shows that work-life balance is an essential factor for individual well-being and organizational success. While strategies for achieving this balance vary, there is a clear need to adapt organizational practices and policies to the needs of modern employees. Research also suggests that as technology evolves, new challenges will arise in maintaining this balance, underscoring the need for continued research on the topic.

2. Research methodology

The present study is qualitative and exploratory in nature therefore, it uses a qualitative paradigm. This is particularly beneficial when a researcher needs to clarify their understanding of a situation or problem, when samples are usually small, and sampling is guided by theoretical rather than probabilistic considerations (Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness, 1999). In this case, the method was chosen to understand specific situations, such as organizational policies, in the implementation of WLB, in small and medium-sized enterprises from various fields of activity, which suggests that a detailed analysis of the context and the subjective experiences of the representatives of these enterprises is essential to obtain a deep understanding of the problems encountered. At the same time, the method allows the selection of participants, the selection criterion being the work points, in the performance of the activity in two localities, in the same county, of the same economic entity. By using semi-structured interviews, perspectives for further research can be developed, through the experiences of the interviewed subjects, thus obtaining valuable information about how they perceive and interpret the reality in which they operate. This qualitative aspect is necessary to understand not only the facts, but also the social and cultural context in which the enterprises operate. The semi-structured interviews cover a total of 38 small and medium-sized enterprises, their activity taking place in 16 fields of activity: wholesale, retail, security services, forest processing, restaurant-bar, clothing, bakery, milling, freight transport, passenger transport, consultancy services, recreational activities, telecommunications, civil construction, forestry, vegetable production. The interviews lasting about 40 minutes were conducted with 38 decision management representatives, representing 84.2%, and line operational directors, representing 15.8%, data collection being done between September 2024. The structure of the interviewees is composed of 81.5% male and 18.5% female. The data were entered and processed using the SPSS Statistics 17.0 program. After entering the data, coding and validation procedures were performed, primary processing of the information from the interviews was carried out by constructing one-dimensional tables expressed in the form of absolute and relative frequencies (univariate analysis) and contingency tables (association) between two or more variables.

3. Results and discussions

Since failure to implement WLB practices in the workplace can lead to a negative effect on an organization's performance, the present study conceptualizes certain factors that are related to the adoption and implementation of different WLB initiatives. The following factors and variables analysed, knowledge of the concept of WLB and effective part-time work, knowledge of the concept of WLB and flexible working hours, reduced working week and impact on WLB, knowledge of the concept of WLB and implementation of work-life balance based on reduced working hours, knowledge of the concept of work-life balance and implementation of work-life balance based on other schedules or projects, are included in Table no. 1.

Table no. 1. Concept WLB correlations

Presumptions	Pearson Chi Square	Asymp. Sig.(2 sided)	Fisher's Test	Power of the test -p	Contingency coefficient	Monte-Carlo simulation
1.Corelation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and effective part time work.	1,192	,275	-	-	-	-
2.Corelation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and flexible work program.	6,513	,011	0,035	0,035	0,383	0,032
3.How Reduced Work Week has an impact on WLB.	22,913	,116	-	-	-	-
4.Corelation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and implementation of work-life balance based on reducing the work program.	2,418	,659	3,272	,491	-	-
5.Corelation between knowledge of the concept of Work-Life Balance and implementation of work-life balance based on other programs or projects.	11,751	,008	8,039	,012	-	-

Source: Authors research

This table contains statistical data that helps assess the relationships between knowledge about the concept of work-life balance (WLB) and various aspects related to part-time work, flexible working hours and the implementation of work-life balance strategies. Here is a detailed explanation of each column and the results presented:

1. Presumptions: This is the description of the hypotheses or relationships being examined. Each row represents a different hypothesis.
2. Pearson Chi-Square: This is a statistic used to assess whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables. A higher value indicates a greater

difference between the observed and expected distributions, and a lower value suggests a weaker association.

3. Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): This is the p-value associated with the Chi-Square test. A p-value less than 0.05 is often considered significant, meaning that there is a significant relationship between the two variables being examined.

4. Fisher's Exact Test: This is an alternative test used in data analysis with small sample sizes or when expected frequencies are very small. It is useful for testing the significance of the association between categorical variables.

5. Power of the p-test: This indicates the probability of detecting a true association if one exists. A test power greater than 0.80 is considered good.

6. Contingency Coefficient: This coefficient measures the strength of the association between two categorical variables. The value ranges from 0 (no association) to 1 (perfect association).

7. Monte-Carlo Simulation: This is a statistical method that uses simulations to evaluate test results under conditions of uncertainty. It is often used to obtain more precise estimates of p-values.

Analysis of the results:

1. Correlation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and effective part time work:
o Pearson Chi-Square: 1.192
o Asymp. Sig.: 0.275 (not significant)
o Interpretation: There is no significant association between knowledge of the concept of WLB and part-time work.

2. Correlation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and flexible work program:
o Pearson Chi-Square: 6.513
o Asymp. Sig.: 0.011 (significant)
o Fisher's Exact Test: 0.035
o Power of the p-test: 0.035
o Contingency coefficient: 0.383
o Interpretation: There is a significant association between knowledge of the concept of WLB and flexible work programs, with a moderate strength of association.

3. How Reduced Work Week has an Impact on WLB:
o Pearson Chi-Square: 22.913
o Asymp. Sig.: 0.116 (not significant)
o Interpretation: No significant association was found between reduced workweek and WLB.

4. Correlation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and implementation of work-life balance based on reducing the work program:
o Pearson Chi-Square: 2.418
o Asymp. Sig.: 0.659 (not significant)
o Fisher's Exact Test: 3.272
o Interpretation: No significant association was found between knowledge of the concept of WLB and implementation of work-life balance based on reducing the work program.

5. Correlation between knowledge of the concept of Work-Life Balance and implementation of work-life balance based on other programs or projects:

o Pearson Chi-Square: 11.751
o Asymp. Sig.: 0.008 (significant)
o Fisher's Exact Test: 8.039
o Interpretation: There is a significant association between knowledge about WLB and implementing work-life balance through other programs or projects.

In conclusion, Table no. 1 suggests that there is a significant association between knowledge about the concept of WLB and the use of flexible work schedules, as well as implementing work-life balance through other programs. In contrast, no significant associations were found for part-time work, reduced workweek, and implementing work-life balance through reduced work hours.

Table no. 2. Corelation between knowledge of the concept of WLB and flexible work program

Source: Authors research

From Table no. 2, we can see several statistical tests that have been performed to

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,513[a]	1	,011		
Continuity Correction[b]	3,727	1	,054		
Likelihood Ratio	5,417	1	,020		
Fisher's Exact Test				,035	,035
N of Valid Cases	38				

analyze a relationship between two variables, knowledge of the concept of WLB and flexible work program. Interpretation of the results:

Pearson Chi-Square:
  - Value: 6,513
  - df (degrees of freedom): 1
  - Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): 0,011

The "p" value associated with the Chi-Square test is 0.011, which is lower than the common significance level of 0.05. This suggests that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables analyzed.

Continuity Correction:
  - Value: 3,727
  - DF: 1
  - Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): 0,054

This correction is used to adjust the Chi-Square test for discrete data variables. The p-value is 0.054, which is greater than 0.05, suggesting that the association is not statistically significant at this level.

Likelihood Ratio:
  - Value: 5,417
  - df: 1
  - Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): 0,020

The "p" value associated with this test is 0.020, which indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables, similar to the Chi-Square test.
Fisher's Exact Test:
   - Exact Sig. (2-sided): 0,035
   - Exact Sig. (1-sided): 0,035
Fisher's test is frequently used to evaluate the association between two variables in small-sample studies. The "p" value of 0.035 suggests that there is a statistically significant association between the variables.
N of Valid Cases: 38
The number of valid cases included in the analysis is 38, which indicates the sample size used in the study.
Looking at these results, we can conclude that there is significant evidence of an association between the two variables, especially given the results obtained from the Chi-Square test and Fisher's test. Continuity Correction suggests that we need to be cautious in interpreting the result, but in general, most tests indicate a statistically significant association.

Table no. 3. Correlation between knowledge of the concept of Work-Life Balance and implementation of work-life balance based on other programs or projects

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided
Pearson Chi-Square	11,751	3	,008	,019
Likelihood Ratio	9,155	3	,027	,026
Fisher Exact Test	8,039			,012
Nr. of Valid Cases	38			

Source: Authors research

From Table no. 3, we can observe several statistical tests that have been performed to analyze a relationship between two variables. Interpretation of the results:
Pearson Chi-Square:
   - Value: 6,513
   - df (degrees of freedom): 1
   - Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): 0,011
The "p" value associated with the Chi-Square test is 0.011, which is lower than the common significance level of 0.05. This suggests that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables analyzed.
Continuity Correction:
   - Value: 3,727
   - DF: 1
   - Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): 0,054
This correction is used to adjust the Chi-Square test for discrete data variables. The "p" value is 0.054, which is greater than 0.05, suggesting that the association is not statistically significant at this level.
Likelihood Ratio:
   - Value: 5,417
   - df: 1

- Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): 0,020

The "p" value associated with this test is 0.020, which indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables, similar to the Chi-Square test.

Fisher's Exact Test:

- Exact Sig. (2-sided): 0,035
- Exact Sig. (1-sided): 0,035

Fisher's test is frequently used to evaluate the association between two variables in small-sample studies. The "p" value of 0.035 suggests that there is a statistically significant association between the variables.

Nr of Valid Cases: 38

The number of valid cases included in the analysis is 38, which indicates the sample size used in the study.

Looking at these results, we can conclude that there is significant evidence of an association between the two variables, especially given the results obtained from the Chi-Square test and Fisher's test. Continuity Correction suggests that we should be cautious in interpreting the result, but in general, most tests indicate a statistically significant association.

- The analysis of the results shows that there is a statistical correlation between the knowledge of the concept and the achievement of a WLB balance through flexible working hours (which agrees with the theory in the literature review).
- Knowledge of the concept leads to achieving a WLB balance by methods other than the work schedule.
- Reducing the working week and knowing the concept of WLB does not help to achieve WLB balance.
- Also, the reduction of weekly working hours and their impact does not help to achieve this balance.

Work-life balance initiatives could be designed by organizations with or without the participation of their employees. WLB initiatives such as flexible working hours have been observed to be carried out as the choice and preference of managers, without much formal, procedural, organisational documentation. Challenges for WLB initiatives also include determining an appropriate trade-off between their relative merits and disadvantages to the organization, the most observed include high labour costs and raising the skill level of employees. Other things mentioned include discounting absenteeism by reducing weekly work hours or working hours. Flexible hours options vary, depending on the nature of the business, the job requirements, and the policies and practices adopted by each organization.

The practical implications of work-life balance (WLB) initiatives for organizations are varied and can influence both employee performance and organizational success, according to research:

• Customizing initiatives: Every organization is unique, and WLB initiatives need to be tailored to the specifics of each business. Organizations should consider the different requirements of employees across roles, departments, and stages of their professional lives.

• Monitoring and evaluating WLB initiatives: It is essential for organizations to monitor the impact of WLB initiatives through regular evaluations. These evaluations can help identify potential issues and adjust programs to meet employee needs and changes in the work environment.

• Training and development of employees: Providing training and professional development opportunities can help increase employee skill levels. These programs can be integrated into WLB initiatives to support employees in managing their careers while benefiting from more flexible work schedules.

• Cost-benefit analysis: Organizations should conduct a detailed analysis of the costs and benefits of WLB initiatives. While implementing these programs may involve initial expenses (e.g., employee training or technology investments), the long-term benefits, such as reduced absenteeism and increased employee retention, can justify these costs.

• Employee consultation: Organizations should involve employees in the development of WLB initiatives. This will not only ensure that the programs are relevant and useful, but will also increase their acceptance. Surveys, focus groups, or informal meetings can be effective ways to obtain feedback.

These practical implications can help organizations develop effective strategies that improve work-life balance, increase employee satisfaction, and ultimately contribute to organizational success.

Conclusions

The adequacy of work-life balance initiatives is determined by various variables such as the nature and demographics of the workforce, the internal environment regarding the organizational structure in the business environment analysed, suggesting that there is no universal solution for all organizations, and initiatives must be adapted according to the specifics of each organization. There are specific arguments about the ways of work-life balance initiatives available to organizations. In some cases, these initiatives support and go together with what is stated in the literature in the field, or in other cases, modified or different scenarios are observed. Although flexible working hours are not the only factor contributing to the achievement of WLB, it is nevertheless recognized as an important factor. On the other hand, a manager said that this initiative has contributed to reducing absenteeism and increasing turnover. This is supported by Summer (2007) and Thompson (1999), that the flexible nature of work leads to greater employee motivation, increased loyalty, and decreased absenteeism rates. One of the interesting results of this study is that part-time work and the reduction of the working week do not help to achieve WLB balance, and shows that organizations need to carefully analyse the impact of the various measures they implement. The study showed some examples of negative organizational outcomes by implementing WLB, due to the high costs. Despite the intention to support WLB balance, organizations need to be aware of the resources required and the financial impact of these initiatives. Also, the support of methods other than through the work program, for the implementation of policies received interesting answers such as legislative changes in the labour code, the tax regime, tax legislation, suggesting that despite the intention to support WLB balance, organizations need to be aware of the resources required and the financial

impact of these initiatives which can be the subject of further research in the realization of WLB. The limitation of this study is given by the selection criterion of the interviewed companies and the diversity of the fields of activity, and future research could explore more contexts including: demographic variables (age, gender, family status), costs versus benefits of implementation, the role of legislation, systematization of initiatives as procedures in WLB, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of WLB initiatives. Regarding the current state of WLB initiatives in the analysed organizations, most of the managers confirmed their knowledge of the WLB concept but their implementation is done at a slow pace. Some of the organisations agreed that the current form of their WLB initiatives is not well documented at the organisational level, not being included in a system procedure, being more of an informal nature. In conclusion, work-life balance initiatives are influenced by a variety of factors, and their success depends on adaptability, flexibility, financial resources and an appropriate legislative framework. Their implementation remains a challenge, and organizations need to document and systematize these initiatives to maximize their effectiveness.

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