CAREER MANAGEMENT AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE FROM A PROTEAN CAREER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The study investigates how organizational policies and practices support both career management and work-life balance in relation to organizational performance. The theoretical foundation of the research is the protean career concept, which emphasizes self-direction and a personal values orientation. In this context, organizational policies are becoming increasingly important, shaped by uncertainty and increasing pressures on managers in both leadership and operational roles. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, with a dominant qualitative component based on semi-structured interviews and an integrated quantitative component measured on a 1-5 Likert scale; the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential methods to compare the public and private sectors. Data were collected from 67 senior and operational managers. The interviews were structured around four main themes: autonomy in decision-making, career management, work-life balance, and role conflict and career sustainability. The findings highlight how organizations' policies on career management and work-life balance influence performance through employee retention and customer satisfaction. In addition, the study shows that autonomy and role clarity are important for the sustainability of managerial careers. The research contributes to the application of the protean career concept within organizations and highlights the close links among career management, work-life balance, and organizational performance.

Keywords:
career management, work-life balance, protean career, organizational performance, decisional autonomy, role conflict.

JEL Classification
M10; M12; M54; J24; J81; J28

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Introduction

Recent transformation of work, accelerated by digitalization, business volatility and competitive pressures, have changed the role of organizational policies regarding career management and work-life balance (WLB): from individual benefits to strategic infrastructure with effects on organizational performance. In this context, the literature shows that policies that increase decision-making autonomy, support development and clarify career paths contribute to stronger employability, retention and organizational outcomes (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019; De Vos et al., 2020). At the same time, career management has evolved from a linear approach, dependent on hierarchies, to a flexible vision, centered on the individual and personal values, in which development programs (e.g., training, mentoring, internal mobility) are increasingly correlated with support measures for WLB (De Vos et al., 2020). From a protean career perspective, autonomy and professional self-direction are associated with satisfaction and commitment, especially when supported by an organizational culture that supports WLB. In the Romanian context, career management policies that include internal mobility, support for certifications, and succession plans are reported to be relevant for employee retention and the sustainability of managerial careers (Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruta, 2025). WLB influences organizational performance through mechanisms that go beyond individual well-being. Evidence from the literature indicates that policies that promote schedule flexibility, reduce overload, and include well-being-oriented benefits are associated with reduced absenteeism and increased organizational loyalty (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). When employees perceive real support from the organization, motivation and the quality of customer interactions increase, with effects on innovation and service quality (Grotto & Lyness, 2010). For this reason, WLB is increasingly treated as a strategic determinant of organizational performance, not just as an individual support tool (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). In addition, flexible work arrangements may have differentiated effects depending on national contexts, which reinforces the need for adapted and coherent policy design. Complementarily, WLB can be understood as a contextual resource that supports career viability and the capacity to contribute to performance, explaining the pathways through which WLB practices translate into organizational outcomes (Guo et al., 2024). As a theoretical foundation, the protean career concept provides an integrative framework for analyzing the interaction between organizational policies, career management (CM), WLB and organizational performance. The protean career, defined by self-direction, mobility, and alignment with personal values, involves adaptability in an environment characterized by uncertainty and rapid change (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). At the same time, the protean framework helps to understand how organizations can support self-direction through resources and formal development and evaluation mechanisms (Hall et al., 2018). The literature shows that protean orientation is associated with employability and reduced intentions to leave, especially when the organization offers clear resources and development paths (Holtschlag et al., 2020). However, a significant part of the research treats protean orientation mainly as an individual attribute and examines WLB through satisfaction or work-family conflict, paying limited attention to policy packages and their link to organizational indicators such as retention, productivity, decision quality, or innovation. The central argument of this study is that

organizational performance depends less on isolated interventions and more on the coherence of policy packages and the consistency of their implementation (De Vos et al., 2020). Consequently, the shift from dispersed policies to coherent packages regarding role clarity, decision-making autonomy across levels, transparent criteria for mobility and promotion, mentoring and rotations, as well as explicit availability expectation, may be more relevant to organizational performance than any single measure (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019; Cachon-Rodriguez et al., 2022; De Vos et al., 2020). In this context, the present study investigates how, in Romanian organization, policies and practices regarding CM and WLB, in relation to autonomy and role clarity, connect with organizational performance, from a protean career perspective, using an approach based on semi-structured interviews that also includes Likert-scale assessments integrated into the analysis.

1. Review of the scientific literature

In contemporary organizations, managers frequently face pressures to make quick decisions, overlapping responsibilities, and heightened role conflicts, which makes organizational policies on decision-making autonomy, role clarity, and career sustainability relevant to both individual well-being and collective performance. In Romania, research in the business and economics indicates links between work flexibility, satisfaction and performance, but also risks when autonomy is not matched by rules and clarity regarding expectations and availability (Davidescu et al., 2020; Nemțeanu et al., 2021). In the same way, bureaucratic barriers and limited decision-making autonomy can generate frustration and reduce the responsiveness of organizations, with consequences for the sustainability of CM (Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruță, 2025). In the health sector, the absence of adequate WLB policies is associated with strong intentions to migrate, affecting organizational stability and quality of services (Ciotlăuș et al., 2025). Recent evidence suggest that a culture based on trust and autonomy correlates with higher retention and a better WLB, but the positive effects depend on how autonomy is framed by processes, roles, and coordination (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2022). In Romania, flexibility and autonomy are perceived as levers for satisfaction and performance, but teleworking and flexible arrangements can amplify stress and ambiguity when clear rules and managerial alignment mechanisms are lacking (Davidescu et al., 2020; Nemțeanu et al., 2021). It follows that autonomy, as a policy, is especially productive when combination with clarity of roles and explicit rules on availability and deliverables. CM has moved from the traditional paradigm, dominated by hierarchical paths controlled by the organization, to models that emphasize self-direction and continuous development. In this context, the protean career defines success not only by objective outcomes (e.g., promotions), but also by congruence with personal values and the ability to navigate transitions (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004). Subsequent extensions emphasize that self-direction and mobility become sustainable when supported by consistent organizational policies, such as mentoring, internal mobility, and succession plans, which transform "protean orientation" from an individual attribute into an outcome activated by the organizational system (Hall et al., 2018). A synthesis of the literature shows that career management practices contribute to individual satisfaction and organizational performance through

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retention and the reduction of costs associated with turnover (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019). In Romania, development-oriented policies (including support for certifications and cross-cutting projects) are reported to be relevant for loyalty and the sustainability of CM, especially among young cohorts (Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruță, 2025). WLB has become a central construct in human resources, defined as the perceived balance between work and personal life (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). The literature shows that WLB policies are associated with reducing absenteeism and turnover intentions and improving performance through support mechanisms and perceived reciprocity (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Grotto & Lyness, 2010). Meta-syntheses indicate that WLB practice packages are reflected in productivity, retention, and customer satisfaction, but the magnitude of the effects depends on the culture and consistency of implementation (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2022). In Romania, teleworking and flexibility are positively evaluated, but they can produce ambivalent effects: on the one hand, they support continuity and autonomy; on the other hand, they can weaken team relationships and performance visibility, affecting professional development if they are not accompanied by mentoring, feedback, and deliberate managerial routines (Nemțeanu et al., 2021). Thus, WLB does not function robustly as a determinant of performance unless it is integrated with career development policies and role architecture. Role conflict and career sustainability complement this integrative logic. Ambiguity and overlapping responsibilities consume psychological and organizational resources, reducing performance and increasing the risk of leaving, including in contexts where there is formal flexibility (Nemțeanu et al., 2021). From a protean perspective, multi-role interfacing is common, and a lack of clarity can erode the ability to self-direct. Evidence from the Romanian academic environment shows negative associations between role ambiguity and perceived well-being and effectiveness, suggesting that role design and coordination may function as protective mechanisms (Macovei & Martinescu-Bădălan, 2023). On the sustainability dimension, the literature indicates differences by age group: for young people, the early match between interests and trajectory counts for a stable career start, and for employees aged 50+, the work climate and recognition influence job satisfaction and continuity (Cioca & Bratu, 2020; Plopeanu et al., 2021). These results converge on the idea that career sustainability is a system outcome, dependent on an organizational ecosystem in which autonomy, WLB, and recognition are underpinned by real learning opportunities, transparent transitions, and role clarity (Hall et al., 2018). Overall, the literature indicates a shift from isolated interventions to policy package coherence and consistency of implementation as prerequisites for long-term performance (De Vos et al., 2020). However, many contributions remain fragmented between the individual level (protean orientation, satisfaction, work-family conflict) and the organizational level (policies and performance indicators). In this context, it becomes relevant to investigate how autonomy, role clarity, CM and WLB work as a policy package and how they connect with organizational performance, especially in the context of organizations in Romania.

2. Research methodology

The study uses a mixed-methods design, with a dominant qualitative component (semi-structured interviews) and an integrated quantitative component, to analyze how

organizational policies regarding decision-making autonomy, career management, work-life balance (WLB) and role clarity are associated with organizational performance. The focus is on the comparison between the public and private sectors. Data were collected from 67 semi-structured interviews, conducted between August 6 and September 12, 2025, with managers from 33 organizations. The sample included senior managers (80.6%) and line managers (19.4%). The organizations were classified into eight areas, but the comparative analysis was conducted exclusively on sectoral affiliation (public vs. private). The interview guide covered four dimensions: (1) decision-making autonomy, (2) career management, (3) WLB and (4) role conflict and career sustainability. The instrument combined open-ended questions with closed-ended items on a Likert scale (1-5). Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed through deductive and inductive coding, and certain themes were binary-coded at the interview level (0 = absent, 1 = present), which allowed for tabular reporting as n/N (%) by sector. The quantitative component was analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics v20. For binary variables, frequencies, percentages and public-private comparisons were reported through contingency tables, with the chi-square test and, when expected frequencies were low, Fisher's exact test (and/or Monte Carlo). For Likert items, response distribution and top-2-box aggregations (4-5) were reported, and the association with sector was assessed by tests and indicators appropriate for ordinal data (e.g., Kendall tau-b or Monte Carlo simulation p, depending on the table). The significance of differences was assessed by effect sizes (Phi/Cramér's V; respectively Kendall`s tau-b for ordinal items). The inferential results are interpreted as exploratory, given the convenience sample and the fact that the interviews came from multiple organisations. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent; data were anonymized and reported in aggregate, without identifying individuals or organizations.

3. Results and discussion

The results presented below describe how public and private sector managers perceive organizational policies and how they are reflected in performance. The analysis follows four interrelated dimensions. First, decision-making autonomy is relevant because it influences the speed and quality of decisions, but also the level of motivation and involvement of management teams. Second, CM captures the policies and processes through which organizations support professional development, from career paths and key competencies to training, mentoring, internal mobility and progress-oriented assessment; operationally, these practices translate into performance through more effective use of skills, professionalization and a culture oriented towards adaptability and results. Third, WLB reflects the organization's ability to configure roles, workload and flexibility so that employees can fulfill their professional responsibilities without compromising essential personal areas; managerially, WLB functions as a mechanism for protecting and regenerating human resources, reducing stress and absenteeism, stabilizing retention and supporting involvement, with effects on productivity, decision quality and operational continuity. Role conflict is analyzed as a result of ambiguity, overlaps and simultaneous pressures, and the associated organizational mechanisms (succession plans, rapid arbitration of top-management issues, redistribution of tasks,

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clear job descriptions and procedures, rules to prevent overlaps) are considered tools through which organizations reduce ambiguity, define role boundaries and stabilise coordination. These dimensions provide the framework for understanding which policies and practices can reduce tensions, accelerate the circulation of information and improve the coherence of decisions, with direct implications for organizational performance.

3.1. Decisional autonomy

Table no. 1. Decision-making autonomy, limits, effects and support

Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p	Test	Effect
Autonomy	Small budgets	19/26 (73,1%)	15/41 (36,6%)	0,006	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,36
Autonomy	Decisions: teams	7/26 (26,9%)	21/41 (51,2%)	0,075	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,24
Autonomy	New projects	18/26 (69,2%)	16/41 (39,0%)	0,024	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,29
Autonomy	Modification of procedures	8/26 (30,8%)	22/41 (53,7%)	0,082	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,22
Limitations	Long approvals	13/26 (50,0%)	16/41 (39,0%)	0,452	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,11
Limitations	Centralized budgets	14/26 (53,8%)	14/41 (34,1%)	0,199	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,18
Limitations	Promotion restrictions	6/26 (23,1%)	5/41 (12,2%)	0,315	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,14
Effects	Loss of opportunities	23/26 (88,5%)	23/41 (56,1%)	0,007	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,34
Effects	Down motivation	10/26 (38,5%)	14/41 (34,1%)	0,796	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,04
Effects	Slow company perception	6/26 (23,1%)	9/41 (22,0%)	1,000	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,01
Effects	Innovation braking	12/26 (46,2%)	8/41 (19,5%)	0,029	Fisher (2-sided)	V = 0,28
Support policies (Likert)	Quick decisions	10/26 (38,5%)	26/41 (63,4%)	0,001	Kendall tau-b	tau-b = 0,360
Support policies (Likert)	Resources and tools	2/26 (7,7%)	22/41 (53,7%)	<0,001	Kendall tau-b	tau-b = 0,383
Support policies (Likert)	Management shows confidence	15/26 (57,7%)	34/41 (82,9%)	0,011	Kendall tau-b	tau-b = 0,289

Source: Author's research

Note: Percentages were converted to n/N using N public = 26 and N private = 41; for binary items, we kept Fisher's p (2-sided) where reported, and for Likert items, we kept p (Monte Carlo, 2-sided) and Cramér's V.

In the public sector, managers more often indicate autonomy (table no.1) for "small budgets" (73.1% vs. 36.6%; Fisher p = 0.006; V = 0.36) and "new projects" (69.2% vs. 39.0%; p = 0.024; V = 0.29). In the private sector, differences in the opposite direction appear for "team decisions" (51.2% vs. 26.9%; p = 0.075; V = 0.24) and "procedure changes" (53.7% vs. 30.8%; p = 0.082; V = 0.22), but these results remain at the trend level. For autonomy limitations (long approvals, centralized budgets, restrictions on promotions), no consistent differences are evident between sectors (p > 0.19; V = 0.11-0.18). In contrast, in the public sector, two consequences relevant to performance are more frequently reported: "lost opportunities" (88.5% vs. 56.1%; p = 0.007; V = 0.34) and "slowing down of innovation" (46.2% vs. 19.5%; p = 0.029; V = 0.28), while "decreased motivation" and "perception of slow firm" do not differ between sectors (p ≥ 0.796; very small V). Autonomy-supporting policies are evaluated more favorably in private: "quick decisions without unnecessary approvals" (63.4% vs. 38.5%; p = 0.001; tau-b = 0.360), "resources and tools" (53.7% vs. 7.7%; p < 0.001; tau-b = 0.383) and "leadership shows trust" (82.9% vs. 57.7%; p = 0.011; tau-b = 0.289).

3.2. Career management and organizational performance
Table no.2. Career management and organizational performance

Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
Career development	Courses: Retention	23/26 (88,5%)	27/41 (65,9%)	0,047 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,253
Career development	Coaching: decisions/mistakes	11/26 (42,3%)	8/41 (19,5%)	0,055 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,246
Career development	Internal mobility: processes	7/26 (26,9%)	23/41 (56,1%)	0,025 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,286
Career development	Mentoring: Time to Leadership	4/26 (15,4%)	14/41 (34,1%)	0,156 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,206
Performance (KPIs)	Courses	14/26 (53,8%)	11/41 (26,8%)	0,026 (Pearson χ^2, df = 1)	Φ = 0,272
Performance (KPIs)	Mentoring	3/26 (11,5%)	18/41 (43,9%)	0,005 (Pearson χ^2, df = 1)	Φ = 0,340
Performance (KPIs)	Internal mobility	7/26 (26,9%)	23/41 (56,1%)	0,019 (Pearson χ^2, df =	Φ = 0,286

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Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
				1)	
Perceptions (Likert)	The organization's values are clearly articulated	18/26 (69,2%)	30/41 (73,2%)	0,832 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,164
Perceptions (Likert)	Career development policies are well-defined and enforced	24/26 (92,3%)	30/41 (73,2%)	0,289 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,280
Perceptions (Likert)	I have access to real career development opportunities	24/26 (92,3%)	33/41 (80,5%)	0,102 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,329

Source: Author's research

Note: Percentages were converted to n/N using N public = 26 and N private = 41. Fisher's p (2-sided) is reported for binary items, and p (Monte Carlo, 2-sided) and Cramér's V are reported for Likert items.

In the comparison between the public and private sectors (table no.2), three relevant differences and a trend emerge. In the area of policies, the public more frequently associates courses with retention (88.5% vs. 65.9%), and the private sector more frequently reports internal mobility related to process improvement (56.1% vs. 26.9%); coaching appears more frequently in the public, but marginally (p = 0.055). At the level of examples/KPIs, the public more often provides examples of retention through courses, while the private sector more frequently indicates mentoring as a mechanism for shortening the time to role and internal mobility as a mechanism for optimizing processes. Likert perceptions indicate high levels of agreement in both sectors; the differences are not significant, but the effect sizes suggest a pro-public bias for "well-defined policies" and "access to opportunities".

3.3. WLB and organizational performance
Table no.3. WLB and organizational performance

Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Email Rules	2/24 (8,3%)	9/41 (22,0%)	0,191 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,175
WLB Politicians (Implement)	WFH / flexibility	0/24 (0,0%)	9/41 (22,0%)	0,021 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,307
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Extra days	6/24 (25,0%)	27/41 (65,9%)	0,002 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,394

Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Socializing	6/24 (25,0%)	14/41 (34,1%)	0,580 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,096
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Settlement	7/24 (29,2%)	18/41 (43,9%)	0,296 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,146
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Program discount	11/24 (45,8%)	16/41 (39,0%)	0,612 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,067
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Financial benefits	6/24 (25,0%)	12/40 (30,0%)	0,778 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,054
WLB Politicians (Implement)	Paid days off	13/24 (54,2%)	18/41 (43,9%)	0,452 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,099
WLB-Performance Policies	Reduction of meetings: productivity	11/26 (42,3%)	12/41 (29,3%)	0,302 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,134
WLB-Performance Policies	Flexible Hours: Reduce Absenteeism	8/26 (30,8%)	25/41 (61,0%)	0,024 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,294
WLB-Performance Policies	Limiting email after hours	7/26 (26,9%)	6/41 (14,6%)	0,342 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,151
WLB-Retention Barriers	Lack of flexibility in days off	11/26 (42,3%)	26/41 (63,4%)	0,131 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,207
WLB-Retention Barriers	Unclear leave policies	9/26 (34,6%)	23/41 (56,1%)	0,132 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,210
WLB-Retention Barriers	Frequent changes ale program	13/26 (50,0%)	26/41 (63,4%)	0,317 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,133
WLB-Retention Barriers	Busy workloads	18/26 (69,2%)	25/41 (61,0%)	0,604 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,084
WLB Governance/Practices (Likert)	Clear rules by program	37/67 (55,2%)	—	0,382 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,251
WLB Governance/Practices (Likert)	Periods without meetings (managers)	36/67 (53,7%)	—	0,059 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,353

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Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
WLB Governance/Practices (Likert)	Control over loading/schedule	45/67 (67,2%)	—	0,075 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,342
WLB Governance/Practices (Likert)	Values-aligned WLB practices	39/67 (58,2%)	—	0,372 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,254
WLB Governance/Practices (Likert)	WLB policies contribute to retention	46/67 (68,7%)	—	0,205 (MC, 2-sided)	V = 0,295

Source: Author's research.

Note: For binary items, Fisher's p (2-sided) and V (≈ Phi) are reported as effect sizes.

For Likert items, the source table reports the Top-2 total and sector tests.

In the area of WLB policies, two differences (table no.3) are robust: WFH/flexibility (0.0% public vs. 22.0% private; p = 0.021; V = 0.307) and additional days (25.0% public vs. 65.9% private; p = 0.002; V = 0.394), both in favour of the private sector. For the impact on performance, the only clear difference is flexible working associated with reduced absenteeism (30.8% public vs. 61.0% private; p = 0.024; V = 0.294). No significant differences appear for retention-related WLB barriers, but there are two trends in the private sector for flexibility of days off and clarity of leave (p ≈ 0.13; V ≈ 0.21). On the Likert scale, agreement is generally high (Top-2 between 53.7% and 68.7%), with near-threshold signals for "windows without meetings" and "control over workload/schedule".

3.4. Role conflict and career sustainability

Table no.4. Role conflict and career sustainability, operational clarity mechanisms

Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
Operational clarity (reduction of role conflict)	Succession plan activated in the absence of the manager	8/26 (30,8%)	18/41 (43,9%)	0,315 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,131
Operational clarity (reduction of role conflict)	Fast refereeing by top management (conflicts between teams)	3/26 (11,5%)	8/41 (19,5%)	0,508 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,105
Operational clarity (reduction of role conflict)	Load redistribution to avoid overload	16/26 (61,5%)	20/41 (48,8%)	0,328 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,125

Size	Item	Public n/N (%)	Private n/N (%)	p (test)	Effect
Operational clarity (reduction of role conflict)	Clear job descriptions – responsibilities	24/26 (92,3%)	23/41 (56,1%)	0,002 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,386
Operational clarity (reduction of role conflict)	Clear procedures – who decides in specific situations	17/26 (65,4%)	20/41 (48,8%)	0,215 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,163
Operational clarity (reduction of role conflict)	Rules that prevent overlaps between departments	1/26 (3,8%)	16/41 (39,0%)	0,001 (Fisher, 2-sided)	V = 0,394

Source: Author's research

Note: V = Cramér's V (equal to |Phi| for 2×2 tables). The direction of the difference is interpreted from the percentages. The p-values are interpreted exploratory (interview data, collected from several organizations).

The results indicate two robust sectoral differences in mechanisms that reduce ambiguity and role overlap. In the public sector, "clear job descriptions-responsibilities" is reported much more frequently (92.3%) than in the private sector (56.1%), the difference being significant and with a moderate effect (p = 0.002; V = 0.386). In contrast, in the private sector, "rules that prevent overlaps between departments" is reported more often (39.0% vs. 3.8%), also significant, with a moderate effect (p = 0.001; V = 0.394). For succession planning, rapid arbitration, task redistribution and decision-making procedures, the differences between sectors are not significant (p ≥ 0.215) and have small effects (V ≤ 0.163). Overall, the public sector seems to stabilize roles mainly through formal clarification of responsibilities, and the private sector through interdepartmental separation rules; both mechanisms can reduce tensions and support career sustainability through a more predictable coordination framework (Brătianu, 2018; Albulescu, 2024).

Conclusions
The study's conclusions suggest that organizational performance is influenced less by the isolated existence of policies and more by the coherence of practice bundles that include autonomy, CM, WLB and role clarity. From the perspectiveof the protean career, these dimensions are interdependent: autonomy without resources and trust remains nominal, career development without operational mechanisms remains formal, and WLB without border control becomes a promise without effect. Differences between sectors do not indicate a uniform advantage, but distinct configurations of the mechanisms through which policies are translated into performance. Regarding decision-making autonomy, the public sector more frequently reports autonomy in

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micro-budget decisions and project initiation, but it also more frequently reports performance costs associated with limiting autonomy, especially lost opportunities and reduced innovation. The private sector is more clearly characterized by fast decisions, available resources and tools, and managerial trust. This contrast suggests that autonomy is a integrated package (authority + resources + speed + trust) that reduces decision-making friction and enables execution. The managerial implication is the need to design autonomy together with decision thresholds, deadlines and explicit responsibilities. In CM, the results indicate two distinct development architectures that affect performance through different channels. In the public sector, formal training is more often associated with retention, suggesting a strategy of skill standardization. In the private sector, mentoring and internal mobility are more often connected to faster role readiness and improving processes. The conclusion is that career policies produce effects when they are linked to observable outcomes and supported by transparent routines and criteria. In practical terms, the public sector benefits from complementing training with consistently applied mobility and mentoring mechanisms, while the private sector benefits from stabilizing mobility and mentoring mechanisms through predictable rules and feedback. For WLB, sectoral differences emerge more clearly. The private sector more frequently reports flexibility and additional days, and schedule flexibility is more clearly associated with reducing absenteeism. At the same time, WLB barriers affecting retention are broadly comparable across sectors, with signals particularly on flexibility of days off and clarity regarding leave policies. The central result is that WLB functions as a proximal determinant of performance when it includes real control over time and boundaries. From this perspective, managerial priorities are to protect meeting-free intervals, reduce intrusion after hours, and increase control over workload, in parallel with clarifying procedures related to time off. In role conflict and career sustainability, the results suggest two different mechanisms for reducing ambiguity: the public sector is distinguished by formal clarity of responsibilities (job descriptions), and the private sector by rules that prevent overlaps between departments. Both are relevant for reducing tensions and stabilizing coordination, but neither is sufficient on its own. A sustainable framework combines clarity of responsibilities with interface rules and decision procedures, so that roles are predictable and conflicts are prevented or resolved quickly. The limitations of our study are specific to an exploratory approach based on a covenience sample, limited coverage and the use of indicators derived from thematic coding and varning N values for some items. Consequently, statistical tests should be interpreted as indicative, and the conclusions describe patterns and mechanisms, not firm generalizations. Future directions include expanding the sample, multi-level analyses (manager-organization) and triangulation with objective performance indicators (absenteeism, actual turnover, decision-making times, process KPIs and innovation), to more robustly test the relationships between policy packages and organizational outcomes.

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