



ASSESSING THE ROLE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

ÇALIŞAN İYİLİĞİ İÇİN İŞ-HAYAT DENGESİ VE ESNEKLİK ROLÜNÜN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

Abstract

The present article is aimed at critically discussing the reviewing the impact of flexibility and work-life balance on employee well-being. Mainly, the article is concerned with the aspects of work-life balance related to people management and employee well-being, the indicators of healthy working life, organization and employee (personal)-driven flexibility, and human resource management (HRM) practices. Employee well-being is a critical aspect of HRM, as it directly affects the performance of the individual and consequently, the organization in general. The aspects of flexibility and work-life balance have been examined in accordance with the impact of HRM practices on them and with an extensive analysis of the existing theoretical domain. That is to say, the main indicators of healthy work-life balance were considered with their importance of them stated and discussed. The two distinctive types of flexibility have been discussed including organizational-driven and persona-driven flexibility. Not only the phenomenons of personal and organization-driven flexibility were considered but also their impact on the well-being of the personnel. The causal relationship has been supported between healthy work-life balance and employees' well-being as well as the role of flexibility in forming and creating of well-being.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Flexibility, Organization-driven Flexibility, Employee Well-Being, HRM.

Öz

Bu makale, esneklik ve iş-yaşam dengesinin çalışan refahı üzerindeki etkisinin gözden geçirilmesini eleştirel bir şekilde tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma temel olarak, insan yönetimi ve çalışan refahı açısından iş-yaşam dengesi, sağlıklı çalışma hayatının göstergeleri, organizasyon ve çalışan (kişisel) odaklı esneklik ve insan kaynakları yönetimi (İKY) uygulamaları ile ilgilidir. Çalışan refahı, bireyin ve dolayısıyla genel olarak organizasyonun performansını doğrudan etkilediği için İKY'nin kritik bir unsurudur. Esneklik ve iş-yaşam dengesi yönleri, İKY uygulamalarının üzerlerindeki etkisine uygun olarak ve mevcut teorik alanın kapsamlı bir analizi ile incelenmiştir. Yani sağlıklı iş-yaşam dengesinin temel göstergeleri, önemleri ile birlikte ele alınmış ve tartışılmıştır. Örgütsel güdümlü ve kişisel güdümlü esneklik dahil olmak üzere iki farklı esneklik türü tartışılmıştır. Sadece kişisel ve organizasyona dayalı esneklik fenomenleri değil, aynı zamanda personelin refahı üzerindeki etkileri de dikkate alınmıştır. Sağlıklı iş-yaşam dengesi ile çalışanların refahı arasındaki nedensellik ilişkisinin yanı sıra, refahın oluşturulmasında ve yaratılmasında esnekliğin rolü desteklenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İş-yaşam Dengesi, Esneklik, Organizasyon Odaklı Esneklik, Çalışan Refahı, İKY.

Robert PAPLA*

Dmitriy PAK**

Gulim GINET***

* DBA Candidate, Graduate School of Business, Narxoz University

E-posta/E-mail:

robert.papla@savencia.com

Orcid: 0000-0003-1345-5031

** Research fellow, HR Research Center, Narxoz University

E-posta/E-mail:

dmitriy.pak@narxoz.kz

Orcid: 0000-0001-8805-1387

*** Research fellow, Silk Road Case Center, Narxoz University

E-posta/E-mail:

gulim.ginet@narxoz.kz

Orcid: 0000-0002-9847-3222

Başvuru/Submitted: 10.05.2022

Kabul/Accepted : 11.09.2022

Introduction

Before starting the discussion, it is important to understand the concepts that make up the topic: “work-life balance” and “flexibility”. Despite its evolving popularity, the term ‘work-life balance’ does not have one common definition, but rather presents an array of term explanations (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Definition in the electronic dictionary is quite straight-forward - it is ‘the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). According to this definition, ‘life’ part of the term is about spending time with your family and doing activities you like, e.g., hobbies and interests. This definition does not cover other aspects of life, such as academic duties of working students or household duties such as cleaning. However, these things are part of life as well and question arises perhaps, this definition has limitations because it considers two measurements (work and personal life), while life has at least one more measurement (things you must do, but are not related to work, family or hobbies). It is still vital to keep balance between these activities and job. Sangarandeniya and Ranasinghe (2020) support our opinion, by suggesting that ‘work-life’ should address non-family aspects of life as well, such as academic responsibilities or travelling. Some authors even proposed a fairer term - ‘work-non-work balance’ (Casper et al., 2018). Consequently, such definition covering wider aspects is more inclusive and applies even to those who are not married or live single. The term is also inclusive in terms of gender: Lewis (2003) believes keeping this balance is a matter of both women and men, because everyone struggles to equalize time spent on work, family, and spare time.

Similar to ‘work-life balance’, ‘flexibility’ has been defined in a number of ways. According to the dictionary, ‘flexibility’ is ‘the ability to change or be changed easily according to the situation’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This is a personal trait that consists of several other traits. To describe, a flexible person should: 1) have an open mind to accept and communicate new information - intellectual flexibility; 2) have a positive attitude towards changes and learning new - receptiveness; 3) look for new ways of performing tasks - creativity; 4) be able to change his working style depending on circumstances - modification of behaviour (University of Bradford, n.d). Personally, we think that some individuals are born with flexibility and adaptability. Such individuals often seek to challenge their reality and try new experiences to evaluate how they will react: trying different styles and methods of working, changing industries or companies to work in, moving to different countries for work or study. On the other hand, we do not deny that these competences can be trained if an individual has strong willingness. In any case, flexibility is a valuable trait important both for job performance and life, and vital in achieving the work-life balance.

Historically, the concept of work-life balance has developed after the movement of stonemasons in 1856, who were the first in history to declare their rights for a 40-hour working week (Brough et al., 2020). The protesters’ motivation was to regain the rights to spend time with family, for leisure and rehabilitation. In the modern world, the issue persists due to the development of technologies. Being available to work anytime from anywhere, thanks to online platforms, created new options but it also created a ‘constant availability’ problem (Brough et al., 2020). Even if the employee is away from his workplace, he still receives job-related notifications on his phone or smart watches. At the end, the employee struggles to define boundaries between work and home, despite his physical surroundings. It is interesting to note that options of flexible schedules and remote working were created to give people more flexibility in their work but ended up causing the problem of work-life disbalance. On the other hand, Wöhrmann, Dilchert and Michel (2021) argue that flexible working hours and work-life balance are negatively related only if an employee has too much freedom in arranging his working hours, while moderate work time flexibility contributes to a better well-being.

1. Work-Life Balance and People Management

From the management perspective, it is crucial to perceive employees' work-life balance important both for the individual and the organization success. People being the company's most important asset, managers should help employees to bring flexibility to their life:

1) When employees have a flexible working schedule that fits their lifestyle, they feel less stressed. For working parents, it is convenient to choose at what hour to begin working, so that morning preparations with children are hassle-free. With the mental stability, they will have strength to perform their work better. Consequently, less work-related stress decreases burnouts and restores health, which results in fewer sick leaves for the organization.

2) For the same reason of having less stress, employees gain more mindfulness. Mindfulness is the 'ability to be fully present, and aware of where we are and what we are doing' (Sangarandeniya & Ranasinghe, 2020). Having their minds free of other concerns, employees will be able to fully concentrate on their current tasks and perform better.

3) By providing flexible working hours, companies are able to attract and retain skilled employees. Young workforce will be captivated by such benefits, which reduces the employee turnover and replacement costs. Colgate-Palmolive offers flexible working hours for its employees and is also one of the companies with little turnover rate (Smith, 2013). Paul Wolfe, the SVP of Indeed, confirms that, 'In today's tight labor market, proper work-life balance practices are essential for employee retention' (Hess, 2017). This proves to what extent the workplace flexibility is significant for talent management.

2. Work-Life Balance and Its Impact Over Employee's Well-Being

Regarding the benefits of achieving work-life balance, various theoretical approaches have been formulated for both employees and organizations. According to Bird (2006), work-life balance leads to feelings of satisfaction and happiness, which prevents various health problems. Work-life balance reduces the possibility of depersonalization as well as the possibility of mental and health problems (Lingard et al., 2007; Hammig & Vauer, 2009). In addition, previous research shows that people with an ability to manage a balanced work and personal life have a relatively calm family life without stressful situations and problems with their relatives and friends. According to Chittenden and Ritchie (2011), the main benefits of balancing personal and professional life can help reduce feelings of frustration, failure, and guilt.

Regarding the benefits of work-life balance at a level organization, Grover & Crooker (1995) found that employees who managed to balance their work and personal life were more effective. Moreover, Nurgabdeshev & Kozhakhmet (2019) observed that production performance increases significantly when employees balance their work and personal life as they have an increased productivity due to their positive attitude in the workplace.

As already mentioned, the imbalance between work and personal life leads to many negative consequences. The first of the most important negative consequences of imbalance is increased stress levels. Zigrist's Effort and Reward Imbalance Model (Siegrist, 1996) is one of the most famous approaches to the consequences of imbalance in working life. According to the model of imbalance of effort and reward, when a person feels that there is a gap between work and life, or a stressful situation that reduces performance and creates even more problems with health. It has been found that stress will be increased if an imbalance occurs between the effort that a person invests in a job and the reward that they receive. The second negative result of work-life imbalance is burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) define burnout as "An emotional state in which a person loses value and positive feelings, compassion and respect for others".

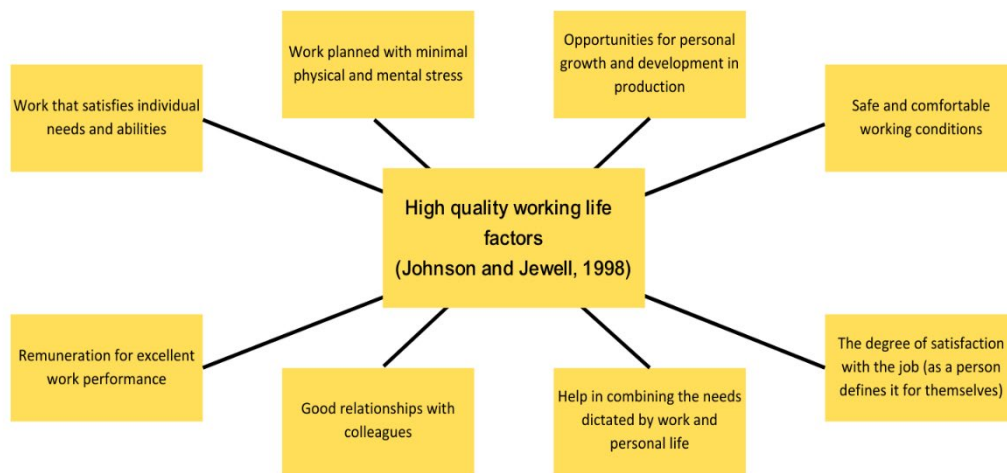
The above negative effects can exist both at work and in personal life. In the work environment, the negative impact on professional commitment occurs with either systematic abstinence or low efficiency, which can lead to a decrease in organizational effectiveness. In the second case (in personal life), the main results of burnout lead to negative attitudes towards family members or friends, as well as feelings of failure, due to the fact that personal goals will not be achieved.

In addition, as noted by Brough et al. (2008), the imbalance between personal and professional life directly affects social problems, as this can lead to an increase in the age of people who decide to have children; this can reduce the fertility rate in the general population.

3. Healthy Working Life Indicators

Three main reasons for the emergence of negative feelings associated with work which are identified as key: prolonged or difficult adaptation to a new job, a person's inadequacy for the position held, and, finally, disappointments associated with a career (Lupu & Ruiz-Castro, 2021). Thus, the problem of work-life balance includes not only the ability to distinguish between work and personal time, but also the quality of work life as the basis for harmony and overall human satisfaction. In this vein, the quality of working like can be defined as the impact of the working conditions on a person's well-being. Figure 1 represents the 8 main factors of high-quality working life defined by Johnson and Jewell (1998).

Figure 1. High-Quality Working Life Factors



Source: Johnson and Jewell, 1998.

The presence of these factors and the absence of potential stressors allows a person to perform their work activities as comfortably and productively as possible. It is in such conditions that opportunities open up for a person and resources appear in order to be sufficiently involved in events that do not relate to work processes. Thus, the quality of working life is the basis for achieving a balance between work and personal life.

4. HRM Practices for Assuring Work-Life Balance

Balancing personal and professional life is a very difficult process that is often impossible to achieve. The main issue seems to be limited staff time to devote to their family and personal interests. Probably the main reason for the difficulty in work-life balance is the current economic

crisis that affects most public or private organizations. Both altering working hours and constant pressure from outside employers to increase productivity and increase the time that employees spend at their workplace, leading to inability to balance their work and personal life. These results are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Moldashev et al., 2019; Nurgabdeshev et al., 2018), which also cites the negative influence of the economic crisis and its reflection in the balance of working life.

Perhaps most often, the possibility of providing employees with an individual work schedule is considered as one of the key areas for creating an organizational and managerial environment favorable for achieving a balance between work and personal life. In particular, a study conducted in 30 organizations in the Netherlands on 2000 employees of different ages and marital status was aimed at studying the influence of work schedule on the level of conflict between work and personal life. Three options for the work schedule were considered, which allow employees to have more opportunities regarding their household obligations: part-time work (reducing the daily number of hours of attendance at work by up to 50%), flexible work schedule ("shifts" in the beginning and end of the working day while maintaining the total number of time daily or weekly) and "remote work", i.e. performing work duties outside a fixed workplace, for example, from home with an Internet connection. It turned out that for women, these non-traditional ways of organizing working time are very convenient and significantly help them to more easily and better cope with household and family obligations. For men, the introduction of a new work schedule has positive effect on reducing the conflict tension between work and personal life. However, in comparison with women, for men such changes in working schedule has lesser effect. In general, part-time and flexible working hours reduce conflict between work and personal life, giving employees more opportunities to fulfill their household responsibilities. At the same time, the option "remote work" had almost no effect in this study on reducing the conflict between work and personal life (Peters, den Dulk & van der Lippe, 2009).

At the same time, several authors note that changes in the employee's work schedule can also have negative consequences, for example, contribute to the appearance of overtime hours or cause him embarrassment and inconvenience due to the fact that on the day when he has an extra day off, most of his colleagues and clients are at work. This can, in turn, lead to the fact that such an employee will try to remotely resolve work issues on his "legal" day off. In this regard, recommendations are made to create conditions in organizations for the transition from a regulated work schedule to a schedule that allows the employee to adjust to the current life situation, as a solution necessary to optimize the balance between working time and household responsibilities. This will allow the employee to effectively manage his economic, professional and personal resources, optimally correlating the volume of "external" work and the fulfillment of domestic obligations (Roberts, 2008).

There is an increasing number of publications appear in the professional literature, that are focused on the detailed description on the managerial approach to their subordinates. The aim of the managers is to increase the efficiency of employees by maintaining a balance of work and personal interests. These managers are guided by three basic principles that complement each other. First, they communicate clearly and openly to their subordinates about what is important to the company, and they encourage their employees to speak out about their personal interests and concerns, openly acknowledging that everyone has responsibilities outside the office. Secondly, they value and support their employees, seeing in each individual peculiarities, which can also be applied in the work process at the request of the employee, even if this does not correspond to his direct job responsibilities. Third, these leaders are experimenting with ways of doing work in search of approaches that increase organizational performance while giving employees the time and opportunity to pursue personal goals (Lupu & Ruiz-Castro, 2021).

5. Organization-Driven and Employee-Driven Flexibility and the State of Employee Well-Being

Flexibility can be defined as an ability of the employee to adapt to the changing working conditions (Umirzakov et al., 2019). As for flexibility driven by employee Pak, Yeltayeva, and Nurgabdeshev (2020) stated that the term is tightly connected with the work autonomy. Autonomy at work is a helpful tool to build the personal resources of workers (energy, skills, good mood, time). For instance, if individuals start their working day at the preferred time in the morning, they will have a better mood and more energy during the day. In general, several studies stated that if an individual has control over time the overall well-being rate will increase which will lead to better work-life balance (Umirzakov et al., 2019). However, it will work only with an employee-centred strategy. Also, it was found that flexibility of location positively correlates with the profitability of the company, productivity and work-life balance (Mamaghani, 2012; Umirzakov, Nurgabdeshev & Zamanbekov, 2020). Also, it was found that flexitime arrangements help to reduce family conflicts, while remote working has the opposite effect (Kozhakhmet et al., 2020). On the other hand, some of the researchers criticized the positive effect of employee-driven flexibility. They claimed that in times of high pressure at work autonomy might facilitate an abnormal extension of working hours and work-life conflict (Nurgabdeshev et al., 2018). It can be prevented if workers will wisely plan their working hours. Overall employee-centred flexible working arrangements have a strong positive association with a healthy work-life balance (Pak, Yeltayeva, & Nurgabdeshev, 2020).

Another aspects of flexibility that should be highlighted is an organization-driven flexibility. The company-oriented flexibility cares more about productivity than the employees' work-life balance (Moldashev et al., 2019). Flexibility which is more employer-centered is not as positive as employee-driven flexibility as it was stated in the previous paragraph. Taking the time flexibility, there is a problem that top managers of the company schedule the work which does not allow workers to address the problem of work-life balance (Umirzakov et al., 2019; Nurgabdeshev et al., 2018). Employers set the working time according to their needs so there can be overtime working, night shifts. This type of flexibility in working hours negatively impact the work-life balance of employee (Kozhakhmet et al., 2020) Another reason why employer-driven practice has a demotivating effect is the psychology theory that states that people are more motivated, perform better at all roles and more committed to an organization when they have control over their decisions (Pak, Yeltayeva, & Nurgabdeshev, 2020; Berkery et al., 2017). Also, financial flexibility which is driven by the employer mostly serves the interest of a company rather than an employee, and it allows an organization to raise or cut salaries and incentives with economic situations (Atkinson, 1989). Some companies offer benefits as payment-related on performance alongside flexitime (Moldashev et al., 2019). Overall, there is different acceptance of flexible working practices driven by organization and employee. So, companies have to wisely choose flexible working arrangements, otherwise, it might have the opposite effect on productivity, efficiency and retention (Umirzakov, Nurgabdeshev & Zamanbekov, 2020).

As mentioned above, it was found that employees' work-life balance depends on who control the boundaries of flexibility. However, the attitude of workers between work and personal life can also influence how flexible working arrangements are perceived. In accordance with boundary theory, people differ in preferences for combining or keeping separate work and personal life (Pak, Yeltayeva, & Nurgabdeshev, 2020; Kozhakhmet et al., 202). That is, people with a desire to integrate work and life have low segmentation preferences, while people with a high intention to separate personal life and work have high segmentation preferences (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Segmentation plays the role of moderator in work-life balance design (Derks et al., 2016).

Integrators and segmenters differ in the commitment to work, the latter is more committed to the job (Rothbard et al., 2005). It is important for people who have high segmentation preference to support boundaries between work and personal life. The lack of having power over the timing of their work (organization-driven flexibility) segmenters might have negative feelings which have a harmful effect on their work-life balance (Umirzakov, Nurgabdeshev & Zamanbekov, 2020). On the other hand, individuals with integration preferences will not be as stressed as segmenters if they will not have the ability to control the boundaries of work-life balance (Umirzakov, Nurgabdeshev & Zamanbekov, 2020). For people with low segmentation preference, employer-driven flexibility practice will not be perceived as a violation of their boundaries, as it correlates with their perception of work-life balance (Pak, Yeltayeva & Nurgabdeshev 2020).

In 2015, researchers conducted a survey of a random 20,000 employees in Germany via telephone interview (Berkery et al., 2017). They tested how employee-driven FWA (flexible work arrangement), employer-driven FWA and segmentation impact work-life balance. The findings were, employee-centred FWA associated with a positive work-life balance mostly among people with high segmentation preferences. For people with low segmentation preferences organization-driven flexibility has a stronger positive association with work-life balance.

All things considered, there are two types of flexibility related to employee well-being – employee-driven and organization-driven flexibility. Employee-driven flexibility positively affects the well-being of the workers as they have more control over their working life, while organization-driven flexibility negative affects the well-being of the personnel. Such findings are demonstrated with the example of the flexible working hours with employees having the flexible hours of working start time have more positive attitude towards work in comparison with personnel working with the employer-set schedule.

Conclusion

We discussed the relationship between two concepts: ‘work-life balance’ and ‘flexibility’. The historical context is that in the 19th century, a movement for establishing a 40-hour working week took place and since then, the concept of work-life harmony has developed. In the contemporary world, the issue still remains due to the increase in using technology for work purposes. In addition, companies developed modified working methods to provide more flexibility to their employees. Some examples are autonomy to choose when to start and finish working, remote working or working on the chosen days during the week. At the same time, the flexible working practices caused a new problem - the imbalance between work and life. The borders between various life domains became indistinct and people are struggling to arrange their time correctly, so that the work-life balance remains. To avoid this issue, individuals should analyze themselves and choose which boundary management style works best for them - segmentation or integration before applying for a job. On the other hand, work-life balance is important not only for the employees but also for the employers as well. Several benefits of helping employees to be flexible and therefore, maintain the balance have been described: companies will have high retention rates, save costs on turnover and replacement issues, attract young candidates and keep the current talents in the company. That is why managers should pay attention to integrating policies that would contribute to the employees’ flexibility and both will receive the corresponding benefits.

Furthermore, there is a clear meaningful connection between three concepts - "workaholicism", "downshifting" and "balance between work and personal life." Behind the first two concepts in this series are real phenomena that have already aroused scientific interest. The third concept is rather artificial, implying some ideal state of affairs in the life of a particular person, the achievement of which brings him general satisfaction, maximally contributes to his

self-realization and personal growth. Violation (non-achievement) of this balance is fraught with many negative consequences, manifested in the most diverse forms and in various spheres of his life.

Finally, flexible working arrangements has to be considered at the workplace, as it would be beneficial for employer and employee. The FWA is one of the most important factors for choosing the company to work for. Flexibility is important in any culture and country and more important than occupation. Even though there are some criticisms of FWA, its positive impact on work-life balance is undeniable. Flexible working practices positively impact on healthy work-life balance. Companies, where employees satisfied with their balance between work and personal life, show a better retention rate, fewer burnouts, increased productivity. Workers who prefer employee-driven flexible working arrangements perform better, have high motivation level, well-organized, disciplined and have good communication skills (Umirzakov, Nurgabdeshev & Zamanbekov, 2020). Employer-driven practice is not as effective as the former, that is why it is important for companies to decide on flexibility involving employees. Also, the context of segmentation preferences has to be considered as people with integration or segmentation preferences have different flexibility demands. Flexibility and work-life balance have a positive correlation, only if employees themselves choose the format of flexibility.

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