
WORK LIFE BALANCE AMONG ROMANIAN EMPLOYEES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

**Claudia-Elena Țuclea¹, Gabriela Țigu², Mădălina-Lavinia Țală³
and Maria-Cristina Iorgulescu⁴**

^{1) 2) 3) 4)} The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

E-mail: claudia.tuclea@com.ase.ro; E-mail: gabriela.tigu@com.ase.ro

E-mail: madalina.tala@com.ase.ro; E-mail: cristina.iorgulescu@com.ase.ro

Abstract

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) has raised the attention of a large number of researchers and professionals, due to its direct impact on work efficiency and life quality as well. Although the specific international literature includes plenty of studies, this research topic was not so intense in Romania. In this context, the paper is based on a study among Romanian employees, aimed at achieving an image of the balance between those two components of life: work and family. More than that, this research highlights the factors influencing this balance, the extent of involvement of organizations, and the employees' perception of the level of stress, as result of WLB.

Keywords: work-life balance, employees, work satisfaction, work stress

JEL Classification: M54, J28

Introduction

Work Life Balance (WLB) has received ample research attention in the whole world in the last years. However, there are few studies regarding this equilibrium among Romanian employees. Thus, the purpose of this study is to map the dimensions of WLB in Romania, envisaging both Romanian companies and multinational companies.

1. Literature review

The relationship between work and personal life has various aspects and dimensions equally important and interdependent. Some academics argue that WLB represents one of those interest areas of human resource management (HRM) for which practice has developed before theory (Brewster, 1998). The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) has highlighted the family's role in individual development and has stressed the need for supporting a balanced family life. "Family friendly working conditions and competitiveness are not a contradiction in terms" (EFILWC 1998). The phrase „family friendly policies” was afterwards replaced with WLB

(Bryson et al., 2000; Hogarth et al., 2001; Duncan, 2002). Kofodimos (1993) has shown that it is in the interest of the individual to live a balanced life.

WLB was defined as proper functioning and satisfaction both at work and at home, without any role conflict (Clark, 2000). Proper balance between personal and professional life can be achieved when a person is able to meet all its own needs in terms of family, work and society (Warren, 2004). Marks and MacDermid (1996) put forward for consideration that individuals are able – and actually should – to commit to equally valuable roles in life; this means they should have a balanced orientation towards more roles. Kirchmeyer understands a balanced life as “achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains, and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across domains” (Kirchmeyer, 2000).

Work-life balance definitions implicitly refer to two components of the balance: the inputs and the outputs. The inputs are personal resources (Kirchmeyer, 2000) assigned to each role. To be balanced, it is necessary for each role related to work and family to be treated with a similar level of attention, time and commitment. The other component of the balance refers to the results obtained as a result of the roles the individual has committed to in work and family life. A result frequently included in WLB definitions is satisfaction (Clark, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 2000; Kofodimos, 1993).

Based on these aspects, other researchers have proposed three components of the WLB: a) time balance - an equal amount of time dedicated to work and family roles; b) involvement balance - an equal level of psychological involvement in work and family roles; c) satisfaction balance - an equal level of satisfaction with work and family roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003). The benefits of attaining work-life balance aim both employees and organizations by: eliminating work-family conflict, increasing job satisfaction, developing organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour (Kopelman et al., 2006).

Among the most important factors influencing the nature and extent to which organizations adopt practices aimed at balancing work with the personal life of employees can be found: the size of the enterprise (Konrad and Mangel, 2000), the sector of activity (Tremblay, 2004), the percentage of women holding managerial positions (Galinsky and Bond, 1998), the need to achieve a high level of employees’ commitment (Evans, 2001), public sector unionisation (Wood et al., 2003).

2. Research methodology

Both professional and personal life are fundamental benchmarks in the existence of modern man. Therefore, research is necessary and timely. Taking into consideration those two components of life: work and family, and the balance between those, the main aim of this scientific initiative is identifying the relationship between those two components, by discovering whether one has a more powerful influence on the other. Consequently, the research objectives are: O1 – Identifying employees’ perception regarding the balance between professional and personal life; O2 – Highlighting the factors influencing the balance between professional and personal life; O3 – Establishing the extent of involvement of organizations in balancing professional and personal aspects; O4 – Determining employees’ perception of the level of stress.

In order to achieve the research objectives, it was conducted a survey, based on personal interviewing, the statistical population being represented by persons who had a job in the last 3 months, in a company activating in Romania. In the questionnaire, there were used

close-ended questions, with scales as: semantic differential and Likert scale. The data was collected using an online questionnaire, between 22nd April and 27th May 2016. As a result of the survey, there were collected 354 valid responses, the profile of the respondents, from a professional point of view, being presented in Table 1.

Regarding the personal profile, most of the respondents are young, 66.67% of them being younger than 36 years old. Only 17.23% of the ones interviewed are aged between 36 and 45 years old, while 13.84% of the respondents are in the mature stage of their career, as they are aged between 46 and 55 years old. Furthermore, 63.28% of the respondents were women, while the other 36.72% of the ones interviewed were male employees. The marital status of the respondents seems to be in correspondence with their age, as more than half (52.54%) are unmarried and 41.81% are married or in a relationship (and already live with their partner). Moreover, 11.58% of the respondents live alone. Considering the fact that 52.54% of the respondents are not married, one can argue that the ones interviewed continue to live with their parents or other relatives. Most the employees who took part in the survey (35.03%) are part of a 3-member family, while 27.97% belong to a 4-member family. Although 42.94% of the respondents were or are still married, only 22.88% have children under care. In terms of the level of education, the majority of the respondents are highly educated, as 58.19% have a bachelor degree and 21.19% have a post-graduate degree.

Table no. 1: Respondents' professional profile

Position occupied					
top-management	middle-management	first level management	specialist	assistant	executive
4.52%	13.56%	9.61%	20.90%	9.32%	38.70%
independent consultant: 3.39%					
Employer					
state owned-company	private company		mixed ownership corporation		
20.34%	75.42%		4.24%		
Type of employer					
multinational company	big Romanian company	small or medium sized Romanian company		microenterprise	
43.22%	19.21%	32.49%		5.08%	
Number of jobs held in the present					
one job	two jobs		three or more jobs		
92.94%	5.65%		1.41%		
Level of monthly income (lei)					
less than 1200	1200-2000	2001-3000	3001-4000	4001-5000	more than 5000
12.99%	40.68%	24.86%	10.45%	4.24%	6.78%

In terms of their professional profile, 27.69% of the respondents hold managerial positions, while the majority (38.7%) are employed for an executive position. Only 3.39% of the ones interviewed work independently. Furthermore, 75.42% of the respondents were, at the time of the survey, employed in private-own companies, while 20.34% were working for state-own companies. In terms of the type of the company the respondents worked for, the

majority (43.22%) were employed in multinational companies, while another considerable percentage (32.49%) were working in a small or medium sized Romanian company. Only 19.21% of the ones questioned were working in a big Romanian company, while even less (5.08%) were employed in a microenterprise. An interesting fact for the purpose of this research is that almost all of the respondents (92.94%) had, at the time of the interview, a single job, only 7.06% of the ones questioned having two or more jobs. Last, but not least, in terms of the level of the respondents' monthly net income, the majority (40.68%) stated that they earn between 1200 and 2000 lei, while almost a quarter (24.86%) reported a net income between 2001 and 3000 lei. While 21.47% of the respondents earn at least 3000 lei, 12.99% of them gain less than 1200 lei.

3. Main results and discussion

After centralizing and processing the data obtained by conducting the survey, there were highlighted two lines for grouping information: on one hand there are the aspects related to work-life balance and on the other hand there are the ones related to the role of stress in employees' life.

For the first category, including objectives 1, 2 and 3, the following conclusions can be drawn. Regarding the first objective, a primary observation relates to the employees' satisfaction with their working schedule, nearly 55% declaring themselves as satisfied. In contrast, only 11% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, as presented in Figure no. 1. The share of those neutral ore hesitant about this aspect should also be mentioned, as it is higher than 21%.

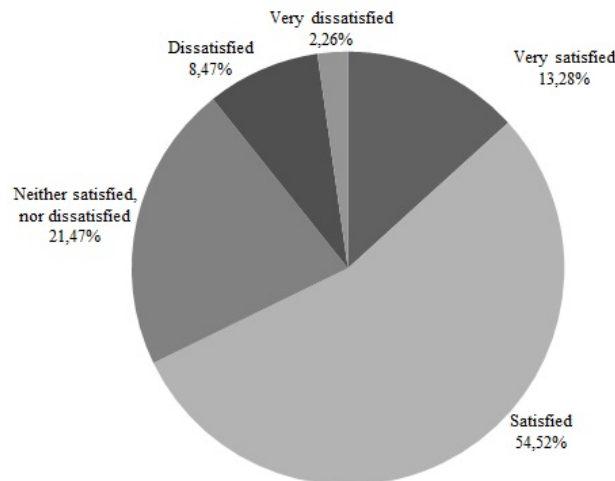


Figure no. 1: Romanian employees' level of satisfaction regarding their working schedule and the manner it fits with their private life

A second observation relates to how individuals perceive that they can play a role in balancing their professional life with their personal one. Thus, 81% consider that it is in their power to obtain this balance, while the remaining 19% deny having such influence.

A third conclusion refers to the impact that work and family have on each other. The research reveals that work problems tend to reflect on personal life (this happening "always" in 15% of the cases and "sometimes" in 38% of the cases). Otherwise, 74% of the

respondents consider that they address their work tasks properly, regardless of their private life. Only 4% of the respondents always take their private problems to their working place, while 22% occasionally do so. However, the fact that more than half of the respondents have highlighted the negative impact of professional life on their personal life indicates a certain level of job pressure.

Related to the second research objective, based on the previous studies presented in literature, the most “disturbing” two factors in this WLB seem to be work schedule and overtime working hours. However, not even these two are mentioned with a considerable frequency, as, for example, only 23% of the respondents consider that their working schedule is often or always responsible for damaging WLB. All results related to this aspect are presented in Figure no. 2.

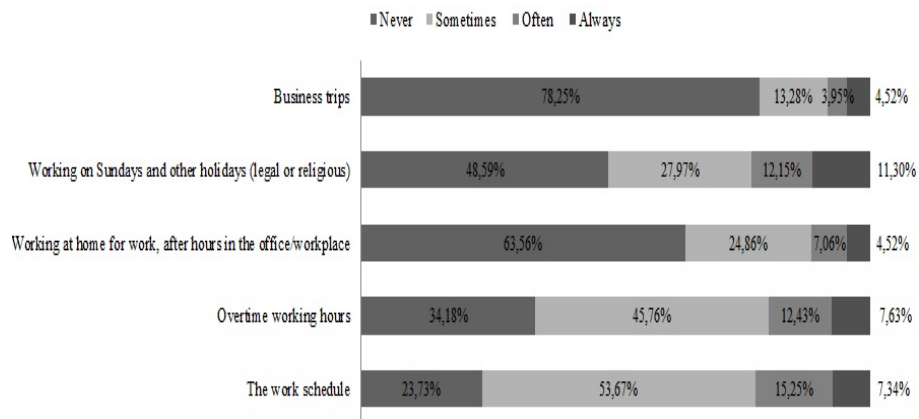


Figure no. 2: The frequency with which specific factors affect the work-life balance of Romanian employees

Strengthening the individual role in balancing personal life with the professional one is highlighted in another specific question of the research instrument (Figure no. 3).

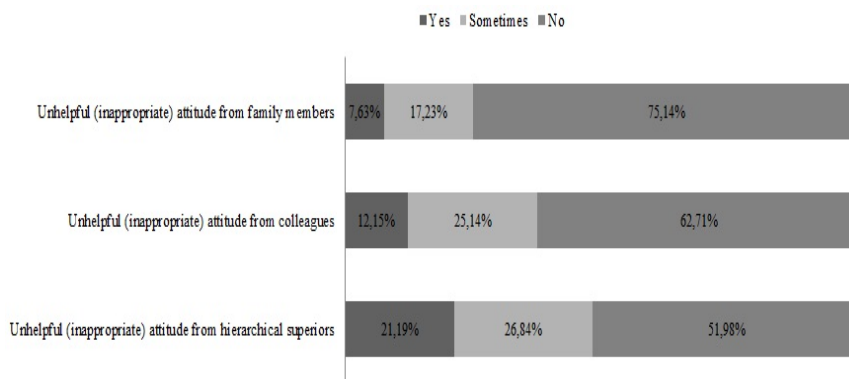


Figure no. 3: Situations affecting the work-life balance of Romanian employees

As a result, a large number of the respondents considered that inappropriate attitudes from family, colleagues and bosses do not affect them (266, and 222 of the responses, out of the total 354). However, employees are affected by the attitude of their superiors (as in 27% of the cases this occurs sometimes and in 21% of the cases it always occurs). This suggests that the direct relationship with the superior is very important, as it can support or even hinder the personal life of employees.

The organization of the XXIst century is no longer a formal environment, designed to create profit. In the context of the new challenges of human resource management, managers should be empathic with their employees' needs. In other words, the moral responsibility of the organization can be extended outside office hours. The present study has tried to identify the involvement of organizations in balancing professional aspects of life with personal ones (the third objective of the research). The results have highlighted the existence of a variety of measures implemented, on average, two per entity (Figure no. 4).

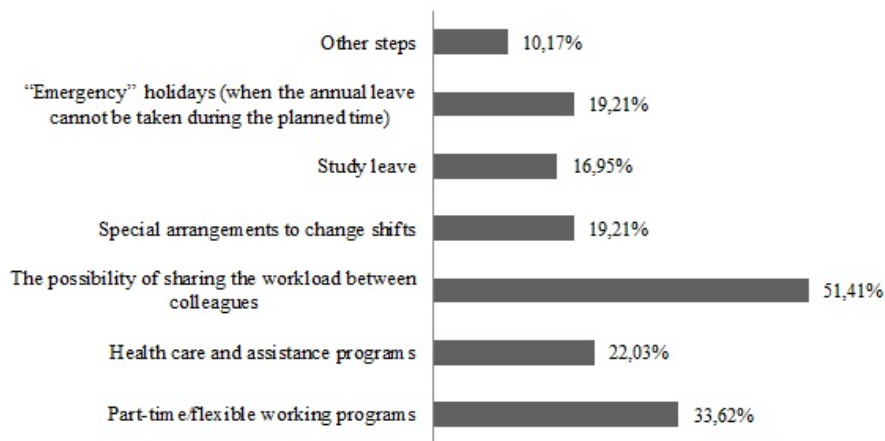


Figure no. 4: Steps taken by Romanian organizations to help employees achieve balance between work and private life

The measure most often indicated by respondents (in over 50% of cases) is the possibility of sharing the workload between colleagues. This requires good communication and trust, helping to strengthen team spirit. Employees have also indicated the opportunity of working part-time or according to a flexible program (in more than a third of the cases), while health and assistance programs were mentioned in 22% of the cases. Organizations in Romania are willing to accept shift changes, but also "emergency" holidays. Although these two practices occur in less than 20% of the cases, one can argue that managers' efforts to meet spontaneous needs of employees should be appreciated. A lower frequency occurred in the case of counselling (through which employees learn how to overcome problems related to work-life balance), personal service (child feeding room for mothers, bedroom, purchasing and food preparation services etc.) and dependent care (services and resources to help employees with dependents, either children or adults).

Last, but not least, the fourth objective of the research aimed to reflect employees' perception regarding their level of stress. As a result, out of the 354 respondents, 69% admitted that they have experienced stress at the workplace. Family also exerts pressure,

but only in 54% of the cases. The results confirm the place held by this complex psychological phenomenon. However, only 14% of the respondents stated that they have medical conditions generated by stress, such as cardiac problems or high blood pressure. This can be justified by the fact that 67% of the respondents are young, but also by the lack of recognition of the impact that stress can have on humans or the lack of an assessment of the real state of their own health.

It is known that stress can generate three categories of problems: physical, emotional and psychological. Almost half of the respondents admit that they have felt, to some extent, physical and emotional problems caused by the conflict between work and personal life. 33% of the respondents also indicate psychological problems. It can be concluded that the sample is divided in two approximately equal sectors: on one hand, those who deny the presence of symptoms that may be associated with stress and on the other hand, those who admit having faced such problems.

Conclusions

These results suggest that the majority of Romanian employees are aware of the fact that when imbalances occur in their life, individual decisions should be taken. Each modern man should be the master of his own life and should have the maturity of taking actions when things get out of control. But, as a result of this study, one can argue that Romanian employees prove to be good professionals by trying to fulfil the tasks related to the job.

There have been identified five factors that influence the work-life balance: the work schedule, overtime working hours, working at home for work (after hours in the office/workplace), working on Sundays and other holidays (legal or religious) and business trips.

Stress, now unfortunately becoming more frequent in the life of modern man, is a phenomenon that should not be neglected by the individual or the organization. It occurs gradually and often underpins changed attitudes and behaviours of the person. Moreover, the perception can be negatively influenced, by exacerbating concerns related to aspects of personal and professional life. Sometimes, stress can cause more complex phenomena such as burnout.

An extremely effective way of combating stress and overcoming obstacles related to WLB, counselling is still in early stages in Romania, due to the lack of management's proper understanding of the concept and its related costs. Whether this balance will be maintained in the future, is something to look forward to.

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