

ROMANIAN EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION ON THEIR OWN WORK-LIFE BALANCE – EVIDENCES FROM TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The present study aims at identifying how employees in the Romanian tourism industry perceive their own balance between private and professional life. For this purpose, a research was carried out among the employees participating to the Romanian Tourism Fair in November 2017. The data were collected from 126 participants by face-to-face interview. The results of preliminary data analyses reveal that the majority of the respondents were women aged between 18 and 35 years, most of them working in tour operator agencies. Briefly, our research has highlighted that the group of the surveyed professionals declared that they often work either overtime or during their free days (73%) and continue thinking about work problems even when they are at home (about 66%). However, 90% of respondents consider that it is in their power to balance their relationship between professional and private life. This statement is also supported by the idea that managers or colleagues are to a small extent responsible for the imbalance between their private and professional life. Nevertheless, employees declare that they often feel stress due to their job, some of them even presenting health problems (heart disease, hypertension). Interestingly, the respondents have stated that most organizations have taken measures to balance their employees' work-life report.

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

JEL Classification: M54, J28

Introduction

The tourism industry is often presented as requiring a high volume of work, but paid less than the average of other sectors of the economy (Janes & Wisnom, 2010). In general, work-life balance in the tourism industry is perceived as acceptable, according to a study conducted between 2003-2009 by Janes and Wisnom (2010).

Over the past decades, a substantial literature about work-life balance (WLB) has particularly been developed as a result of profound changes within both workplace and family context. The considerable increase in number of couples in which both members work has specially determined both men and women attempt to find solutions in balancing their different and multiple roles.

Within this context, the concept of work-life balance has received an increased attention from researchers (Segovia-Perez, et al., 2019; Wilkens et al., 2018; Vieira et al., 2018; Stier,

Lewin-Epstein & Braun, 2018; Yu et al., 2018; Nassani et al., 2018; Cain, Busser & Kang, 2018; Farmaki, 2018; Wahlberg, Ramalho & Brochado, 2017; Wheatley, 2012; Chiang, Kwan & Birtch, 2010). However, there are still various opinions on the definition and measurement of WLB (Hsieh & Lin, 2010).

The concept of WLB has been globally perceived and often estimated as the interpenetration between work and family (Lin, Wong & Ho, 2015): eg, "How do you feel in balancing work and family life?" (Bednarska, 2013). Other studies refer to the conflict between work time and family time (Yu et al., 2018; Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2017; Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016; Emerald Group, 2015; Lin, Wong and Ho, 2015; Gamor, Amissah and Boakye, 2014; Wheatley, 2012).

Work-family conflict (WFC) is a type of conflict between roles, in which pressures and demands from the workplace and family are incompatible (Wheatley, 2012). The work-family conflict refers to individuals' difficulties in simultaneously fulfilling different roles in relation to time and limited energy to optimally combine them. The physical and mental health of individuals is assessed and analyzed in relation to work pressure and their feelings of guilt when they do not spend enough time in the family (Hofmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017; Emerald Group, 2015; Gamor, Amissah & Boakye, 2014).

1. Literature review

There are many studies in the literature on WLB (work-life balance) referring to it from different perspectives. An ample analyzed perspective is that of the relationships between workplace stressors, employees' adaptive resources to stress and the level of workplace stress they have experienced (Cho & Allen, 2019; Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016; Emerald Group, 2015; Gopinathan & Raman, 2015; Lin, Wong & Ho, 2015; Pookaiyaudom, 2015; O'Neill, 2012; Wheatley, 2012; Chiang, Kwan & Birtch, 2010; Deery & Jago, 2009). The results revealed that increased workplace demands combined with reduced control lead to a higher level of stress (Gopinathan & Raman, 2015).

Possible solutions for stress reduction are: increasing flexible working practices, work from home and access to both paid and unpaid vacation (Deery & Jago, 2009).

WLB aspects in the tourism industry have been extensively researched, according to the following main topics: over-work, stress levels associated with job insecurity, ambiguity of the role, job autonomy and time pressures and psychosomatic symptoms (Segovia-Perez, et al., 2019; Wu, et al., 2019; Nassani, et al., 2018; Farmaki, 2018; Suhartanto, et al., 2018; Wilkens, et al., 2018; Kubickova, Croes & Riviera, 2017; Bredvold & Skalen, 2016; Gopinathan & Raman, 2015; Lin, Wong & Ho, 2015; Gamor, Amissah & Boakye, 2014; Yeh, 2013; O'Neill, 2012).

Other studies aimed at identifying the factors influencing work-family conflict among hotel industry employees (Segovia-Perez et al., 2019; Cho & Allen, 2019; Wilkens, et al., 2018; Vieira, et al., 2018; Cain, Busser & Kang, 2018; Wahlberg, Ramalho & Brochado, 2017; Cahill, et al., 2015; Gamor, Amissah & Boakye, 2014; Lin, Wong & Ho, 2013; Bednarska, 2013).

Other research has emphasized the relationship between work-life balance and emotional intelligence (EI), showing that life experiences contribute to the progress of EI, which then mitigates the imbalance between the professional life and the individual's personal life (Koubova & Buchko, 2013; Hofmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017). The level of EI is considered to be essential for improving the work-life balance of an individual, work representing only a component of general satisfaction from this perspective.

The work-life balance is also influenced by gender, as women are able to positively influence it (Segovia-Perez, et al., 2019; Nassani, et al., 2018; Wilkens, et al., 2018; Vieira, et al., 2018; Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun, 2018; McMullan, Lapierre & Li, 2018; Yu, et al., 2018; Yeh, 2013; Wheatley, 2012). Men, in general, consider that personal life deserves

to be subordinated to a successful career, choosing to work overtime or even on free days (Cain, Busser & Kang, 2018). Also, top-level managers work very often overtime and feel that sometimes they cannot properly fulfil their role in the family due to work (Kubickova, Croes & Riviera, 2017); on the other hand, non-managerial employees very rarely stay at the workplace overtime.

On the whole, the quality of life in the tourism industry is assessed below the average of other areas of activity (Bednarska, 2013). The content of work, financial compensation, job security, career prospects, leadership, work-life balance and health / safety conditions are perceived as weak points. Compared to the average, the tourism industry has got unfavorable scores in most work environment dimensions, except for peer-to-peer relationships.

2. Research methodology

Our research aims at identifying the main characteristics of the relation between private and professional life of the employees of tourism industry. According to this purpose, the research objectives are: 1 – Identifying the perceptions of employees from Romanian tourism industry regarding the balance between professional and private life; 2 – Finding the organizations’ degree of involvement in balancing the professional and private aspects of their employees lives; 3 – Detecting the employees’ perception of their stress level.

According to these objectives, a survey was carried out among the employees of tourism companies participating to the Romanian Tourism Fair in November 2017. The data were collected from 126 participants by face-to-face interview. The profile of the respondents is outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

Table no. 1 Respondents’ personal profile

Age				
18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	56-65 years
31.7%	46%	16.7%	4.8%	0.8%
Gender				
male			female	
27.8%			72.2%	
Family size				
1 member	2 members	3 members	4 members	5 members or more
23.8%	22.2%	29.4%	23%	1.6%
Education				
secondary school	high-school	post-high-school	undergraduate	postgraduate
0.8%	6.3%	0.8%	71.4%	20.6%

Source: Authors’ computation

As highlighted in Table no. 1, most of the respondents are young, 77.7% of them being younger than 36 years old. Only 16.7% of the interviewed are aged between 36 and 45 years old. Moreover, 72.2% of the respondents were women. Most the employees who took part in the survey (29.4%) are part of a 3-member family, while 23% belong to a 4-member family. In terms of the level of education, the majority of the respondents are highly educated, as 71.4% have a bachelor degree and 20.6% have a post-graduate degree.

Table no. 2 Respondents’ professional profile

Position occupied					
top-management	middle-management	first level management	specialist	assistant	executive
11.9%	16.7%	11.1%	23%	11.1%	15.9%
independent consultant: 10.3%					
Employer					
state owned-company		private company		mixed ownership corporation	
11.1%		82.5%		6.3%	
Type of employer					
tour operator	retailer travel agency		hotel	other	
49.6%	6.3%		15%	29.1%	
Number of jobs held in the present					
one job		two jobs		three or more jobs	
88.9%		8.7%		2.4%	

Source: Authors’ computation

In terms of their professional profile (Table no. 2), 39.7% of the respondents hold managerial positions and 10.3% of the ones interviewed work independently. What's more, 82.5% of the respondents were employed in private-own companies, while 11.1% were working for state-own companies. As regards the type of the company the respondents worked for, the majority (49.6%) were employed in tour operator agencies, while 15% were working in hotels. An interesting fact for the purpose of this research is that almost all of the respondents (88.9%) had but one job at the time of the interview, only 11.1% of those questioned having two or more jobs.

3. Main results and discussion

In this section we are going to present and analyze the main results, according to research objectives.

Regarding the employee’s perception of the balance between the private and the professional life, the considered variables were the working program and possibly existing emotional problems as an effect of WLB imbalance.

Fig. no. 1 is emphasizing the tourism employees’ perception of the working program. Accordingly, 60% of them appreciate that working program is sometimes affecting the balance between their private and professional life, while 13.5% replied with ‘often’. We also have registered 22.2% employees who are never affected by the working program.

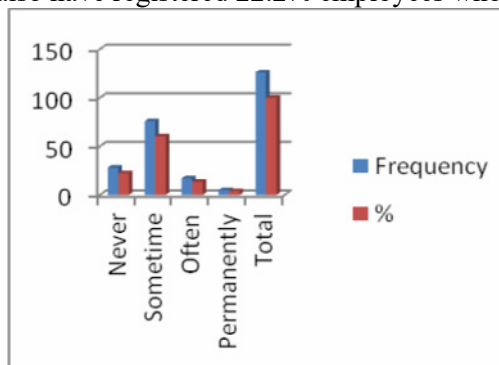


Fig. no. 1 The impact of the work schedule on WLB

Source: Authors’ computation

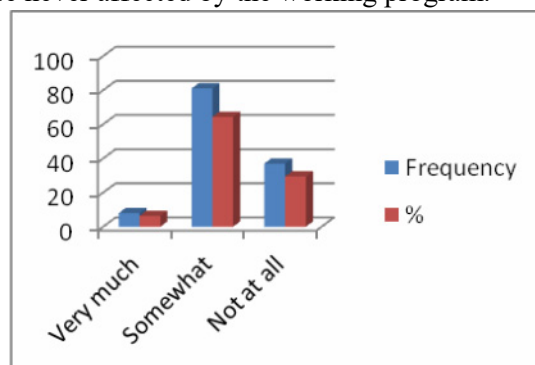


Fig. no. 2 Emotional problems as a result of the imbalance between work and personal life

Source: Authors’ computation

Fig. no. 2 is showing the extent to which the employees appreciate that they have emotional problems as a result of the imbalance between their private and professional life. Thus, 64% declare they sometimes meet such problem, but 30% appreciate that they have no problem regarding this aspect.

As for the impact of the inappropriate behavior of the influencing elements (the chef, family and colleagues) on WLB, the results are presented in fig. no. 3.

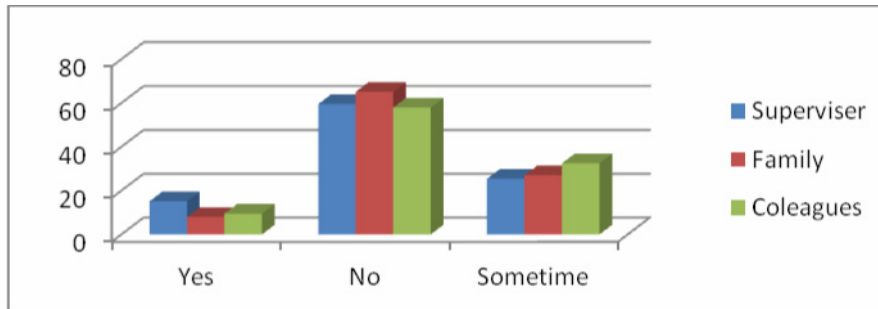


Fig. no. 3 The imbalanced between private and professional life as an effect of the manager's, family and colleague's attitude

Source: Authors' computation

Regarding the implication of the organization into getting the balance between private and professional life of the employees, the most frequently applied measures are: the part-time flexible working programs (34%), the possibility of sharing working responsibilities among colleagues (30.2%) and health-care assistance programs (12.7%).

As for the perceived stress level of the tourism employees, 51.6% of them declare they sometimes feel themselves under stress due to their working place, while 11.9% affirm that they feel permanently under stress. More than that, 13.5% of the respondents state they even have health problems (hypertension, hearth problems).

Table no. 3 shows the main problems of imbalance between private and professional life.

Thus, 35.7% of the respondents often and very often work overtime, while 37.3% only occasionally.

As well, 31.7% often and very often think of the problems connected to their work whenever out of work, while 34.1% just think occasionally. We also have to emphasize that 22.2% of the respondents appreciate that they have often and very often lost the opportunity of spending their time in the family or with their friends due to their working program, while approximately 40% appreciate that they have accidentally missed such opportunities.

Table no. 3 Effect of imbalance over private and professional life (%)

	Very often	Quite often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Working overtime	9.5	26.2	37.3	21.4	5.6
Thinking of job outside working hours	7.9	23.8	34.1	29.4	4.8
Losing opportunities to spend time with family / friends	7.1	15.1	38.9	31.7	7.1

Source: Authors' computation

We may appreciate that most of the employees are working overtime, while only 5.6% declared they never do that. Also, only 4.8% of the respondents succeed in completely avoiding the problems concerning their working place as soon as they have finished their

working activity. Within the same tendency, an absolute majority has differently experimented the missing of some opportunities to spend their free time the way they wish, due to their activity at work.

Conclusions

The results of the research have revealed that the employees in tourism are aware of the existing imbalance between the time dedicated to their profession and that connected to their private life, even though most of them are young, aged maximum at 35. We also have to notice that 92% of the respondents are highly educated and approximately 40% are managers, consequently more responsible.

Concerning the first objective of the paper, identifying the employees' perceptions in Romanian tourism industry regarding the balance between professional and private life, the main conclusion is that they may sometimes suffer both the impact of the working program upon WLB and the emotional problems caused by the researched imbalance, the percentage of the respondents who have declared that being approximately of 60% in both situations.

Concerning the organizations' degree of involvement in balancing the professional and private aspects of their employees' lives, the researching results emphasize that most of the organizations are involved in reestablishing the balance by adopting either the flexible working program, or offering part-time jobs.

Jobs are also defined so that they could allow distribution and redistribution of responsibilities among employees when the situation occurs.

Stress is also perceived by most of the respondents, 63% of them showing different levels of stress, either associated, or not with legally stress diseases.

Professional conciliation favored by the employers' intervention hardly exists in employees' replies, just one of them noticing such an attitude.

Consequently, we may admit that the level of imbalance between personal and professional life is not higher among the employees in tourism,; however, countermeasures are not numerous, more complex plans of getting WLB being necessary.

The limits of the present research paper consist in its rather small sample; still, the present paper can be developed to a higher extent, starting from these results relevant enough for this analyzed sector of activity.

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