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(summary)

Management of work-life balance in Romania

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INTRODUCTION

Our practical experience in the field of management has made us notice that work-life balance is an aspect valued by employees, but also by the organizational or social systems in which they are engaged (family, organizations, states). The abundance of materials on this topic shows that the subject is of interest both for various researchers (in fields such as social psychology, organizational psychology, human resources management, etc.) and for the popular press.

We consider the concern for work-life balance (WLB) as an important one, especially in the context in which in the contemporary society we observe the effects of Hartmut Rosa's (2003) theory of social acceleration, the essence of which lies in the paradox that people suffer from a rhythm of accelerated life and a frequent lack of time, despite major time gains, both professionally and privately, due to technological innovations. The Internet and mobile technologies have become ubiquitous in everyday life, on the one hand, making our lives easier, but on the other hand facilitating our permanent connection to our work, to the disadvantage of personal life. Also, another social trend that increases the concern for work-life balance is the gradual change of generations that occurs on the labor market, by the increase of the share of Generation Y and the professional debut of Generation Z, while decreasing the representation of the Baby Boomers and Generation X. Generations born after 1981 have other characteristics, ideals and expectations from professional life, in the sense that they place more emphasis on work-life balance (Smith 2010; Ozkan and Solmaz 2015), considering work a less central value than previous generations (Twenge 2010), which brings additional challenges for managers. It should be noted that the generations of managers are going through the same demographic change, which means that if work-life balance becomes more prominent for managers, it becomes more important for companies in general.

The *aim of the PhD paper* is both *descriptive* - to analyze the balance between professional and private life (explaining the concept, historical evolution, its antecedents and consequences, its importance for employees and organizations) and *prescriptive* - to suggest scientifically validated practices and methods, which companies, based on existing public policies and individual expectations of employees, can apply to achieve this balance, with positive organizational effects. This goal is broken down into 3 objectives, each representing

a level of analysis; thus, we analyzed work-life balance, with a focus on Romania, at (1) state level; (2) organizational / company level; (3) individual level.

STRUCTURE OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS AND SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

The doctoral thesis is composed of two parts. The first part is dedicated to the review and critical analysis of the literature, and the second part contains a series of original applied research.

Thus, **Chapter 1** of the doctoral thesis describes the context in which the personal interest for this topic arose, presents the purpose of the paper and the levels of analysis considered, summarizes the current state of knowledge in the field and presents the research gap. The conclusion we reached after reviewing the literature is that so far no integrated analysis has been done, both in terms of the angles of analysis and of the variety of analysed work-life balance policies and methods in Romania. Also, this paper analyzes how various demographic variables influence the individual perceptions of employees in Romania, but also whether there is a correlation between WLB and various organizational indicators.

Chapter 2 analyzes the concept of work-life balance (WLB), but also other related concepts, in the context of the most relevant theories on the relationship between the domains 'work' and 'life' and explores the most appropriate methods to operationalize these concepts.

WLB was defined and operationalized differently, depending on the organizational theories to which various researchers adhered (the theory of spillover and compensation between domains, the theory of work-family boundaries, the theory of borders, the theory of work-family enrichment, the theory of person-environment fit). Although there is no universally accepted definition of the notion of work-life balance, in essence, this concept is based on 'the principle that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities and more as complementary elements to a fulfilled life' (Manfredi and Holliday 2004).

If for the popular press the predominant premise today is that professional life takes up too much time at the expense of the private life (i.e. one-way interference with negative effects), in the academic research it is clear that conflict and enrichment are taken into

account – i.e. two-way relationship with ambivalent results positive/negative between the work and life domains.

The interest in researching the topic undoubtedly derives from the perceived benefits of achieving WLB in practice, being almost axiomatic to say that it is important for employees to achieve work-life balance. Today, it is universally accepted that WLB is desirable and has positive effects at all levels - individual, company, state - even if specialized research is disparate and sometimes has inconclusive or contradictory results (for example, the relationship of consequence, antecedent, mediator or moderator of WLB compared to other key concepts in organizational psychology, such as job satisfaction, organizational and dedication is not irrefutably established).

Considering that the essence of the concept is broadly understood the same, both in the academic world and in the organizational sphere, we focused on finding concrete measures to achieve WLB, with practical applicability, at state, company and individual level, through academically validated methods (case studies, interviews, questionnaires).

Chapter 3 presents various measures regarding WLB at state level, analyzing the situation in Romania in a European context. The relationship between WLB and various state socio-economic indicators is also studied.

In order to understand the situation of Romania in the European context regarding WLB, we analyzed the most representative publications of the European Union. Romania's place in the rankings calculated by the EU based on synthetic indicators is fluctuating. By conducting our own statistical analyzes, we have shown that the variation of the WLB index is largely explained by indicators such as real GDP per capita, countries with higher GDP having higher WLB. We also introduced in the analysis some indicators not researched so far, such as the perception on the lack of corruption, the gender equality index and the hourly compensation.

We also carried out a comparative analysis of the legislation in the areas that we considered to be the most relevant for providing a framework for WLB (namely: working hours, daily breaks and parental leave), to see if Romania is aligned with various European countries.

In conclusion, practitioners could use the information in this chapter to reflect on how a company's WLB policies are influenced by the minimum foundation established by the

legal framework. Work-life facilitation could be achieved by going beyond the legal framework in favor of the employee. For example, for HR managers concerned with creating a *WLB culture* in their company, analyzing the legislation in ‘best-in-class’ countries, not just their own, could be a source of inspiration for new policies. For decision-makers, the findings related to macroeconomic indicators correlated with the WLB level could give the direction in which public policies should go.

Chapter 4 presents various measures on WLB at the companies’ level. An updated inventory of work-life balance policies, tools and measures that organizations can apply is presented and the segmentation-integration index is introduced as a tool that companies can use to compare their approach to WLB with that of other companies. The list of WLB measures is inspired by the academic literature, by the analysis of companies famous for innovation in terms of providing work-life balance benefits, but also by interviews with practitioners. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, work from home (teleworking) has become an essential measure, therefore we have touched on the subject, trying to outline some probable directions of evolution for this policy. The chapter also contains a methodological innovation, namely the use of the Kano Analysis, a tool usually used to measure customer satisfaction, to understand how employees use and value the WLB policies offered by companies.

To ensure that our approach is not strictly academic, but that it brings value to practitioners, we conducted a series of interviews with managers, in which we asked, among other things, which directions in the literature are of interest for them. This chapter answers the following research questions:

- "Which direction of research on WLB is of most interest to practitioners/companies?"
- "What is the importance given by companies to work-life balance for attracting, retaining and motivating employees?"
- "What WLB policies and practices are offered to employees? "
- "How do the analyzed companies position themselves on the segmentation-integration continuum?"

Chapter 5 analyzes work-life balance at individual level, based on a research questionnaire completed by 298 workers (employees and entrepreneurs/independent

consultants) in Romania. Through relevant statistical methods, we analyzed the influence of demographic and individual factors on the perceived level of WLB, but also the relationship between WLB and some organizational indicators, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to stay in the organization. We also presented the main strategies that Romanian workers apply to maintain their work-life balance.

The research objectives we have set ourselves are:

- **Objective 1:** *Identifying the WLB level for people working in Romania (employees or entrepreneurs) and the individual factors that influence this level.* To achieve this goal, we conducted descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing, especially regarding population segmentation and comparison of means. Also, in order to identify numerical relationships between WLB and various factors, we performed simple and multiple linear regressions, binary regressions, as well as moderation and mediation analysis.
- **Objective 2:** *Explain the relationship between the WLB level and organizational indicators such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to stay.* To achieve this goal, we applied multiple linear regressions.
- **Objective 3:** *Analysis of how the difference in methodology influences research results.* In this regard, we compared the results when the WLB level is measured by the method chosen by the EU in the Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound 2018), with this index being calculated by a method launched in academia. The statistical method is that of tests for paired samples.
- **Objective 4:** *Identifying individual strategies for achieving WLB.* In this regard, we used thematic analysis to classify the answers received to an open-ended question in our questionnaire, subsequently applying relevant statistical methods. Where we had promising numerical results, we applied interviews, in order to better understand the explanations at human level, which is a good practice in management.

Chapter 6 presents the final conclusions of the research. It highlights the contributions of the paper to the theoretical knowledge regarding work-life balance and also to the field of management. Also, some limitations of the study are enumerated, and suggestions are made for future research.

The doctoral study has a consistent section of appendices and a generous bibliography, which can guide other researchers interested in the topic.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper has an interdisciplinary character. The concept of ‘work-life balance’ is defined in the literature in areas such as social psychology, organizational psychology, business and human resource management and it is a subjective construct. Our focus was to investigate the benefits of this balance not only for individuals but also for companies and to provide useful tools for managers, at any level, but especially for managers who have the authority to create personnel policies.

By analyzing the concept at national, company and individual level, with a focus on Romania, we consider that we have made the most comprehensive analysis of this topic so far in our country.

From a theoretical standpoint, we consider that, following a rigorous documentation reflected in the bibliography of this paper, we managed to clarify the state of knowledge in the field, but also to enrich the literature.

First, defining the concept of work-life balance proved to be a cognitive adventure. We consider that this concept cannot receive a supreme, indisputable definition, but we have highlighted the definitions that have the greatest popularity among researchers. In our empirical research, we have used those definitions for which operationalization is clearly and convincingly described in the literature (the items used are presented in full by the researcher who proposed them and are sometimes taken over by other researchers). The analysis of data published by European institutions on WLB issues reveals interesting aspects, especially in terms of comparability between countries, but does not follow a rigorous methodology in defining concepts, therefore, we chose definitions proposed by researchers in academia. Whatever the preference of future researchers, we recommend the use of an operationalization based on multiple items, as the concept of WLB is far too complex to be properly measured by a single item. Our work helps to clarify and summarize an extremely broad field of research and gives future researchers clear anchors for understanding and operationalizing the concepts that govern this domain. In the interest of simplifying this

ocean of information, we have also proposed a model that integrates the most relevant theories in the field.

Also from a theoretical perspective, we summarized the main antecedents, consequences and mediating variables of the WLB concept. The analyzed literature, but also our own empirical research shows that there are benefits for companies that encourage WLB, benefits among which we can list the construction of a positive image of the company to attract candidates, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to stay in the organization.

Our research has been structured on 3 levels - national, company, individual - and we consider that we have made a lot of contributions *in practical terms*.

From a state-level analysis perspective, we begin by noting that the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), published periodically by Eurofound, are the most popular sources for secondary data analysis for researchers. However, these sources do not define the concepts surrounding the work-life relationship in a rigorous scientific way. Thus, EWCS does not always provide a final indicator for the measured concepts. In turn, EQLS, even if it proposes a composite index of work-life balance, ends up proposing, in fact, an index of work-life conflict, which is obviously another concept. We will note, however, that the WLB index proposed by Eurofound is useful, because it allows a clear ranking of European countries.

In the European context, the analysis of the legislation regarding aspects related to WLB shows that Romania is aligned with the rest of the countries, and is even among the countries with the friendliest legislation in the field of parental leave (Eastern European countries are generally leading this ranking). Despite this positive aspect, Romania is on the 26th place in terms of the composite index of work-life balance in the EU28, according to EQLS (2018), which is explained by the fact that WLB at state level is positively correlated with indicators such as real GDP per capita, the perception of the lack of corruption, the gender equality index, the hourly compensation, the participation rate in the labor market, and the high scores for these indicators are, as a rule, the prerogative of developed countries. Therefore, raising the WLB level reported at national level will be possible through economic development. We believe that the EU's imposition of minimum standards on work-life balance issues is a benefit, which ensures the facilitation of WLB at the Community level.

We would like to point out that this paper proposes some regression models with some original independent variables, which have not been taken into account by other researchers so far. For practitioners, the analysis of the legislation in the best ranked countries in the WLB index could be the starting point for new policies, just as the macroeconomic indicators correlated with the WLB level that we highlighted in this paper could become points of interest for authors of public policies related to WLB.

From the perspective of analysis at the organizational level, we consider that it is not relevant for practitioners to try to define this concept in an indisputable way from an academic point of view. The concept of work-life balance is relatively easy for every individual to understand, so if a company aims to measure its WLB level, it is important to choose one of the existing definitions in the literature and remain consistent for periodic measurements and data comparability from one period to another. We would recommend, of course, to retain the idea that work-life balance means more than the absence of work-life conflict, in the sense that an element of WLB is the emergence of positive spillovers between areas (work-life enrichment).

Throughout this paper, companies can find countless examples of WLB practices that they could apply - from classic ones, like extra days off, maternity protection, or flexible work schedules, to some unusual ones, such as providing days off for personal development, community involvement or for the adoption and caring for pets. We highlight that have proposed a new category in the taxonomy of WLB policies and measures, namely *support for integration-segmentation*.

The 4-day work week and the much larger use of homeworking are two of the bets of the future. The introduction of the 4-day work week would be as revolutionary as the introduction of the 5-day work week in its day, but since then mankind has experienced the spread of the internet and mobile technologies, which has once again made the 7-day work week possible for some people and fields. This shows that the route from one reduction to another, from one historical landmark to another, can be winding. In terms of working from home, the recent pandemic of COVID-19 will force companies to re-evaluate their telework policies and as well as the policy on office facilities and space. As evidence accumulates that working from home does not reduce productivity, the prognosis is that firms will rent smaller spaces (some will even try a model based entirely on telework), invest in technologies that

allow remote work, and that the spatial boundary between the areas of work and personal life will become increasingly blurred for more and more workers globally. This also means that, for people who in the past had strong preferences for segmentation, adapting to practices that integrate the professional and private spheres will appear challenging and will require a change in their attitudes. For companies, being flexible, in the sense of extending the working policy from home, could prove to be a major competitive advantage in the future.

From the perspective of analysis at the individual level, our finding is that demographic factors (eg, gender, marital status, etc.) and individual factors (company domain and size) give mixed results as predictors of work-life balance. Among the interesting findings we mention the fact that the WLB level is higher if the direct manager has children, in other words, the parental status of the manager is influencing the level of support it provides to employees in achieving WLB. We consider that we have discovered a unique influence through this factor consisting of *the parental status of the manager*, and this variable should be of interest for future research in the field. We recommend that managers be trained/be made aware of these relevant demographic factors, and that companies perform needs analysis that take into account the segmentation of the categories of employees.

Based on the empiric study, we can say that, at an individual level, the key to success in achieving work-life balance is to reduce your work-life conflict and find work-life enrichment opportunities. More specifically, workers need to protect their personal lives from the interference of work on life and find ways to enrich their personal lives through work. Also, based on this applied research, we have come to classify the individual strategies for achieving WLB in 3 categories: segmentation type, integration type and individual focus type. Moreover, the categories are exemplified by dozens of concrete ideas that can be applied in practice.

SOME MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

As an essential finding for companies, based on our empirical research, we emphasize the idea consistent with the theory of person-environment fit that providing employees with segmentation opportunities equal to or greater than their segmentation preferences significantly increases their work-life balance score.

We also showed that WLB has a significant influence on important organizational indicators in the field of human resources, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to stay. Thus, WLB is explained directly and indirectly by the work-life conflict, the relationship being mediated by job satisfaction. In other words, WLC influences the decrease of WLB and also influences job satisfaction, which in turn influences the WLB level. We also found that 53.66% of the intention to stay is explained by WLB, in terms of the total mediation relationship that appears in the direction of WLB→Managerial support→Job satisfaction→Intention to stay.

In practice, organizations can support the work-life balance of employees by implementing friendly policies and measures in this area. Also, much like other researchers, we recommend that organizations calculate the cost of not implementing such policies. Benefits for organizations can be estimated financially by multiplying the intention to leave the organization with the costs of employee turnover (these are costs related to recruitment and selection, training, speed and accuracy in the execution of a new employee, etc.). Also, a good WLB of employees brings lower costs in terms of sick leave expenses. The interviews we conducted with managers, as well as personal managerial experience, showed us that the implementation of working from home policies offered employees the alternative to requesting medical leave when the physical parameters are not optimal, and the number of leave medical has decreased.

The organizational policies that facilitate WLB are becoming more varied, and the recommendation to managers is to keep abreast of new developments in the field and the actions taken by the competition. To verify satisfaction with these policies or to decide what new measures to introduce, we recommend applying the Kano analysis, as described in this paper. It should be noted that the success of WLB-friendly policies depends on the individual perception of employees (according to the P-E fit theory). It is important for companies to communicate proactively about their efforts to create an appropriate work-life climate. In this respect, uninformed employees might consider normal the existence of benefits for which companies actually make considerable financial and administrative efforts. Finally, as we showed in the Kano analysis, not all WLB policies are equally important to employees and do not have the same impact on their satisfaction. Therefore, companies need to periodically review their WLB policy offerings and measures and decide which ones need to be adjusted

and even eliminated, based on cost-benefit comparisons. To see how they compares to the competition, companies could make assessments using the integration-segmentation index.

By the nature of their position, managers can multiply positive practices, being able to contribute to the creation of a *work-life culture* in companies. As we have shown, the WLB level of employees determines the intention to stay in the organization, by mediating the managerial support regarding WLB and job satisfaction. It is important, therefore, for managers to provide/ to be perceived as providing high support to employees to attain work-life balance. Managerial support becomes critical in stressful situations and studies show that most stressful events in people's lives are related to the spectrum of personal life (for example, the death of a family member, divorce, etc.). Therefore, in these difficult times, companies, through managers, need to take care of employees as individuals and provide them with instrumental and emotional support.

Last but not least, managers need to be aware that the change of generations brings WLB to the forefront, with representatives of generations Y and Z being more concerned with the subject than previous generations. The constant development of technologies, the constant evolutions in the business environment, but also unforeseen events (such as the recent pandemic of COVID-19) force companies and managers to always be on the lookout to find the best mix of work-life balance policies. We remind you that one aspect for which the need is growing, given the aging population, is the provision of policies that allow the care of elderly family members.

We believe that certain elements of this paper will be of interest for applied research that can be done by specialists in companies. We recommend that practitioners create their own questionnaires, depending on the objectives they set for themselves (this paper offers various examples that can be used). We argue that the data collected at a given time are less important than the *working methods per se* presented in the paper, which meet the conditions for repeatability of studies.

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