Gender Difference in Work-Life-Balance

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Abstract

Today, balancing life, work and family responsibilities constitutes a challenge for everyone. The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between job satisfaction and Work-life balance among employees in the workplace, and to examine how Work-life balance is perceived by gender. It is hypothesized that men and women will report significant differences in their perception of work-life balance. This research study evaluated through a review of empirical literature, applied a survey regarding how life balance is perceived by men and women. The instrument used to conduct the survey is in the public domain, Veterans Health Administration (VHA, 2015). The study discusses the importance of the effects of work-life balance, how it impacts individuals’ lives, and how people manage their behavior and stress on their different scenarios or conditions. This study included participants by convenience sampling. There were 101 respondents (male=33; female=68). Results indicate that there is no a correlation between men and women in their perceptions of work-life balance. In addition, no significant differences were found across gender and overall employee satisfaction or burn out. However, significant differences were found in supervisor/team leader work-family balance support across gender. This study validates how the implementation of flexibility provided by organizations’ HR policies, offers employees improved work-family balance and other lifestyle benefits. Bohle, Quinlan, Kennedy, and Williamson (2004).

Key Words: work-life balance, work-family balance, gender, work, family
1. Introduction

Why has work-life balance become an important topic for research, and how its implications affect peoples’ life and gender? Examining the traditional perspectives and its implications for the study between work and life relationship has gained more interest today, especially because time pressures at the workplace have increased and workers generally have higher job expectations and demands at work (Guest, 2009). Work and organizational psychologists are the ones who can best contribute to this topic. In the human resources management field, work-life balance is gaining increased global attention from different employees (Guest, 2009; McCarthy, Darcy and Grady, 2010).

Evans, Carney and Wilkinson (2013) established that work-life balance can be a process of finding personal meaning and satisfaction across multiple roles and aspects of one’s life. According to the authors, balancing work life with personal life appears to be an almost universal struggle for both men and women. In today’s economy, there is a significant increase in dual-earner families, requiring shift in parental, household, and partnership duties for both men and women (Higgins, Duxbury, and Lyons, 2010). Other definitions also indicated that finances are important, and the dual imbalanced fare poorly on life satisfaction (Warren, 2015). On this study, Warren suggested that finances are actually the stronger driving force evaluating life satisfaction, and he highlighted them over time (Warren, 2015).

To refine the current understanding about how work-life balance works, it has been hypothesized that male and female will report significant differences on their perception of work-life balance. The aim of the current research is to conduct thorough a review of empirical literature to understand how life balance is perceived by the following two different groups; male and female employees. The literature reviewed suggested that the implementation of ‘flexibility’ provided by their employment offers, workers improved work-family balance and other lifestyle benefits (Bohle, Quinlan, Kennedy, and Williamson, 2004). One way to improve the work-family balance is the implementation of work-life policies that are designed to facilitate workers, providing some flexible options such as child care facilities for parents and flexible schedules as well as social support (Brummelhuis and Van Der Lippet, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is Work-Life-Balance?

Although much of the literature reviewed talked about work-life conflict or work life imbalance, work-life balance refers in general to the conditions that are necessary to reach the equilibrium and that are connected or linked to psychological well-being. Balance is a complex word; it meanings can vary from one author to another (Guest, 2009). Other studies refer to work-life balance as work-family balance. According to Hill, Hawkins, Ferris,
and Weitzman (2001), work-family balance may be defined as the ability by which an individual achieves the balance between demands involving emotions and behavior, and work-family. A more modern concept of work-life balance, introduced the term “reconciliation of employees” that refers to work and personal lives, which included different factors such as temporary arrangements permitting employees to reduce the number of working hours. McCarthy et al. (2010). Additionally, this term is defined as ‘flexible working arrangements’ and that basically involves flexibility in time (flexi-time), which is a combination of working hours matching individual’s own personal need. Flexibility might be perceived very different by each employer, varying according to their own values in regards to work-family balance and other style life benefits aspects. Bohle et al. (2004). Flexibility has been recognized as a key factor on employer friendly practices that contributes to offer a work life balance environment (Fleetwood, 2006). The Work-life balance measures the extent to which employees consider their workloads reasonable and feasible, and a balance between work and life is supported by managers. (Partnership for Public Service, 2017). Thus, managers play an important role providing flexi-time to their employees, and this creates an impact that is directly reflected towards individual’s work-life balance.

2.2 Human Resources and Work-Life-Balance Policy and Practice

Undoubtedly, human resources play an important role making HR decisions as well as the managers, who serves as the link between operational and strategic diverse organizational activities. McCarthy et al., (2010). It is inevitable to find inconsistencies between what was originally proposed at senior HR level and the final decision made by the managers (McCarthy et al., 2010). Further, the authors argued about the fact that HR policy can be in the opposite direction from what the actual reality. They explained that HR hierarchy made managers become the relevant bridge of connection between HR policies, influencing the way they are going to be interpreted and promoted them to be enacted. Once the HR directors or managers formally designed and implemented the Work-life balance policies, it is very important that HR research and adopt multi-perspective, which allows them to place those policies in practice, influencing also attitudes and behavior. McCarthy et al. (2010). The following sections of this paper attempts to mention and briefly define some of the different factors that might affect and influence the life balance, according to each particular case.

2.3 Vision Perspective on each Generation

Schultz et al. (2012) mentioned other contributing factors that influenced the population’s perception is directly related to the generation they bellow. As an example, the author mentioned Generations X and Y, and how each one differs from the other and from members of older generations. According to Schultz et al. (2012), research indicated that members born from 1965 to 1981 are Generation X, and those born from 1982 to 2000 are Generation Y (Schultz et al., 2012, p.45). This is a very important aspect to be considered, because it
influences a lot on critical thinking, and the way each of the group’s approaches to balancing work and life. Scott, Glavin, and Milkie (2009) found a relationship between personal values according to the age, which is directly related to the level of every employee’s commitment. Additionally, they mentioned that labor force and family composition has changed dramatically making more difficult and challenging for many working adults to reach the work and family life balance (Scott, Glavin, and Milkie, 2009).

2.4 Relationship between Work and Life

Work and personal life balance are related and directly affected by different factors. A study about alternate work schedules and work-life balance done by Tausig and Fenwick (2001), reported that the schedule control at work is one of the important factors that positively influences work-life balance. A methodological review found in Industrial-organizational psychology and organizational behavior (IO/OB) regarding work-family, analyzed 210 articles from 1980 to 2003; it suggested to expand the perspective to advance in the field. This study also states that knowledge is generally limited to what they called “static correlational relations among work and family variables” (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, and Lambert, 2007, p.37). Nitzsche, Jung, Kowalski and Pfaff (2014) described the newly developed work-life balance culture scale (WLBCS). This study basically measured the promotion of work-life balance through the application of an organizational culture among the employees. According to Nitzsche et al. (2014), it is emphasized that an imbalanced experienced related to work and family will be directly reflected on lower organizational commitment from employees’ side, and this also affects job satisfaction, which are some of the important elements to be considered in this study. It is hypothesized that in men and women reports significant differences in their perception of work-life balance. In order to test the main hypothesis of this study, the following hypotheses were derived from the selected questions of the Work-Life-Balance survey:

- There is a correlation between gender and Overall Employee Satisfaction.
- There is a correlation between gender and Supervisor/Team Leader Work Family Balance Support.
- There is a correlation between gender and burnout at work.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A sample of 101 participants from the United States, and some countries from Latin America and Europe, was collected using convenience sampling. Eligible participants were divided into two sample categories (male=33; female=68). Ranging in ages between 18 and 60 years old. Each of the groups mentioned above were identified and differentiated.
3.2 Instrument

The instrument used on this research paper was provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The instrument type is a questionnaire, currently available to the public and it can be retrieved from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA, 2015). The occupation and sector specificity of the questionnaire were generic. Questions were included in the 2015 VA all employee survey and divided by theme (VHA, 2015). Each of the sections mentioned above had different response options. The response options were organized in metric score.

3.3 Demographic Questions

Fourteen demographic questions were included on the first part of the survey. The demographic data taken into account for this study was gender, age, ethnic identity, country of origin, level of education, marital status, household incomes, number of children, professional level and job status.

3.4 Employee Satisfaction

Following the demographic section, question number 15 of the Work-life balance survey contained 9 sub-questions grouped by theme. Employee satisfaction assesses how satisfied employees are related to the amount of work, quality of direct supervision they received, promotion opportunities, and praise (VHA, 2015). The type of scale was originally continuous and the response options were included in metric score from 1 to 5, where each number represents an answer: 1=Very Dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 3=Neutral, 4=Satisfied, 5=Very Satisfied (VHA, 2015).

3.5 General Workplace/Workgroup Perceptions

Following the Employee Satisfaction section, question number 16 of the Work-life balance survey contained 10 sub-questions grouped by theme. General workplace/workgroup perceptions assess safety resources and climate at workplace and how supervisor/team leaders understand and support employee family/personal life responsibilities in work groups (VHA, 2015). The type of scale was continuous and the response options were in metric score, also from 1 to 5 as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree, and Do Not Know option is available on each question (VHA, 2015).

3.6 Burnout

Following the General workplace/workgroup perceptions section, question number 17 of the Work-life balance survey contained 3 sub-questions grouped by theme. Burnout assesses levels of exhaustion and reduced personal achievement (VHA, 2015). Type of scale: continuous. Finally, the burnout response options go from 0 to 6, the response options are: 0=Never, 1=A few times a year 2=Once a month or less, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5= A few times a week, 6= Every day. This metric is an aggregate score (score 0-6) computed from the
items: (1) Exhaustion (2) Depersonalization, and (3) Reduced Personal Achievement (VHA, 2015).

3.7 Reliability of the instrument

The reliability coefficient used by the U.S. department of Veterans Affairs was the coefficient alpha: 0.80 to 0.89. (VHA, 2015).

3.8 Procedure

An online survey was created on the website Question Pro (Question Pro Survey Software, 2016). This survey was distributed to participants in private, via electronic questionnaires and through social media outlets such as Facebook and LinkedIn; and also, through personal email accounts such as Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo, and AOL. Prior to completing the survey, each participant was provided with an informed consent form, which described the general nature of the study, the right to withdraw, and the approximated time of duration (10-15 minutes). Participants were not compensated for their participation in this study.

4. Results

A total of 126 participants started the survey. Out of these participants, 108 were able to complete it but 7 responses did not meet the study’s participation requirements, leaving a final sample of 101 responses for analysis.

The average of employee’s participants obtained were predominately females 68 (67.3%), and male 33 (32.6%). The majority of the respondents in both sample groups combined were professionals, constituting 50 (39.7%). The participants were Hispanic/Latino in their majority 82 (81.20%). Participants were originally from 21 different countries as follows: Argentina, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, United States, and Venezuela. The majority of the participants were predominantly from three countries: Venezuela 31 (31.3%), United States 20 (20%), and Cuba 18 (18%). Regarding the marital status, 57 (57%) of the participants were married, while the remaining 44 (44.4%) indicated to be single. About (50%) of the participants did not have children; (18%) had one child; (19%) had two children; and the remaining (6%) had three children, and only about (3%) had four children or more. The average of participants who worked full time was (76%). Participants working and studying full time were about (20%), and only (4%) of the respondents indicated they were full time students. Even though more demographic questions were included on the survey, they were excluded from this paper since they were not relevant to the purpose of this study.

To ensure that there is not difference between gender and overall employee satisfaction, the female and male sample were first combined, and the originally continuous scale was simplified with the purpose of meeting criteria to run the Chi-Square test.
9 sub-questions of the Overall employee satisfaction section at the survey, question 7 was selected: “Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?” Although the original responses were continuous, the answer options on the metric scale were grouped as follows: answers corresponding to 1 and 2 (Very Dissatisfied and Dissatisfied), were converted to Dissatisfied=1; the Neutral option stayed the same Neutral=2, and the answers corresponding to 4 and 5 (Satisfied and Very Satisfied) were converted to Satisfied=3 (VHA, 2015). Leaving a new modified categorical scale as follows: Dissatisfied=1, Neutral=2, Satisfied=3.

Likewise, the scale for the General workplace/workgroup perceptions section of the survey was also modified, with the purpose of meeting the correct criteria to run the Chi-Square test. From the 10 sub-questions of the General workplace/workgroup perceptions section at the survey, the question selected was the one titled: “Work/Family Balance Supervisors/team leaders understand and support employee family/personal life responsibilities in my work group” (VHA, 2015). This time, the answer options on the metric scale were grouped corresponded to the option response options of the section as follows: The response options were in metric score, also from 1 to 5 as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree, and Do Not Know option was available on each question (VHA, 2015). answers corresponding to 1 and 2 (Strongly Disagree and Disagree), were converted to Disagree=1; the Neutral option stayed as the same as Neutral=2, and the answers corresponding to 4 and 5 (Agree and Strongly Agree) were converted to Agree=3. Leaving a new modified categorical scale as follows: Disagree=1, Neutral=2, Agree=3. This modification allowed the researchers to run the Chi-Square procedure.

To determine if gender is associated with burnout preferences, the selected question from this part of the survey was the first question, related to exhaustion: “I feel burnout from my work”. Response options corresponding to this part of the survey go from 0 to 6 as follows: 0=Never, 1=A few times a year 2=Once a month or less, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5= A few times a week, 6= Every day. This metric is an aggregate score (score 0-6) (VHA, 2015).

The Chi-Square Test for Employee Overall Satisfaction was chosen to find out if there was a correlation between gender and overall employee satisfaction. The p value was .055 which was greater than the alpha level .05. The results revealed that there was no correlation between gender and overall employee satisfaction, meaning that the null hypothesis was failed to reject.

Regarding the Chi-Square Test for the General workplace/workgroup perceptions question, to determine the correlation between gender and the Supervisor/Team leader Work Family Balance Support, the p value obtained was .0212 which represents less than the used alpha level .05. According to the results, there was a correlation between gender and the Supervisor/Team
Leader preferences, which means that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was supported.

The Chi-Square Test for the burnout question was selected to determine if there was any correlation among gender. The p value obtained is .954 which is greater than alpha level .05. Both genders have similarities in their responses. The Chi-Square findings revealed that there was no statistically significant correlation between gender and burned out at work. The main hypothesis of this study was: Female and male employee’s perception about Work-Life Balance will report significant differences. According to the results obtained, the main hypothesis was not supported. Although one of the three Chi-Square tests was significant (Work-Family Balance, p = .012), the primary hypothesis cannot be supported, since the other two tests (Overall Employee Satisfaction, p = .055; and Burnout, p = .954), did not obtain significance.

5. Limitations

The results on this study cannot be generalized to the entire population since it used a snowball sampling method; female participation predominance on the survey did not facilitate getting more even responses based on gender, which constitute another limitation. Some of the cells in the Cross-tabulation table did not contain an n of at least 5, meaning that the pre-test criterion for a Chi-Square Test was not satisfied. Consequently, the criteria to run T-Test was not satisfied either.

6. Discussion

In general, the results obtained in this study do not indicate significant difference between the work groups, male and female employees, since the criteria to run the t-test was not satisfied and the appropriate test selected was the Chi-Square.

However, a significant correlation in responses was obtained across gender with the Supervisor/Team Leader Work Life Balance preferences. The implementation of flexibility provided by organizations offers employees improved work-family balance and other lifestyle benefits. Bohle et al. (2004). The results in this study showed no significant difference between Overall Employee Satisfaction, Burnout, and gender. This is an important finding because it supports other research which indicate that a blending of gender roles has occurred. It supports the idea that men and women are sharing household duties to a greater degree than in previous generations. According to Fenwick and Tausig (2001), achieving work-life balance is both physically and psychologically necessary to promote life satisfaction, wellness, and occupational success. For the majority of men and women, work-life balance can be a process of finding personal meaning and satisfaction across multiple roles and aspects of one’s life. Evans et al., (2013).
References


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