Work-life balance report

The Work-life Balance Directive

This directive aims to improve families' access to family leave and flexible work arrangements The WLB directive has entered into European Union law and must now be adopted by Member States by 2 August 2022.

The Work-life Balance Directive introduces a set of legislative actions designed to modernise the existing EU legal and policy frameworks, with the aims of better supporting a work-life balance for parents and carers, encouraging a more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women, and addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market.

Measures under the directive include:

- The introduction of paternity leave: under the directive, fathers must be able to take at least 10 working days of paternity leave around the time of birth of their child, compensated at least at the level of sick pay.
- Ensuring that two out of the four months of parental leave are non-transferable between parents and compensated at a level that is determined by the Member State.
- The introduction of carers' leave: workers providing personal care or support to a relative will be entitled to five days of leave per year.
- Extending the right to request flexible working arrangements to carers and working parents of children up to eight years old.

Read the directive here:

DIRECTIVE (EU) 2019/1158 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158&from=ET

Work-life balance

Work–life balance refers to the ability of every individual, regardless of gender, to coordinate work and family obligations successfully. Work, in this context, refers to paid labor performed outside the home (Wheatley, 2012). Crooker et al. (2002) has written that "work-life balance is the stability characterized by the balancing of an individual's life complexity and dynamism

with environmental and personal resources such as family, community, employer, profession, geography, information, economics, personality, or values".

Studies have found that, when parents manage to balance family and working life, they are more satisfied with their life, which positively impacts their mental and physical health (Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014). Successful work–life balance can, therefore, be considered to be an important public health issue (Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014).

The term work–life balance (WLB) has gained increasing popularity in the public discourse. It is a term that is commonly used in companies, especially large ones, and it is often said to be at the core of their corporate welfare, e.g.,. However, academic knowledge around the WLB concept is not as solid and extensive as the widespread use of the term would suggest.

Currently, in addition to the massive presence of women in the labor market, which has fostered the literature about work–family balance, there is a highly increasing rate of active elderly workers, workers with a long-standing health problem or disability (LSHPD), single workers, and childless couples. These workers have different needs and interests outside work. This situation places renewed importance on a key feature of the WLB: The importance that is attached to the many different life role changes from person to person. Therefore, even if the family role remains central in nonworking life, it is important to recognize the value of other roles when conceptualizing and measuring the WLB. The family may not be the most important part of the WLB in determining the positive outcomes of, for example, workers with chronic diseases for whom the management of health has great influence.

After a review of the conceptualizations of the WLB in the literature, Kalliath and Brough proposed a definition of the WLB: "Work–life balance is the individual perception that work and nonwork activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (p.326). A recent review indicated that a better work–life balance fosters not only job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment but also life and family satisfaction. The work–life balance also reduces stress-related outcomes such as psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depression.

Work–family conflict, in both directions, has been consistently found to be associated with work-related, family-related, and domain-unspecific outcomes. Specifically, among the many outcomes that are associated with work–family conflict in a statistically significant manner, the ones that were more strongly associated were organizational citizenship behavior, work-related

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and general stress, burnout and exhaustion, and job, marital and life satisfaction. (Gragnano et al 2020)

Covid-19 and (women's) increased unpaid labour

During previous crises, women have been more likely to either reduce their working hours or temporarily step down from work (Alon et al., 2020; Andrew et al., 2020). We still do not know if the effects of COVID-19 will be the same, but new studies from England, Canada, Australia, Italy, and the United States indicate that parents have been under greater time pressure for the last few months and that mothers have spent less time on paid work and more time on household responsibilities as compared to fathers during the pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020) Studies have indicated that young children tend to seek help and attention by interrupting their mothers, and that the mothers in turn experience time as more fragmented (Collins, 2020; Collins et al., 2020; O. Sullivan & Gershuny, 2018), which can become a bigger challenge in lockdown as the one during COVID-19. Since the lockdown, more mothers participating in Andrew et al.'s (2020) research have reduced their working hours and those who have stopped working do twice as much childcare and household duties as their male partners who are still working. Conversely, in families where the male partner has stopped working but not the female, the parents share childcare and household duties equally even though the mother works at least 5 h of paid work a day. Qian and Fuller (2020) argue that the pandemic is far from being an equalizer when it comes to gender equality, as their research indicates a widening gender employment gap among Canadian parents with young children.

Juggling childcare and paid work has been very challenging for parents, but then again, this has meant increased flexibility for many employees, flexibility that has often been discussed as the solution to a better work–life balance, especially for women. (Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2014; C. Sullivan, 2015; Wheatley, 2012).

Parental leave

Parental leave helps parents balance their caring duties and work life. However, it is often unavailable to potential parents as their eligibility might be dependent on criteria such as whether a person is in paid work; if they are an employee or self-employed; the sector in which they work; the length of service; or leave might not be accessible to same-sex couples or

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migrants. Changes in the labour market, such as the spread of atypical forms of employment (e.g. temporary contracts and on-demand work, bogus self-employment, voucher-based work) have increased concerns about parents' access to leave, especially in cases where it is based on definitions of traditional standard employment. (EIGE 2019)

Work–life initiatives available to the individual employee are important to the individual's life at and outside of work (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Morris, 2008). Accessible work–life initiatives encourage healthier and safer work environments by reducing employee fatigue and stress (Yasbek, 2004). Employees with less work-imposed stress are also more committed and productive on the job (Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008).
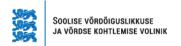
However, work–life initiatives such as flexible scheduling are typically only useful to upper tier salaried workers (Lambert, 2009; Lambert & Waxman, 2005) and often work against hourly employees (Lambert, 2009). Maternity leave is frequently available, while paternity leave is disproportionately offered and often culturally unacceptable to use within an organization (Kirby & Krone, 2002). (Munn, Sunny L. 2013)

Over the last few decades, the government of Iceland has taken some important steps in making laws and policies to facilitate fathers' involvement in childrearing responsibilities. The most substantial step is probably an Act on shared parental leave passed in 2000, which gave parents 9 months in total, "dividing the 9 months so that three are sharable while each parent has three that are strictly nontransferable" (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018, p. 460), and was lengthened by a month on January 1, 2020 (Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave No. 95/2000 with amendments [Althing, 2019]). (Hjálmsdóttir, Andrea et Valgerður S Bjarnadóttir. 2021)

The Estonian state and local governments provide support for childcare services, education system and health services etc. It allows parents and caregivers to spend less time on family responsibilities and offers time to concentrate on work. Similarly, other services can be of help to caregivers, such as public transport, cleaning services, laundries, ready-to-eat food etc. (Karu 2008: 6)

Helping mechanisms

Opinions vary in the literature as to the impact of social support. A resources-and-demands theoretical framework reveals both a direct and a buffering effect (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). House (1981) shows that support can enhance health and well-

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being directly, regardless of stress levels. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) support this idea by showing that job resources have a direct negative effect on burnout and a direct positive effect on job engagement. The assumption that support has a direct effect proposes that everybody benefits from high levels of support (House, 1981). In addition, the resources-and-demands approach suggests that resources can also help people cope with demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Job demands may consist of long hours, shift work, frequent travel or job pressure. Examples of private-life demands are care responsibilities for older relatives and children. These demands are not necessarily negative when adequate resources exist to meet them (Moen and Chermack, 2005; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). 'Social support could mitigate or buffer the effect of potentially stressful objective situations (such as a boring job, heavy workloads, unemployment) by causing people initially to perceive the situation as less threatening or stressful' (House, 1981: 37–38). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) therefore expected to find a negative relationship between demands and resources in their study, since job resources potentially reduce job demands.

Support appears to be important in explaining satisfaction with work-life balance. Adding support variables in the regression model increased the explained variance and direct positive effects of support on satisfaction with work-life balance were found. Moreover, support was revealed to have a buffering effect with respect to the negative impact of job demands on work-life balance satisfaction.

Allen (2001) suggested that the availability of family supportive benefits might be indirectly related to work-life conflict through the perceived family supportiveness of the organisation. Her results indicate that workers who perceived the organisation as less family supportive experienced more work-life conflict and less job satisfaction than employees who perceived their organisation as more family supportive. (Anja-Kristin Abendroth et Laura den Dulk. 2011)

Supportive working environment

The distinction between emotional and instrumental support raises questions about the relationship between them. Research findings suggest that instrumental support in the workplace is not enough to achieve a successful work-life balance (Den Dulk and Peper, 2007; Lyness and Kropf, 2005; Warren and Johnson, 1995). Supervisor and colleague support is crucial for the actual take-up of workplace policies and for managing work and personal life.

Behson (2005) found that emotional support explains more variance in work-life conflict than work-family benefits. (Anja-Kristin Abendroth et Laura den Dulk. 2011)

Improving the gender balance in management could, further, reduce the negative career implications for workers who use flexible working arrangements. The use of positive discrimination is a suitable solution for those with significant work and household responsibilities. Identifying those in the greatest need is, however, easier said than done. Employers may be concerned about negative reactions from other employees, but nevertheless have an ethical obligation to ensure employees with caring responsibilities are able to balance work and life. However, entrusting employers with this task may not currently represent a suitable solution given their focus on retaining existing workplace practice, and flexibility for the employer. (Wheatley, Dan. 2012,. 813-831)

In addition to identifying practices that have the potential to improve work-life facilitation, the current review has considered what makes policy effective in practice, including the notion of potentially negative consequences. Such consequences include reduced employment participation of women, reduced career opportunities for flexible or part-time workers, and reduced access to preferred roles, tasks and opportunities that both use workers' full range of skills, and provide opportunity for development and advancement. Whether framed as unintended consequences or overt discrimination, it is crucial to recognise that work-life policies will only be effective to the extent that workers do not experience economic, social or career penalties with policy use.

Fundamental to a supportive and successful work-life culture is recognition and respect for the responsibilities and commitments of all employees outside work. In this context, assumptions and expectations around gender and care are central. For work-life policies to be truly effective they must be accepted and integrated into the

mainstream for all workers – not simply as a special consideration for working mothers.

Multifaceted policy approaches are needed that set the foundation for change. More inclusive employment regulation, better quality part-time work and a greater policy focus on men's uptake of flexible work are likely to alleviate some of the burdens and causes of work-life conflict across industries – alongside cultural shifts in workplace gender norms. (Skinner, Natalie; Chapman, Janine 2013)

For organizations, improved employee outcomes could in turn positively influence organizational performance thus impacting the firm's bottom line. Studies have demonstrated

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increases in organizational performance, profit, and productivity (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) as well as employee recruitment, retention, and commitment (Galinsky & Johnson, 1998) when work–life initiatives are present. Organizations are diverse in type, size, function, and industry, limiting the types and availability of work–life initiatives. While there are many advantages for organizations to provide work–life initiatives to employees, there are also costs, making it difficult to create a "one-size-fits-all" approach to the creation and application of work–life initiatives (Yasbek, 2004).

While "a one-size-fits-all" approach is unlikely, there is value in the collaborative efforts of individuals, organizations, and government as primary forces in promoting work–life policy development, implementation, and evaluation for the betterment of society as a whole (Munn, 2009). The development of work–life policy has the potential to promote positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization.

A lack of flexibility within organizational and societal level work–life policies toward the needs of all kinds of workers can affect a multitude of factors on the job including productivity, attendance, and ability to learn, all of which are likely to make work less meaningful if lowered. An organization can demonstrate how it cares for its employees by not only offering work–life initiatives that are supportive of the employee work–life balance but also embedding values and practices within the organizational culture that make it acceptable for all employees to use the benefits. To resolve issues of organizational culture and address the work–life needs of employees, it is essential to consider what creates meaningful work for individuals, how that meaningful work is impacted by one's work–life balance, and how work–life balance might be impacted by meaningful work. (Munn, Sunny L. 2013)

Work-life balance benefits

Braun and Peus (2018) analysis found benefits to be one of the main themes throughout the reviews from the "Best Places to Work."

The word "benefits" could be applied to many different organization-provided benefits, but further analysis discovered that more than 80% of the findings were referring to their time benefits or, as the reviewers commonly called them, "perks." Food was the most mentioned time benefit. Comments such as "*lunch every Monday and breakfast every day*" or "*They bring*

in breakfast, lunch and dinner" were extremely common, mentioned in more than 25% of the reviews.

The model integrates authentic leadership and crossover literatures to suggest that followers perceive authentic leaders to better balance their professional and private lives, which in turn enables followers to achieve a positive work–life balance, and ultimately makes them more satisfied in their jobs. (Braun, S. and Peus, C. (2018) 'Crossover of work-life balance perceptions : does authentic leadership matter?', Journal of business ethics., 149 (4). pp. 875-893.)

The first purpose of this qualitative research (*Ross, Intindola, Boje "It Was the Best of Times; It Was the Worst of Times: The Expiration of Work–Life Balance" 2017*) was to better understand how the "best" and "worst" companies approach employees given the hyperconnected nature of today's workplace.

Many other time benefits were mentioned. Free Internet usage was mentioned as an excellent way to stay connected to the outside world, pay bills, check personal email, or even plan a family event (D'Abate, 2005). Other benefits help reduce the stress of a busy work commute: "[company provided] b*us transportation is great to have in the heavy-traffic Bay Area . . .* " Some benefits promote physical and social wellness where employees are able to stay active and interact with their colleagues at a level that is different from their workplace: " . . . *free food, gyms, basketball courts, ping pong tables, pool tables, etc*." "*Very fun workplace with game room and ping pong tables.*" One company even had employees who mentioned perks that helped accomplish common household chores. " . . . *laundry mats . . . for free and much more.*" All of these time benefits are enjoyed by employees at the best places to work but are non-existent in the worst places to work. In the worst places to work, benefits were only mentioned in 7% of the employee reviews. Those that did mention benefits largely mentioned the lack of benefits provided by these companies. The only "perk" that was specifically mentioned was related to merchandise such as discounts or the ability to check out books. (Ross, John P, Melissa L Intindola, et David M Boje. 2017)

How to support a better work-life balance for your employees

Offer flexible and remote working. Workers value employers who empower them to manage their own time.

Encourage managers to focus on productivity rather than hours. Encourage your employers to take breaks, a walk or even work in an entirely different part of the office. Create break-out rooms or set aside spare desks that workers can go to. Sometimes team chatter and phones can be overwhelming and it's healthy to break away for a bit.

Regularly review your allocation of duties to ensure individuals have achievable workloads.

Lead by example and ensure that managers and the senior leadership team enjoy a healthy work-life balance too. Make sure they're leaving the office on time, taking breaks and not emailing workers out of office hours or expecting them to deliver work in unworkable time scales when it isn't urgent.

Give employees time to volunteer. Research shows if workers are allowed the freedom to give back while working, they will generally feel good about themselves and about their workplace.

Reconsider time off. Could you afford to give your staff more time off? Equally, another way to prevent burnout is to force workers to take their time off within the holiday year by not allowing them to carry over holiday or capping how many days they can carry over.

Increase support for parents. Often companies lose great talent because they can't cater to their childcare needs. Ensure the mums and dads in your organisation are getting a better work-life balance, so you don't lose precious expertise. Providing better and equal benefits for maternity, paternity or shared parental leave will encourage all parents to balance their working life and parenthood regardless of their gender.

Perks or no perks? Researches have revealed that while 40% of business owners believe office games and similar benefits are important to employees, just 5% of workers agree. So, if you're considering perks in the office such as ping pong tables, think again. However, there may be additional services that can save employees time and money and alleviate stress. These may include:

- Subsidised gym membership or free fitness classes
- A discount at the dry cleaners
- Massages in the office
- Company cars or support including petrol allowance
- Repairs and maintenance
- Helping staff with their tax returns or tax support if they have any questions.
- Think about what's right for your people and your company, and design experiences personalised to your workforce and your people.

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Want to create a better work-life balance for your employees? Try asking them.

Acknowledge every employee is different. Many of your employees may be desperate to achieve a better work life balance. However, others may feel satisfied with the time they spend working. Some may want to start work later but be happy to finish later too. Others may not mind working extended hours, if it means they can switch off when they get home. Some may be eager to work part time, but just don't know how to approach the matter with their manager. (Fuhl 2020)

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