



## Critical Analysis of Work-Life Balance Concept and Proposal of Evaluation Method

Ladislav Sojka\*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to analyse the concept of Work-Life Balance with emphasis on the definition and content of construct. Based on a review of the literature, the article highlights the diversity of approaches defining the work-life balance (WLB) as well as the lack of a single accepted definition, on which the practitioners and academics community agree. The most problematic term was found to be the term "balance". On the basis of analysed knowledge, the definition of work-life balance is proposed. The definition of WLB is based on presumption that WLB is such a state, that work life quality allows the full potential of a private life to be realized. According to this presumption a definition of work-life balance has been proposed and a formula for the calculation of work-life balance has been formed.

**Keywords:** work-life balance; quality of work life; indicator of work life; domains of life.

**JEL classification:** M12

### Kritična analiza koncepta uravnoveženosti dela in življenja ter predlog metode vrednotenja

**Povzetek:** Namen tega prispevka je analizirati koncept uravnoveženosti dela in življenja s poudarkom na definiciji in vsebini konstrukta. Članek na podlagi pregleda literature poudarja raznolikost pristopov, ki opredeljujejo ravnotežje med poklicnim in zasebnim življenjem (WLB), kot tudi pomanjkanje enotne sprejete opredelitve, s katero se strinjajo praktiki in akademiki. Najbolj problematičen je bil izraz "ravnotežje". Na podlagi analiziranega znanja se predlaga opredelitev ravnovesja med poklicnim in zasebnim življenjem. Opredelitev WLB temelji na domnevi, da je WLB takšno stanje, da kakovost delovnega življenja omogoča uresničitev polnega potenciala zasebnega življenja. V skladu s to domnevo je bila predlagana opredelitev ravnovesja med delom in zasebnim življenjem ter oblikovana formula za izračun ravnotežja med delom in zasebnim življenjem.

**Ključne besede:** ravnovesje med delom in življenjem; kakovost delovnega življenja; kazalnik delovnega življenja; področja življenja.

**JEL klasifikacija:** M12

### 1. Introduction

Work-life balance has always been of interest to the parties involved in any economic activity. At various stages of economic development, this phenomenon was viewed with different emphasis. Currently, there are several factors that push these issues to the

\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., University of Prešov, Faculty of Management, Ul. Konštantínová 16, 08001 Prešov, Slovakia; ladislav.sojka@unipo.sk

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forefront of both employees and employers. There is a considerable amount of intersecting influences, which can be grouped into three areas, namely (Guest 2001):

- changes in the work environment,
- private life influences i.e. change in communities in which individuals live,
- values and preferences of individuals.

The first area is influenced by such factors as implementation of information technologies and the resulting information load, requests from customers for continuous innovation of the products and quick response to the required services, the intensification of work and work over a set number of hours.

In the second area, which is the community in which the individuals are living in, we can also see deterioration in conditions of balance. In particular, we see growth in the number of single individuals, an enormous increase in the number of working women, marriage, double careers, longer working hours, people continue working in the evenings and at home.

The third area has also seen significant changes. The current generation of employees have a different approach towards work, prefers other values and is not willing to express unlimited commitment and loyalty to the organization. The conflict between the demands of work and personal life results in imbalance between work and other life domains (Guest 2001).

The debate over the balance between work and private life is very frequent and many times even passionate, but in most cases, it is without a clear definition of what is the balance between work and private life. Another issue is from what perspective the balance can be judged. It can be from the point of the individual (employee), from the point of the organization in which he/she is employed, or in terms of the whole society. The aim of this paper is to analyse the definitions of balance published by individual authors and create a definition that would be generally acceptable and can serve as the base of WLB measurement. The approach that is used in the analysis and design of definition is perceived in the context of a relationship of employee and employer organization.

## 2. Literature review

One of the main reasons that make practitioners and academicians interested in the issue of work-life balance is that between these two domains there is a relation.

According to Zedecka and Mosier (1990) there are five main models that explain this relation in work-life balance, namely models: segmentation, spill-over, compensation, instrumental and conflicting model.

All mentioned models have a common flaw. None of them defines the concept of balance. The following is a literary review describing the range of views on this issue. It seems to be necessary to critically review and analyse the problem of the definition of the terms and find appropriate definitions and indicators of balance. This is also the aim of this paper's contribution.

Virtually every author who conducted a study on WLB presented a different definition of work-life balance. In accordance with Kirchmeyer (2000) and (Lewis, Rapport and Gambles (2003) the term WLB remains problematic because it over-generalizes roles outside of the working sphere and simplifies the division of the spheres. Greenhaus et al. (2005) report that the definitions are not mutually consistent, and it is therefore very difficult to measure the balance.

In Clark (2000) WLB is defined as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with the minimum of role conflict". Similarly, Voydanoff (2005, p. 825) points out that the inconsistency of the concept of "balance" is causing confusion in the literature.

The definition of Burton (2004) indicates that it is necessary to go further than just simply divide your time in order to see what needs to be done. This means that the individual has the ability to respond to any current situation and has the required allocated time to do it. According to the author, WLB is not static and unchanging - a routine cannot be rigid and fixed.

Kirchmayer (2000) defined WLB as "the achievement of satisfactory experience in all domains of life". It is assumed that the achievement of satisfactory experience in all domains requires that personnel resources, such as energy, time and responsibilities are properly distributed across all domains.

In Amundson (2001) is stated that people need to live their lives according to their own rhythm which is different for every single person. Amundson sees work-life balance surrounded by many areas of life that are reflected by a system of contrasting factors: work and play, physical and spiritual, personal, and social, emotional and intellectual.

Reiter (2007) states that "what most people mean by the balance is less work, more fun." The study (Greenhaus, et. al., 2003) described confirmed that the quality of life of those who are more involved and are satisfied within the family is higher than in those who are more engaged in work as in family life.

To define work-life balance, one must first define what work-life imbalance looks like. Work-Life Balance is not a simple equilibrium to reach. It does not simply mean to devote the same time to work and to personal life. WLB can change over time. Balance looks different when an individual is married as opposed when one is single. The balance is set differently when one is at the start of one's career, as opposed to when one's about to retire. According to the author, the most appropriate definition are two key concepts relating to each individual; that is success and pleasure. These two concepts are two sides of the same coin. It is not possible to achieve a single value, without the individual having achieved the second value.

A considerable number of authors who study WLB try to ensure balance without being based on any definition. For example: Harris (2012) recommends achieving a balance by defining boundaries between professional and private life, although notes that this line is very unclear. It is recommended to create a routine that will form the transition between work and personal life, to let the other know the delineation of the hours in which one does not work anymore.

Kalliath and Brough (2012) also note that despite considerable interest in WLB in recent years, there is no single generally acceptable definition yet. The lack of a definition has prevented a full-fledged examination of the issue; the introduction of measures of WLB levels and ultimately, the creation of programs to ensure balance. The authors also provide a brief overview of definitions from different points of view.

### **3. Analysis of WLB from the perspective of employer's organizations.**

It is explicitly as well as implicitly clear from designation "work-life balance" that it is supposed balance between work (or work life) and life itself. Some authors use the term "work-family life". In this case private life is reduced to family life. Private life, however, as will be seen below, is composed of multiple domains.

By using the term Work-Life Balance we try to express balance between domain work life and others domain of life, because the life as whole consist of many domains, and work life is one of the domains. In order to find a "balance", it would be appropriate to replace the term "work" in composed term "Work-Life Balance" by term working life. The second part of the WLB concept "life", or "family life" is better to be replaced by the term "non-work life", which covers all others domain except "Work Life". The term used currently, WLB (work-life balance), would be transformed into Work Life-Non-Work Life Balance (WL-NWLB), which better expresses the essence of the whole issue.

In justification of the proposal, it is necessary to constitute the definition on the term of life. There are several definitions of the word "life". In this paper, the definition used was found in the dictionary and it characterizes life in two dimensions, such as:

- "Compendium of phenomena peculiar to living organisms", and
- "Basic, essential expression of life," which means "action, activity, vigour, vitality, life force" (Slovak dictionary, 1995, pp. 995-996).

Life as a whole can be considered as a mosaic array comprising a number of specific domains in which the individual concerned participates.

Domains of life are components of life associated with certain places, things, activities, people, social roles, or features sense of self.

In relation to the issue under examination, it is possible to break down the domain from which the life of an individual comprises into the domain of working life and other domains – the domain non-working or private life. Number of other domains can be considerable, depending on the level selected for investigation. It can be for instance the domain of social, family, the religious, spiritual, sporting life, or even other domains.

As the guiding motive examined under the present paper is the domain of working life, we will be paying further attention to this domain. The basic idea for this investigation is the fact which incidentally forms the core of the presented approach; that the organization has the opportunity and the right to directly affect only the domain of working life and the components that belong to it. This influence should be carried out so as to comply with established standards to working life and in a way that working life does not interfere negatively with non-work life or private life. In other words, the employees still have the ability to full-fill a non-work life. It is always up to the individuals on how they deal with their private life, it is based on one's preferences and options which the community in which the person lives provides for. This finding is the basis for the definition of balance.

Based on the previously cited findings, it is possible to create a definition of the work-life balance. It should be noted that based on those findings, it is possible to establish four types of balance, although in two cases it is actually a definition of imbalance. This concerns the following definitions of balance.

*The absolute work-life balance* is an employee perceived state in which none of the characteristics (indicators) of work life negatively affect non work life, by its insufficient level or undesirable penetration into private life. (Definition proposed by author)

*Work-life balance with compensation* is an employee perceived state when there are some characteristics (indicators) of quality of working life that do not reach the required level and therefore can negatively affect private life, either its insufficient level or undesirable penetration into private life and this negative impact on some characteristics is compensated by a higher (positive) level of other characteristics and this compensation is accepted by the employee.

In other words, the lack of a level of one characteristic of working life is compensated by an excess of another characteristic or by other extra benefits.

#### *Notes to the above definition*

There is no balance in the company as a general phenomenon, it's always about the individual sense, the perception of the individual (Štefko, et.al., 2016). E.g. working in 12-hour shifts can be unacceptable for one employee (undesirable penetration into private life), in another case, the employee may be well suited with regard to its other activities.

Work during days off and holidays can disrupt the balance, even if it is compensated by the employer surcharges for one employee, while another employee on the contrary, can accept this work with financial compensation or time without negative feelings.

On the other hand, it is possible that the employer ensures all the characteristics (indicators) for the working life to the required standard (mandatory) level and above a certain level it obligatory provides other benefits. E.g. health extras, legal services, childcare, free coal, etc. In this case, the benefits are not compensation of the poor level of basic characteristics of working life, but the extra benefit that the employee receives because he/she is working in an organization. This is an imbalance, but with some surplus of benefit, i.e. a positive imbalance. Based on the above considerations a definition of positive imbalance can be defined.

*Positive imbalance* is by which an individual perceives a state in which some indicators of work life have a level over the obligatory level which is attributed to the workplace and thus the overall balance exceeds the required standard level for the workplace and therefore have a positive impact on non-working life.

On the other hand, the organization can also behave in such a way that indicators of working life can adversely affect private life. The intensity of work in a particular workplace for example can be above the normal standards. In this case, work excessively takes away the force of the individual which results in him/her needing longer time to recover in private life. Financial reward at the workplaces does not reach the standard which is normal or expected for the type of job; then the worker must seek additional sources of revenue, which again adversely affects its potential private life. If insufficient levels of these essential characteristics are not compensated in any way by the employer, then there is a negative imbalance.

Based on the above arguments a definition of negative imbalance can be created.

*Negative imbalance* is by which an individual perceives a state, when some of the indicators of working life negatively affect private life, and even if there is some compensation, it does not compensate the negatively perceived state.

The main principles used in formulating the above mentioned definition therefore is to preserve the potential of the individual's private life and to exploit the potential of private life in the various domains to the own discretion of the individual with respect to his bio - psychological foundation, family, social and societal preferences.

As was indicated in the introduction, providing of WLB involves three entities; organization in which the individual is employed, the individual and the society (community). The third party, namely the society (state), plays a significant role in influencing the private domains. Other factors such as quality of life are measured by various international organizations. This includes for example the following indicators:

- State of the economic system and its consequences on the possibilities of applying active working members of society in the development of material and spiritual values.
- Method of remuneration for work in accordance with its comprehensive performance criteria and economic efficiency, as the economic base to ensure the standard of living and basic needs of people.
- The employment and social security in possible unemployment.
- Level of care for the health of the society and how they have security in case of illness.
- Conditions for work and social functioning of in-validate disabled people and the possibility of self-realization as full citizens.
- Conceptual level environmental program of the company and its implementation in practical environmental protection - the state of the natural and social components of the environment.
- Social status and level of family care and upbringing of children and care for children without family background.
- Terms of education - primary, vocational, higher education and lifelong learning and the possibilities for personal development.
- Ensuring adequate care for older citizens.
- Options of liberal social activities of people and their participation in social life. The level of democracy in social relations and political system and the state of tolerance and the possibility of a multicultural society.
- Security status, peaceful life of the people and the state to ensure protection of human life against aggression and violence.
- State security and protection of fundamental human rights.
- Free time options and the level of its possible applications for rest, recovery forces, cultural and other valuable interests that serve to develop personality.
- Care for people who are dependent on various forms of social assistance.
- State of social morality and its impact on human solidarity.
- The level of social security of people and their state of reflection in the feeling of security and satisfaction.

Ensuring an adequate level of quality of those indicators is beyond the possibilities of individuals and organizations. But the organization should monitor the level of individual indicators of life and, where possible, to compensate for its inadequate level of activities within their budget.

#### 4. The quantitative assessment of balance

The question is how to evaluate the level of balance. Balance is considered to occur when all indicators of working life have the required standard level and thus potential private life is retained in full. It is therefore necessary to establish:

- a.) a set of indicators (characteristics) of working life.
- b.) standard (reference) level of individual indicators,
- c.) determine the importance of each indicator.

The level of balance for a specific employee is then necessary to determine the true value of characteristics (indicators) for the specific workplace.

In this context it should be noted that the quality level of work life is affected by a number of factors such as the length of time worked and possible physical workload, work environment, social relations, work content, and so forth. At this point there is no single universally accepted (standardized) set of indicators of quality of working life. Literary research shows a multiple set of indicators of working life. The most famous is the Walton file. Similar files are also published by other authors. The author of this paper studied a sample of 721 Slovak enterprises and found the following 10 relevant characteristics "(Sojka, 2014)". These are the following characteristics: (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of quality of work life

Characteristics (indicators)	Score
Financial remuneration	6,1
Content of work	5,6
Workload .....	5,3
Working conditions	4,9
Social relations	4,6
Firm location	4,5
Job position and opportunities for personal development	4,3
Company benefits	4,2
Corporate culture and its impact on working life	4,1
Company image	4,06

Source: own processing

The table above gives the average value (score) reached at the above-mentioned set of 721 Slovak industrial companies. A seven-point Likert scale was used to determine the impact of individual quality indicators and work-life balance. The final set of 10 indicators are the ones in which the average points achieved was 4 or more.

That set of indicators has been established for the Slovak business environment. Other authors, for example Walton (1976) set a different, although similar set of eight indicators. These are as follows:

- Adequate and fair remuneration
- Healthy and safe working environment
- Options for personal development
- Work certainty
- Social integration
- Good management
- Work life
- Social significance of work.

Another important step is to determine the required (reference) level of individual indicators. The standard level of individual indicators should be set depending on the nature of the indicator as a verbal description in the case of corporate culture indicator, or as a quantitative indicator, for instance salary, working hours, daily workload, and so forth. For example, the salary of machine operators in engineering production in Slovakia should normally be in the range of 750-800 euros per month.

It is clear that different indicators have a different effect on working life. Therefore, for each indicator of work life, it is necessary to determine the coefficient of importance of each indicator. Determination of the coefficient of importance can be done, for example, by expert methods.

If we know individual indicators and their standard values, if we know coefficients of importance for individual indicators and if we know actual values of individual indicators for a particular job, then it is possible to calculate the balance indicator  $B_i$ . The calculation of this indicator is based on the definition of the balance of working and non-working life, i.e., the balance occurs when all the characteristics (indicators) of working life are at required (reference) levels established for the job, and if that one is not at the required level, it is compensated by other indicators and the individual (employee) accepts this compensation.

The resulting level of balance between work life and non-work life  $B_i$  is calculated from the equation

$$B_i = \sum \left( \frac{c_{1a}}{c_{1r}} \cdot q_1 + \frac{c_{2a}}{c_{2r}} \cdot q_2 + \dots + \frac{c_{na}}{c_{nr}} \cdot q_n \right) \cdot 100 [\%] \quad (1)$$

Where:

$B_i$  - indicator of balance of working life and nonworking life.

$c_{1a}$ ;  $c_{2a}$ ;  $c_{na}$  - the actual level of characteristics of working life  $c_1$ ;  $c_2$  ...  $c_n$

$c_{1r}$ ;  $c_{2r}$ ;  $c_{nr}$  - reference level of characteristics working life  $c_1$ ;  $c_2$  ...  $c_n$

$q_1$ ;  $q_2$  ...  $q_n$  - importance of indicator.

In the case of absolute balance value  $B_i$  would be equal to one or 100 %.

In case of a negative imbalance, the  $B_i$  value ranges from 0 to less than 100 %.

In the case of a positive imbalance, the value  $B_i$  is more than 100 %.

The equation (1) is valid in cases where exist a positive correlation between the level indicator of working life and the level (value) of the respective characteristics as in equation (1).

This applies for example with characteristic "financial remuneration".

In cases where there is a negative correlation between the level of working life and the level (value) individual respective characteristics, is valid equation (2).

$$B_i = \sum \left( \frac{c_{1r}}{c_{1a}} \cdot q_1 + \frac{c_{2r}}{c_{2a}} \cdot q_2 + \dots + \frac{c_{nr}}{c_{na}} \cdot q_n \right) \cdot 100 [\%] \quad (2)$$

Examples include e.g. loudness, reference (standard) noise level is 50 db and a real level is i.e. 80 db.

In assessing the balance of the work life – non work life, on the base of the presumption mentioned before, if all the real characteristics are at desired level (reference level), indicator value  $B_i$  is 100%, it is a case of absolute balance and thus the full potential of non- working life for employees remains unchanged.

If the value of  $B_i$  is less than 100% then some of actual characteristics do not reach desired level (standard level), and it is reduced potential of non-working life.

If the value  $B_i$  is greater than 100%, there is a positive imbalance, and it means that some of the characteristics reach values better than those which are requested for the workplace and thus contribute to boosting the potential of non-working life in the percentage in which the calculated value of the indicator  $B_i$  exceeds 100.%

## 5. Conclusion

The paper analyses the issue of the work-life balance, primarily in terms of the influence of the employee's organization. The paper in particular notes the serious lack of previous research, which results in absence of a generally accepted definition of WLB and the lack of metrics for its evaluation. The proposed definition is based on the assumption that a state of equilibrium between working and private life is considered to be a condition where professional life does not negatively interfere with private life and the potential for

non-work life remains for employee in full volume. The question of utilization of the non-work life potential is not answered as it is a problem of the managerial psychology and sociology. A model calculating the balance is based on this particular set of assumptions.

The proposals set out in this paper are intended as a contribution to the discussion on the issue of WLB, with the aim of reaching a consensus on acceptable definitions and metrics of WLB.

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