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Work-life balance as a way of managing people in contemporary organizations

Abstract: This paper is an attempt to explain and revisit the concept of work-life balance. The aim of this article is to systematically review existing literature and deepen knowledge about work-life balance (WLB) and its relationship with other forms of reconciliation of private life and work. An effort is made to cover in a conceptual framework the vast knowledge of work-life balance. It highlights the evolution of that notion and puts it together with the notion of work-life integration. Specifically, the two main perspective of work-life balance issues are presented: employee's and employer's ones. Moreover, different practices of WLB are presented and put in the context of nowadays social and legal challenges.

Keywords: work-life balance, work-life integration

Work-life balance jako sposób na zarządzanie ludźmi we współczesnych organizacjach

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą wyjaśnienia i ponownego spojrzenia na koncepcję równowagi między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym. Celem artykułu jest systematyczny przegląd istniejącej literatury i pogłębienie wiedzy na temat równowagi między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym (WLB) i jej związku z innymi formami godzenia życia prywatnego i pracy. Podjęto wysiłek usystematyzowania rozległej wiedzy na temat równowagi między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym. Zaprezentowano ewolucję tego pojęcia i zestawiono je z koncepcją integracji życia zawodowego i prywatnego. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono dwóm głównym perspektywom w kontekście WLB: pracowniczej i perspektywie pracodawcy. Ponadto zaprezentowano różne praktyki WLB i osadzono je w kontekście współczesnych wyzwań społecznych i prawnych.

Slowa kluczowe: równowaga między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym, upłynnienie granic pomiędzy życiem zawodowym a prywatnym

JEL: M54

Introduction

"Live to work or work to live?" This is a question many modern employees ask themselves. For many of them, work ends when they close their computer or leave their workplace. However, for others, work continues into the evenings, weekends and even during holidays. Some employees find this acceptable, others do not. According to a survey conducted by Forbes (Pratt and Howard, 2023) among 1,175 British employees, as many as 54% of them would accept a lower-paid job in exchange for a better WLB level. Employees are increasingly aware of the importance of positive working conditions to maintain a happy life. A recent study (Weissang, 2023) conducted by the World Economic Forum showed that 34% of employees would not agree to working conditions that prevented them from achieving WLB, and 48% would leave their job if it prevented them from enjoying their lives. Moreover, there are organizations that prioritize the well-being of their employees by implementing solutions that promote work-life balance (WLB). Conversely, there are those for whom an employee's importance is measured solely by the benefits his or her work brings to the organization and no balance is believed to be important. It is worth emphasizing that employers alone cannot guarantee their employees a full balance between professional and personal life. Individuals must take responsibility for changing their approach to work and personal life. However, there are many ways organizations can help their members find and maintain the balance that works best for them. The concept of WLB is not new, but it has recently gained importance again. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons was the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, when remote work became widespread on a massive scale (Bocean, Popescu, Varzaru, Avram and Iancu, 2023; Furmańczyk and Kaźmierczyk, 2020). It turned out that combining work from home and private life was very difficult. Another reason for the increasing importance of the WLB topic is the increasingly frequent information about fatigue, poor mental state of employees and burnout. Therefore, there is a need to re-examine approaches and concepts related to work-life balance, as well as identify the most effective WLB practices from the point of view of both the employee and the employer.

That is why, the aim of this paper is to systematically review existing literature and deepen knowledge about work-life balance (WLB) and its relationship with other forms of reconciliation of private life and work. An effort is made to cover in a conceptual framework the vast knowledge of work-life balance. It highlights the evolution of that notion and puts it together with the notion of work-life integration. The author will analyse two main perspective of work-life balance issues are presented: employee's and employer's ones. The author will also explain why it is an essential issue in HRM of contemporary organizations. Moreover, various concepts of WLB will be outlined, along with examples of good organizational practices related to WLB based on Polish and foreign literature on the subject from Researchgate, GoogleScholar and Ebsco. Moreover, data from reports of Gallup, EIGE and Runn will be also analysed. The article consists of a theoretical part in which the author analysed the literature on WLB to show the meaning of the concept, its evolution and related concepts. The second part of the article discusses WLB practices, taking the perspective of both the employer and the employee, which allowed for obtaining a more complete picture of the use of WLB tools in contemporary organizations.

1. Work-life balance (WLB) concept and its development

Demographic changes, increasing diversity of employees, intense professional life in which work is the most important value, as well as the governmental policies have a significant impact on the lives of people performing various professions and working in various organizations. Employees are increasingly concerned about whether their work leaves them time and energy to pursue their interests and responsibilities outside the workplace. It can be clearly seen that people caring for children and the elderly have special needs and expectations in this regard. More and more employers notice this and offer flexible forms to all employees, not only those with caring responsibilities (Kaźmierzyk and Chinalska, 2018). Of course, one may wonder whether any good organizational practices in balancing professional and personal life tangibly change the lives of employees and their families. Another aspect worth considering is the extent to which employees themselves manage to reconcile personal needs with the policies and complex goals of the company.

Work-life balance (WLB) is a very broad concept in the context of human resources management in an organization and often refers to finding the right balance between various aspects and roles in a person's life. Although there are different views and concepts regarding WLB, they are usually related to the search for and maintaining overall balance in various spheres of an individual's life. Recent years have brought rapid technological development (Shelest-Szumilas, 2022; Tomb, 2023), which has initiated discussions about the future of work. Various, sometimes extreme, scenarios emerged. Some – predicting a large increase in unemployment caused by the development of advanced technologies and treating employees as an unnecessary expense, others – suggesting that no machine can replace a human being who – with his/her experience, knowledge and ability to respond to changing circumstances – is the most valuable resource of the organization.

The term "work-life balance" was first used by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal (1964), but in the following years this concept was used very seldom. Interestingly, the first WLB programs existed already in the 1930s, but they were not popular. In 1977, Kanter in her book "Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy" first raised the issue of work-life balance and stated that it is one of the most important aspects of organizational functioning. This concept forces organizations to take into account and respect not only the work environment, but also the employee's family. By the 1980s, the importance of work-life balance was already being recognized by organizations around the

world, and many multinational companies had introduced policies and measures to safeguard employee rights. Moreover, provisions regarding WLB and related principles were implemented into the organizational culture. The first WLB programs and good practices focused mainly on supporting women with children. In the mid-1990s, work-life balance became one of the fundamental issues for individuals and an essential part of the strategy of all organizations around the world (Bird, 2006; Powell, Greenhaus, Allen and Johnson 2019). The growing awareness of the importance of the problem has resulted in a significant increase in attempts to search for adequate, satisfactory solutions related to professional and private life. In the academic sphere, this interest has resulted in many research projects and publications. And on an organizational level – many new WLB programs addressed to employees. Currently, they are intended not only for women who are mothers, but for all employees and it refers to other aspects of private life than just family life. Nowadays, the concept of work-life balance is nothing new, and due to the importance attached to it, it is also widely discussed by both business theoreticians and practitioners (Madogwhe and Omogero, 2023).

2. The notion of Work-life balance

The term "work-life balance" (WLB), which refers to the balance between work and personal life, was preceded by the term "work-family balance" (WFB). It is often defined as the extent to which individuals are equally committed to – and equally satisfied with – their work and family roles (Greenhaus and Singh, 2003). However, the term did not catch on because it focused on workers with family responsibilities and excluded everyone else. Other closely related terms that are often used in the literature of the subject are "work-life integration" (WLI), "work-life articulation" (WLA), and "work-life life harmonization" (WLH, "reconciling, harmonizing work and personal life") (Crompton and Brockmann, 2007; Lewis and Cooper, 2005). The term WLI assumes a holistic approach and the belief that these two spheres of life interpenetrate, as well as the relative ease of increasing an individual's involvement in one sphere through positive experiences and participation in the other (Lewis and Cooper, 2005). Such a comprehensive vision is attractive, although at the same time it may turn out to be dangerous due to the lack of clear boundaries between two "lives": professional and private. The terms WLA and WLH assume equal status and importance of personal and professional life. Moreover, they emphasize the need to skilfully combine both spheres of life, rather than interpenetrate them, in order to achieve overall satisfaction. In the table 1 the differences between WLB and WLI, as well as their advantages and disadvantages are shown.

Work-life balance	Work-life integration
- separation of private and professional life	- adapting work duties to lifestyle
- maintaining specific working hours	- work at selected hours during the day
- turning off the company mobile phone and	- use of modern technologies
computer after working hours	
Advantages	
- finding time for family, friends, hobbies and	- flexibility and free time management
passions	- possibility of combining work with e.g. child
- certainty of uninterrupted rest during free time	care
(holidays, weekends)	
Disadvantages	
- low flexibility	- feeling of constantly being at work
- difficulty in establishing a rigid division between	- difficulties in establishing clear and transparent
work and private life	rules of cooperation with the employer
Source: own study based on (Kostro 2018)	

Table 1. Work-life balance and work-life integration

Source: own study based on (Kostro, 2018).

Most often, WLB is defined as an individual's balanced orientation towards fulfilling various life roles and the relationships between these roles. In the literature on the subject you can find many different concepts relating to the concept of WLB. It is also worth noting that the use of the term "balance" is sometimes controversial as it may suggest that work is not part of life and may also encourage the use of short-term solutions that do not take into account fundamental issues and place the responsibility on the individual to reconcile work and life home (Burke, 2004; Lewis and Cooper, 2005). Other controversies surrounding the term "balance" stem from the assumption that work and private life are separate spheres with no connection to each other, and establishing a balance between them assumes that equal time should be devoted to both. For this reason, some researchers prefer the term WLI, because it emphasizes the positive interdependence between the public and private spheres and does not separate the individual from the broad context in which he or she functions (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Below are some of the most important definitions and terms of WLB.

Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) emphasize that work-life balance is an individual's orientation to different life roles, the "interrole" phenomenon. They also point out that a specific measure of WLB is satisfaction with fulfilling many roles in life. They define it as the degree to which a person is committed to – and equally satisfied with – his or her professional role and family role. In their view, there are three elements of "balance": time balance, commitment balance, and satisfaction balance (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003). On the other hand, Kirchmeyer (2000) perceives work-life balance as achieving satisfying experiences in all areas of life, and this requires personal resources such as energy, time and commitment, which must be well distributed between individual aspects of life. The individual himself is responsible for achieving his own satisfaction by making good use of his own resources of energy, time and commitment, while organization or state support are not mentioned at all as having an impact

on the level of satisfaction (Loehr and Schwartz, 2003). However, Clark (2000) defines worklife balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimal role conflict. Her WLB concept assumes that people cross the boundaries between work and leisure every day, and this process is completely natural, because people are shaped by their surroundings and at the same time shape them themselves. According to Fleetwood (2006), work-life balance is about people having control over when, where and how they work. The responsibility for achieving this balance lies with individuals, allowing them control over the work-related aspect of their lives. Controlling time, space, and work methods (at least partially) results in improved productivity and increased satisfaction (Cruz, Sengco and Gadin 2022).

The work-life balance is associated with an individual's belief that work and non-work activities are compatible and support the harmonious development in line with the current life priorities of that person (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). Work and life are therefore complementary spheres of life, not competing ones. Together, they provide an integrated vision of an individual's life plan, which equally encompasses personal and professional development (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020; Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva, 2019).

3. The importance of work-life balance

There has been significant growth in employment over the last few decades. This has resulted in increasingly noticeable competition between co-workers, increased pressure and demands from organizations that expect more and more from their employees and at the same time offer little security and compensation in exchange for working in an unfavourable environment. For many workers, both men and women, their lives are becoming more and more difficult and complicated. The increasing demands at work are accompanied by family and personal burdens, as well as involvement in social activities or pursuing passions and interests. Therefore, to retain employees and maximize their performance, it is increasingly important that organizations recognize the need for employees to achieve work-life balance. This increased pressure has impacted the lives of the organization's employees in many different ways. Not only does it harm social relationships, but it also causes many physical and mental illnesses such as heart problems, weakened immune system, muscle stiffness, exhaustion, burnout, nervousness, depression, etc. Increasing working hours mean that members of the organization have less time to pursue in other areas of life. If an employee is not mentally cared for, satisfied or balanced in his or her actions, he or she will not be able to perform his or her professional duties with due care and attention (Sirgy and Lee, 2018).

Unpredictable changes taking place in the world around us mean that an increasing number of employers are beginning to notice that the balance and quality of life of their employees are one of the most important challenges related to human resources management in the organization. Leading employers in various industries increasingly notice and realize that the balanced functioning of employees in the professional and private spheres, satisfaction, and development are key components of an effective strategy of the entire organization. In practice, improving the quality of working conditions is a difficult challenge. There is no doubt, however, that many managers recognize the need to change and implement practices that will facilitate achieving balance between various spheres of employees' lives, which will translate into improved organizational performance (Work-life balance oczami przesiębiorcy i pracownika, 2019).

WLB practices are formal and informal activities that increase personal autonomy in managing one's work and family life. The literature shows that the use of WLB practices, on the one hand, creates positive attitudes among employees (Koon, 2022; Onken-Menke, Nüesch and Kröll, 2017), and on the other hand, alleviates the negative effects of work, such as stress (Allen, 2001) and burnout and an emotional exhaustion (Deery and Jago, 2015). A satisfied and well-functioning employee not only performs his daily work with the utmost care, but is also able to avoid potentially emerging problems. Work-life balance programs not only help improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and prevent important information from leaking outside the organization, but also reduce costs and have a positive impact on the company's overall results. It is very important that managers and human resources professionals in an organization understand the importance of work-life balance (Easton, Van Laar and Marlow-Vardy, 2013).

4. WLB in the organization – the employer's perspective

Nowadays, members of various organizations often operate under constant pressure. It is either self-induced or forced by the organization. The employee feels that he has to climb the ladder of success, compete with his colleagues and show the world that he is the best. This approach creates pressure. So people try to juggle their personal, family and professional lives. They take their unfinished work home and instead of spending time with loved ones, resting, or pursuing hobbies, they work late and come to work the next day feeling tired, anxious and depressed. On the other hand, organizations constantly remind employees that they must achieve their goals and meet deadlines, because only in this way will they ensure a top position for themselves and their company. A balanced work environment and a people-oriented organizational culture are not only helpful to employees in various aspects of their functioning, but also provide measurable benefits for the company (Zucker, 2017). Implementing work-life balance provides an excellent opportunity to consult with employees to review jobs, responsibilities and their rights, which in turn can help develop innovative and supportive practices that respond to emerging organizational deficiencies. On the one hand, such consultations can help meet the needs of individual employees, which will translate into increased commitment and satisfaction. On the other hand, it allows you to build an organization that is valued by employees and which they do not want to leave. Thanks to this, the organization builds its image as a "good employer" and reduces costs resulting from employee turnover (EIGE, 2015). The most common WLB practices usually include: flexible working hours, remote work, part-time work, task-based work, cumulative working hours, jobsharing, offering childcare and/or elder care, IT, technological and financial support, onsite and online support services, parental leave and employee assistance programs (Gallup, 2023; Randstad, 2022). It is obvious that not all of the above practices are implemented by all organizations at all times and available to all employees. However, employers can be very flexible in implementing them, which may contribute to improving work-life balance. WLB practices implemented in leading organizations around the world will be characterized below. Possibility of remote or hybrid work (home office). Not every organization and not every profession can work from home, but the experience of the pandemic has shown that it is possible. Regardless the legal norm, many companies (e.g. VW, Grant Thorntone) are introducing the possibility of remote work, e.g. 1-2 days a week, which allows you to spend more time with your loved ones, indulge your passions, and fulfil non-professional obligations:

- Flexible working hours. In many positions, working fixed hours (e.g. 8 a.m. 4 p.m., 9 a.m. 5 p.m.) is not a good solution from the point of view of performance. More and more companies understand that one day an employee may want to work, for example, from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., and another day from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. As long as he fulfils his duties 100%, working hours should not matter. This makes it much easier for him to maintain work-life balance.
- 2. Integration meetings with the participation of relatives and the so-called family days. In addition to traditional trips and integration events, more and more employers (e.g. VW) also involve their employees' families and friends in the life of the company. Thanks to this, they do not have to choose, for example, between meeting with colleagues or going out with their loved ones.

- 3. Promoting physical activity and taking care of employees' health. Employers (e.g. Grant Thorntone) are increasingly willing to organize yoga or fitness classes in their offices, offer free fruit and even dietary catering. An important benefit is paid private medical care and a sports card.
- 4. Satisfaction surveys and individual meetings with employees. Employers (e.g. Sumitomo) are increasingly willing to measure the level of satisfaction of their employees. Both through general, anonymous surveys, as well as individual meetings and conversations with employees. One of the most important issues discussed during such meetings is WLB.
- 5. Organizing and paying for training, courses and conferences. A good employer should care about the development of its employees and be open to their initiative. Thanks to this, employees feel that they are constantly developing, feel more satisfied and fulfilled, and it is easier for them to avoid burnout. Moreover, thanks to the employer taking into account employees' requests and suggestions, it gives them a sense of organizational agency and co-decision making, leading to increased satisfaction.
- 6. Workation. Although it may seem that this is an impossible solution in a world full of competition, there are companies that, wanting to take care of the well-being of their employees, especially after the pandemic, decide to introduce workation, i.e. a combination of work and holidays. This term defines vacation leave during which the employee performs professional work remotely. Unlike a home office, the employee works in a typical resting place. Formally, the employee is not on vacation, but performs his or her job duties remotely, to the same extent as he/she would do from the office.

The organizational WLB practices analysed above do not exhaust all the possibilities, because each organization, knowing the needs of its employees, can offer specific sustainable solutions tailored to the employees' expectations.

5. Work-life balance in the organization – the employee's perspective

For many people, home is a substitute for heaven on earth, where they can rest and relax, which allows them to function efficiently in other areas of life. However, due to the imbalance between professional and personal life, it has become an additional place of professional work. In order to be satisfied and to perform their duties efficiently and consciously, every person needs a proper balance between what is professional and what is personal. An employee who acts sustainably is more likely to perform better at work and can thus bring benefits to his or her organization. It has begun to be recognized that there are new ways to make work to " function", enabling both employers and employees to achieve their goals.

Employees increasingly value flexible working conditions and the ability to work anywhere and anytime. Research results show that flexibility is a key element of work efficiency (Weissang, 2023). It makes employees more engaged in their tasks and determined to work towards the success of their organization. In organizations that have introduced a flexible approach to work (e.g. remote or hybrid work), there is less employee turnover. It is obvious that remote/hybrid work is not a solution free from disadvantages. A problem that may arise is the abuse of available modern technological solutions. Employees may even be glued to company's electronic devices that will enable them to answer calls and respond to e-mails almost anywhere in the world. This may translate into a reduction in personal quality of life and an imbalance between professional and personal life. This approach may have serious consequences in the insufficient satisfaction of personal, family, mental and health needs.

Work-life balance is a very important issue because many of us struggle in organizations with time pressure, performance pressure, and the difficult economic situation in many countries, may lead to increased unemployment and, consequently, even greater pressure on employees (Fagan, Lyonette, Smith and Saldaña-Tejeda, 2012) Therefore, all initiatives related to reconciling work and private life will bring even greater benefits to both employees and employers, as well as influence the development and increase of company efficiency. Introducing good WLB practices not only increases productivity and improves employee wellbeing, but also leads to reductions in costs related to employee absenteeism, turnover and recruitment of new employees. The motivation and morale of employees also improve and they become more loyal to the organization. The research results (Gallup, 2023) clearly indicate that the organization's attention to WLB translates into less stress and tension among employees, and also builds a healthier and safer work environment. Employees want their employers to notice that in addition to work, they also have a life that includes their family, friends, hobbies, and social involvement. Employees who do not function in a balanced work environment often struggle with stress and dissatisfaction, which reduces their commitment to their work. The problem of work-life balance is one of the main reasons for quitting a job. Research results (Memon, 2023) show that large companies are more willing to implement WLB practices, but this does not mean that small and medium-sized organizations do not care about the sustainable functioning of employees. To sum up, more and more companies notice that creating conditions for sustainable functioning of employees.

6. Individual strategies to help achieve WLB

In the literature on the subject (Rybak and Szymczak, 2016; Rzepka, 2016; Wątor, 2020), as well as in the practice of managing organizations, there can be found a number of tips on behaviours that support achieving work-life balance. The most frequently proposed strategies include:

- Moving away from perfectionism at work. Performing tasks very well, rather than perfectly, is often sufficient from an organizational point of view. Tasks are to be completed within a specified time and with attention to quality. Closing the tasks and completing them in a specific sequence make easier to maintain work-life balance.
- 2. Being offline. Modern technologies make work much easier and save time. However, it is worth asking yourself whether it is necessary to browse Facebook or Instagram multiple times or whether you need to answer every phone call. At work and in your free time, it is worth trying if possible to use your smartphone as little as possible and appreciate the present moment. You can make it easier by turning off the notification sound or placing the phone face down.
- Physical activity. Regularly devoting 30-40 minutes to exercising, running or your favourite sport reduces your susceptibility to stress and prevents burnout. Moreover, energy levels and commitment to tasks increase.
- 4. Breaking the routine. As humans, we tend to fall into patterns and repeat the same actions thoughtlessly. It is therefore worth considering whether changes in behaviour are necessary to make an individual's life more balanced.
- 5. Defining priorities and focusing on them. One should honestly consider and define what you need and what you want to achieve. Defining priorities allows you not to waste time on matters that are less important or not urgent. If we do not focus on our task during work, it will be necessary to do it at home, and this will disturb work-life balance.
- 6. Hobby, passion, interests. It is important to have interests in life that allow you to break away from routine, in addition to your work and responsibilities. Cultivating your hobby increases your sense of overall life satisfaction and has a positive impact on your functioning in areas other than your interests.
- 7. Relationships with other people. It is a truism to say that man is a social being. However, many people, absorbed in their professional duties, forget about maintaining close relationships with people and limiting them to a minimum. This negatively affects satisfaction and disturbs sustainable functioning.

8. Rest on days off. Vacation allows the employee to rest, gain strength and break away from everyday duties. Therefore, answering the phone or checking emails on days off does not contribute to this. It is necessary to define priorities and set boundaries. If the work performed requires contact with superiors or subordinates, the rules should be clearly established.

Work-life balance is associated with greater employee engagement and job satisfaction. Therefore, organizational WLB practices are beneficial for employees, their physical and mental health, interpersonal relations, development, learning process, triggering creativity, and also have a positive impact on employees' families (Surzykiewicz, 2019).

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to systematically review the existing literature and deepen the understanding of work-life balance (WLB) and related concepts relating to the reconciliation of private life and work. On the one hand, the author tried to systematize existing approaches, and on the other, she analysed the evolution of this concept. The most important thing from a cognitive point of view is that particular attention is paid to two main perspectives in the context of WLB: employee and employer. The analysis of the literature on the subject is not free from limitations. The author is aware that it is possible to inadvertently omit articles that may not be included in this article. Moreover, only works in Polish and English were taken into account. For this reason, the systematic review did not include works in other languages, which is one of the limitations of the conclusions presented in the study.

The literature analysis presented in the article shows the importance and importance of achieving work-life balance by an individual. Therefore, further scientific exploration of this issue is necessary. Empirical research on the determinants of WLB should take into account both the employee's and the employer's perspective. However, the findings cannot be generalized and the results must be interpreted in light of changing context and economic conditions. WLB research that takes into account differences in age, gender and culture may become a particular area of interest. Employees of different ages and genders may define their WLB needs completely differently. The cultural context is also very important, because different cultures perceive "work", "family" and "balance" differently.

Systematizing the understanding of WLB also has practical implications. In the context of human resources management, it may allow for a more conscious understanding, planning and implementation of practices that, being based on the employees' point of view, may prove to be more effective. This is especially important in the context of the increasing diversity of

organizations in a constantly changing environment. However, it should be emphasized, that regardless of the literature findings, empirical research or the practices implemented by organizations for WLB presented in the article, the most important thing is the employee's desire to achieve a stable balance between professional and private life.

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