

Research proposal on the outcomes of Work-life balance in Spain and Iran

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the outcomes of Work-Life Balance (WLB) in Middle East society culture and compare the results to a European culture. Indeed, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of WLB in Iranian employees. We expect to find differences between Iranian and Spanish levels of WLB as well as between its outcomes. In order to explain these differences we will consider some cultural dimensions such as humane orientation, gender egalitarianism, collectivism and temporal flexibility. This study will utilize Structural Equation Modeling which is a statistical tool to measure latent and observed variables. Wholly, we aim to investigate the effects of WLB and the mediating role of culture.

Key words: Work-Life Balance, Outcomes of WLB, International studies, Cultural dimensions.

1. Introduction

WLB is defined as the degree to which a person is engaged in and satisfied with, in equal measure, his or her work and non-work roles (Greenhaus & Powell 2003). Kalliath & Brough (2008) offered a broader definition of WLB as an individual's perception that their work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with their current life's priorities. Subsequently, the assessment of this work-life balance resource is subjective, and cannot necessarily be verified through external observation (perceptions of co-workers or supervisors). People can gain or lose WLB, and the nature of their work environment (inflexible work schedules) could be an influential factor in "balance gain" or "balance losses". Drawing on these theoretical arguments, we therefore define work-life balance as an individual's subjective appraisal of the accord between his/her work and non-work activities and life more generally.

There could be some difficulties when work activities interfere with personal or family activities or vice versa. In fact, some conflicts such as work-life conflict can originate in the home or in the work environment (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Staying at home to care a sick relative, may prevent someone from meeting a deadline at work. The conflict is often the result of having too many tasks and too short time to do them (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 2004). The employees who experience high work-life balance are those who exhibit similar investment time to work and non-work domains. In particular, the perception of sufficient time to meet acute work and family demands is the pertinent issue to be analyzed (Brough, O'Driscoll & Biggs 2009). Similarly, Guest (2002) defined WLB as an individual's perceptions of how well his or her life roles are balanced.

Previous empirical research has shown that the availability of flextime can increase employee autonomy or control over work-related matters, which in turn may increase WLB (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). O'Driscoll, Brough and Biggs (2007) and Brough et al. (2007) discussed the occurrence of both work and family demands as negative antecedents of WLB. Furthermore, we know very little about the impact of culture on the relationships between WLB and its outcomes like: psychological strain, Job or life satisfaction.

In our study we aim to compare two different societies: Iran and Spain. We choose Iran since we figured it out that the family in Iranian society is an important source of support and influence. Members of families in Iran are in regular contact with extended family members (Lagerström, et al., 2010). In Iranian society, an individual's identity is largely tied to the identity of the extended family (O'Shea, 2003). The majority of Iranian women are responsible for housekeeping, and childcare. However, in recent decades the number of women participating in the workplace has increased (Karimi, 2006; O'Shea, 2003). On the other side, attention to WLB has increased in developed countries in recent years. More precisely in European countries like Spain. This increase in interest is driven by a concern that unbalanced relationships can result adverse health effects and poor performance outcomes for individuals, families and organizations (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Many work-life initiatives have been introduced in response to changing workforce demographics and global competition and these programs have the potential to improve both the quality of employees' working life and organizational effectiveness (Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010). However, studies on WLB are still in early stages in Middle East countries such as Iran. In general, little is known about WLB in developing countries (Karimi, 2006). Our intent is to present depth viewpoint about the impact of WLB on Iranian society and compare it to Spain. Therefore, we hypothesize that many employees in Iran would report lower levels of WLB when comparing to EU countries like Spain, because of traditional societal roles and organizational practices (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 2002; Gatrell et al., 2013).

2. Literature Review

As mentioned before Kalliath & Brough (2008) offered a broad definition of WLB as an individual's perception that their work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with their current life priorities. Carlson et al. (2009) defined balance as a negotiation of role expectations between an individual and his/her partner within the home and

work domains. (House, 1981) stated that social support, including instrumental aid, emotional concern, provision of information, and appraisals that are intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient is one mechanism that may help employees to achieve balance through the accumulation of important resources. In the following sections we present the literature review according to its main focus on WLB and related constructs, WLB predictors, WLB outcomes and the cultural context of WLB.

2.1. Work-Life Balance in Contrast to other related Constructs (WFB, WFC)

Families are one the most central issue to individuals (Mortimer, et al., 1986). In response to the employees' need for balance, employers have instituted a number of programmatic changes in the workplace, such as assistance with child care and elder care, telecommuting, flex-time, and job-sharing (Caudron, 1997; Flynn, 1997). Work-Family Balance could be defined as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum role conflict (Clark, 2001). Kingston (1990) stated that gains in productivity may be due to lowered employee stress, absenteeism, and turnover. People simultaneously encounter different levels of stressors in the work and family domains, as well as appraised access to job and family support structures that could mitigate the experience of WFC (Clark, 2001). Work-Family Conflict is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985: 77). Additionally, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) introduce three distinct types of WFC time-, strain-, and behavior-based. Time-based conflict results from the use of a limited commodity (time) and occurs when the time spent in one role (e.g., hours at work, out of town meetings, household duties) makes it difficult to comply expectations from another role (Baltes and Heydens-Gahir, 2003). Strain-based conflict exists when elements of one role (e.g., role ambiguity or family conflict) cause stress and tension that affect performance in another role. Behavior-based conflict occurs when patterns of behavior in one role are incompatible with behavioral expectations in another role.

2.2. Work-life Balance across Cultures

A prolific body of research analyzes national contexts as intrinsically consistent socio-institutional and economic systems (e.g. Boyer, 2005; Brewster, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Whitley, 2000). It is important to investigate the relationship between cultural dimensions and WLB. This study focuses on national culture dimensions in Iran and Spain and the differences between them.

a) *Individualism–Collectivism*

One potentially important cultural dimension that can vary across nations is individualism–collectivism (Triandis, 1995). Societies in which people's primary concern tends to be with themselves and the nuclear family are considered individualistic. People's focus is on personal achievement and independence (Kagitçibasi, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1998). In contrast, people in collectivistic countries tend to see themselves as embedded in a network of social connections that include extended families and other groups. Markus and Kitayama (1998) explained that collectivistic focus on interconnectedness with others, and Kagitçibasi (1994)

noted that people in collectivistic cultures are encouraged to explore their needs for belonging. One characteristic of collectivistic society that contributes to the availability of domestic help is the size of the family unit in which people reside and the degree of interrelatedness people enjoy extended family members. Whereas people in individualistic countries tend to reside in nuclear families comprising a couple with dependent children, people in collectivistic countries often reside in families comprising more generations. Collectivists consider esteeming the self as immature, self-aggrandizing, and even narcissistic (Markus & Katayama, 1998). Instead, they likely view themselves in terms of social connections with co-workers and the employer, and would be willing to sacrifice self-interest for the interest of the larger collective. If people are working long hours and coming home tired from working hard, they likely will have insufficient time and energy for the family. In individualistic society this will lead to family resentment, which leads to Work-Family Conflict. However, people in collectivistic society will view work demands as serving the needs of the family. As a result family members will be less likely to see work as competing with family (Hofstede Centre, 2015), thereby being more likely to support the person's efforts at work and less likely to resent the person for having less time and energy for the family.

b) *Gender Egalitarianism*

Research on the influence of Gender Egalitarianism (GE) on the work-life interface is still at a very early stage and cross-national research is in particular very scarce (Lyness & Kropf, 2005; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). In this paper, we hypothesize that WLB will be associated with higher work and life balance for individuals living in high GE cultures than for those living in low GE cultures. Living in cultures where both men's and women's work and non-work role involvement is encouraged and considered socially acceptable can amplify the beneficial effects of WLB (Corrigan & Konrad, 2006). The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion, (2006); proposes that work-life balance practices will assist employees in balancing their work and family demands, which can in turn lead to enhanced employee productivity and significant business improvements.

c) *Humane Orientation*

"Humane orientation" is the degree to which individuals in organization or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others. This dimension is similar to the dimension labeled Kind Heartedness by Hofstede & Bond (1988). High humane orientation societies contain some characteristic such as: Other interests are important, people are primarily motivated by a need for belonging and affiliation, members of society are responsible for promoting the well-being of others, child labor is limited by public sanctions, and people are urged to be sensitive to all forms of racial discrimination (House, et al., 2004).

2.3. Work-Life Balance and its Outcomes

The accurate evaluation of individual health and performance includes estimates of multiple role demands from work and non-work domains. Organizational researchers assess the impact of the psychosocial work environment upon outcomes, such as occupational stress, employee well-being and include measures of non-work demands within their investigations (e.g. Burke and Cooper 2008). According to Carlson's et.al, (2009) definition of Work-family balance, it is the negotiation and accomplishment of role-related expectations that embodies the concept of work-family balance and leads to important outcomes such as job satisfaction, family satisfaction, family performance, and family functioning (Carlson et al., 2009). (Allen et al., 2000) suggest to study Work Life Outcomes in three dimensions: (1) work-related outcomes, (2) non-work-related outcomes, and (3) Psychological or stress-related outcomes.

a) Work-Related Outcomes

Regarding the effects of WLB, extant research shows that people who perceive balance between their work and life roles tend to be more satisfied of their life and report better physical and mental health (Brough et al., 2014; Carlson, et al., 2009; Ferguson, et al., 2012; Haar, 2013; Lunau, et al., 2014; Greenhaus, et al., 2003). We believe that individuals who experience WLB may be more satisfied of their job and life "because they are participating in role activities that are salient to them" (Greenhaus, et al., 2003; p. 515). By enabling employees to schedule their time in order to better balance competing demands from work and from home, and by helping employees to procure third-party assistance with care giving responsibilities, such practices are intended to reduce or eliminate levels of work-life conflict, and thereby augment employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

b) Non-work Related Outcomes

Sweeping changes in the composition of families and the workforce, such as more dual-career couples and working mothers with young children, have increased the likelihood that both male and female employees have substantial household responsibilities in addition to their work responsibilities (Bond, et al., 1998). We define work-family balance as the "accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains" (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007, p. 458). Based on this definition, it is accomplishment of role-related expectations that embodies the concept of work-family balance and leads to important outcomes such as family satisfaction, and family functioning (Carlson et al., 2009). Grover and Crooker (1995) implied that the availability of family-friendly benefits may signify to employees that the organization cares about employees, which in turn fosters greater affective attachment to the organization.

c) Psychological Outcomes

Work–life balance research models based upon an occupational stress theoretical framework are common and include adaptations of the person–environment fit model (Edwards and Rothbard 1999). Recent refinements to the theoretical explanations of work–life balance focus on the inclusion of positive as well as negative relationships between domains, largely via the recognition that multiple demands may facilitate, enrich and/or enhance some work–life balance outcomes (Brough, et al., 2007; Wayne, et al., 2007; OdleDusseau, et al., 2012; Ratanen, et al., 2013). The assessment of the key consequences of work–life balance has focused on health, attitudinal and performance outcomes in both work and non-work (mostly family) domains. Associations between work–life imbalance/conflict and psychological distress have consistently identified a strong positive relationship: increased conflict is associated with increased psychological distress (Stephens, et al., 2001; Major, et al., 2002).

3. Hypotheses development

Recent research on Work-Life Balance (WLB) shows promising results. However, study and analysis of the impact of WLB on individuals across cultures call for further research (Pasamar & Valle, 2014). WLB is a substantial factor that can overcome stress and anxiety problems (Pasamar & Valle, 2014), and create an effective harmony between life and work (Haar, et al., 2014). The impact of WLB on individual's life is extensive. WLB is highly beneficial since it enables people to make a balance between their job and life (Haar, et al., 2014). Conversely, the lack of WLB can cause some negative outcomes (Haar et al., 2014; Brough, et al., 2014). Previous research has focused on the interest on job and family involvement, role stressors, hours worked, and work and family demands. But there is still little research on comparative studies of WLB across nations in particular between Europe and Middle East cultures. Indeed, this study investigates the effects of WLB on individual outcomes in Iranian and Spanish cultures. By this study, we aim to analyze the effects of WLB on in Iranian employees compared to Spanish employees. Thus, in this study we are aiming to response: “what are the outcomes of WLB in Iran and Spain? Are the outcomes of WLB equal in Iran and Spain? And are these outcomes influenced by cultural dimensions?” We are also striving to figure out the impact of WLB across cultures. Figure 1 shows our theoretical model. Job satisfaction, family satisfaction, and psychological strain are significant outcomes of WLB (Brough, et al. 2014; Pasamar & Valle, 2014). This study aims to examine the effect of culture on WLB. It is supposed that high levels of WLB are positively associated with job and life satisfaction for individuals in Middle East cultures, as well as it has been shown in European cultures.

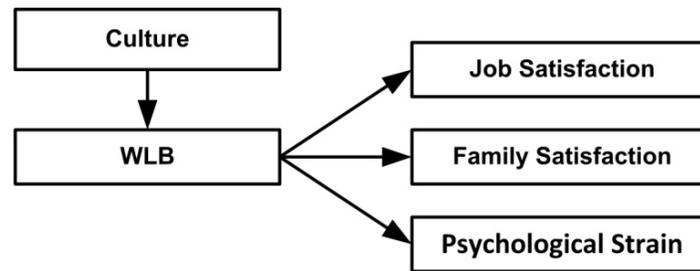


Figure 1. Theoretical model of WLB and its outcomes, with culture as a moderator

Based on this model we hypothesize that the WLB will benefit Iranian's employees as well as Spanish employees.

H1: Work-Life Balance will be positively associated with Job Satisfaction across cultures.

H2: Work-Life Balance will be positively related to family Satisfaction across cultures.

H3: Work-Life Balance will be negatively associated with Psychological Strain across cultures.

Research on the influence of culture on WLB is still at a very early stage. Some aspects of Iranian culture differ from Spanish culture and they may thus give rise to a different frame of results. First, Spanish culture places great importance on the family unit as an institution. Government and employees support governmental measures that allow individuals to balance work and family obligations. Second, the Spanish keep idiosyncratic working hours (from 9 am to 7 pm), a time frame that increases incidences of work–life conflicts, especially compared with the 8 am to 5 pm workday (Pasamar, and Valle, 2014). (O'Driscoll et al. 2007) and (Brough et al. 2007) discussed the occurrence of both work and family demands as the key negative antecedents of work–life balance. Third, family demands are increased both by the volume of dependent responsibilities (caring for children, elderly parents, serious ill spouses and other family members) and by specific acute situations producing intense demands, such as the birth of a new baby or sudden serious illnesses of spouses/parents/other family members: “the combination of reduced time available and increased work and family demands for many employed parents obviously creates additional role stress”. In this study we hypothesize that WLB would be moderated by culture in these dimensions: Individualism/collectivism, gender egalitarianism, temporal flexibility, and high humane orientation. From the perspective of sociology, we claim that living in a country where both men's and women's work is encouraged and acceptable, can reinforce the beneficial effect of WLB (Corrigan & Konrad, 2006). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H4: The relationship between WLB its outcomes is moderated by individualism.

H5: The relationship between WLB and its outcomes is moderated by gender egalitarianism.

H6: The relationship between WLB and its outcomes is moderated by temporal flexibility.

H7: The relationship between WLB and its outcomes is moderated by human orientation.

4. Methodology

A research design is the strategy for a study and the plan by which the research is to be carried out. It specifies the methods and procedures for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Cooper, & Schindler, 2003). We will select two samples, one for Iranian employees and one for Spanish employees and we will analyze them in order to test a hypothesis derived from our theoretical model.

4.1. Data Collection

Indeed, data is the facts presented to the researcher from the study's environment (Cooper, & Schindler, 2003). Data can be collected in a variety of ways, in different settings, and from different sources. In survey research, the main methods used to collect data are interviews and questionnaires. We will exploit the "Questionnaires" which is instrument of questions replied and completed by the respondents. Questionnaires are the most frequently used method of data collection in management research. They are alternatively easy to use, inexpensive, and are often the most plausible alternative for measuring unobservable constructs such as attitudes, values and performances, intentions, and personalities (Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992).

4.2. Sample Selection

Sampling is the process of selecting a sufficient number of elements from the population so that by studying the sample, and understanding the properties or the characteristics of the sample subjects, the researcher will be able to generalize the properties or characteristics to the population elements. Sampling overcomes the difficulties of collecting data from the entire population which can be impossible or prohibitive in terms of time, costs and other human resources (Forza, 2002). Sample size is a complex issue which is linked to the significance level and the statistical power of the test, and also to the size of the researched relationship (for example association strength or amount of difference). The larger your sample's size the lower the likely error in generalizing to the population. Therefore, sampling is a compromise between the accuracy of our findings and the amount of time and money we invest in collecting, checking and analyzing the data. However, it is not surprising that the final sample size is almost always a matter of judgments as well as of calculation. For our research questions and objectives, we need to undertake particular statistical analyses, which will determine the threshold sample size for individual categories (Saunders, et al., 2011).

4.3. Survey Design

Surveys are popular as they allow the collection of a large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way. Survey strategy is perceived as authoritative by people in general and is both comparatively easy to explain and to understand (Saunders, et al., 2011). In this stage we should consider all of the possible shortcomings and difficulties and we should find the right compromise between rigor and feasibility. To evaluate adequately the tightness of the constraints, we will identify the main information needs which flow from the stated hypotheses and, ultimately, from the various purposes of the study (Forza, C. 2002).

4.4. Constructs and scales

Scaling techniques were first used in the 1930s; scales have been developed to measure attitudes and personality dimensions and to assess skills and abilities in social research (Saunders, et al., 2011). A second task in developing the measurement instrument concerns the scale to be used to measure the answers. There are four basic types of scale: nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. The sophistication of the application for which the scales are suited increases with the progression from nominal to ratio. (Forza, 2002). Rating questions have been combined to measure a wide variety of concepts such as customer loyalty, service quality and job satisfaction. For each concept the resultant measure or scale is represented by a scale score created by combining the scores for each of the rating questions. Each question is often referred to as a scale item (Saunders, et al., 2011).

4.5. Statistical Data Analysis

Approaches to data analysis also need to be sensitive to the design being implemented in a quantitative methods study. Data analysis typically proceeds independently for both the quantitative and qualitative phases. We will rely on standard data analysis approaches (descriptive and inferential analysis of quantitative data) (Creswell, et al., 2003). Data analysis usually involves reducing accumulated data to a manageable size, developing summaries, looking for patterns, and applying statistical techniques. Scaled responses on questionnaires and experimental instruments often require the analyst to derive various functions, as well as to explore relationships among variables. Further, we will interpret these findings in light of the research question and determine if the results are consistent with our hypotheses and theories (Cooper, & Schindler, 2003).

4.6. Structural Equation Modeling

SEM is operated to test complex models in which there are one or more independent variables and one or more dependent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Essentially, structural equation modeling tests an interactive path model of several independent variables to one or more dependent variables. Structural equation modeling allows us to test the fit of the model to the data, while at the same time modeling measurement error (unreliability) in the observed

variables. Strength of SEM is that measurement error is taken into account by factor models for each latent variable being estimated at the same time as the model is fitted to data. Structural equation modeling is a large sample technique and shares the distributional and related assumptions of multiple regressions (Kline, 2005). Harris and Schaubroeck (1990) have recommended applying this method when: there are 20 or fewer measured indicators and when multiple models can be compared from the same data set to estimate the best model. As with multiple regressions, moderator effects can also be tested in structural equation modeling.

5. Expected Results

As we mentioned above, we expect to confirm the relationship between WLB and its outcomes: psychological strain, job and life satisfaction. More precisely, we expect to confirm the relationship between WLB and psychological strain will be negative, as Stephens et al., (2001) showed that psychological distress will increase if the rate of conflict increases between work and life. Regarding job and life satisfaction, we expect that a person who has high level of WLB would be more satisfied of his job and life, according to Greenhaus & Powell's (2003) results. In addition, we believe that achieving balance between work and life would make people psychologically healthier, given that they experience harmony in life which assist them to meet the long-term demands of work and non-work roles (Greenhaus, et al., 2003).

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