Review of Work-Life Balance Theories

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ABSTRACT

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Objective - This paper's objective is to make a comprehensive compilation of the various theories used in studies of work-life balance (WLB) in order to understand their usage.

Methodology/Technique – Based on past literature, this paper focused on review of relevant literature from various online data bases as well as manual texts of studies on WLB with particular attention on the theories used. Using descriptive layout, the paper gives adequate review of WLB theories.

Finding – This paper found that there are numerous prevailing theories on WLB explaining the relationships in various WLB studies. Such as Overall Appraisal, Structural Functionalism, Enhancement, Facilitation, Segmentation Spill-over, Compensation, Conservation, Conflict, Human Capital, Congruence, Ladder, Instrumental, Resource drain, Ecology, Border, Boundary and Integration Theories. Based on literature, this paper found that Boundary theory and Border theory are the two major foundation theories used in many studies to explain the different aspects of WLB.

Novelty - This paper found that there are no universally accepted theories for WLB. Theories used on WLB studies depend on the range of the study's framework, variables or perspectives of the study. This leads to omissions or overlapping in frameworks.

Type of Paper: Review

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1. Introduction

In the studies of various disciplines, theories are the bedrock that holds the study frameworks. Some studies variables or framework are derived and underpinned by theories that have given credibility to the outcome of these studies. In the discipline of human resource management, work life balance (WLB) is an aspect that involves the welfare of employees who are the key assets of any establishments. This is because general quality of employee's life in its relation to their working life is of utmost importance in the achievement of organizational goals (Guest, 2002).

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The knowledge of WLB has helped organizations over the years to understand their human capital needs and to find ways to provide enabling environments that improve work relations and consequently improve productivity, leading to achievement of set goals (Guest, 2002). Consequently, this has encouraged scholars over the years to conduct extensive studies on various aspects of WLB. This has given rise to a number of models that have made attempts to explain the dynamics of this aspect of human resource management (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

Over the year's analyses of constructs on WLB has gone through stages; from the early stage which is the transformation stage to the advancement stage (Kumer & Janakiram, 2017). This has given rise to development of many WLB theories. However, despite the numerous theories and models for different aspects of work-life balance, there is not a common universally accepted basic framework or construct (Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek & Sweet, 2006).

The lack of universally accepted basic WLB theory has made researchers to rely on varieties of theories and constructs from scholars like Zedeck and Mosier (1990); Morris and Madsen (2007) to Bakker and Demerouti (2009) (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Therefore, organizations use the model of WLB that best suit their objectives (Guest, 2002).

Thus, there is a need to have a comprehensive review of these work-life balance theories and how they have been used over the years. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to give a comprehensive appraisal of the theories that have underpinned various aspects of work-life balance studies.

Literature Review

2.1 Work-life Balance

The word "WORK" in WLB denotes actions in which intellectual or physical abilities are needed to accomplish it. Furthermore, the word "BALANCE" in the concept is used to give stability between the domains of life and work (Clarke, Koch & Hill, 2004). Since 1986 that term was coined and it gained popularity in the 1990s with Juliet Schor's publication (Sing, 2014) when WLB became a wide concept that covers suitable perspectives, prioritizing between life and work (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

It is a term that is usually used in organizations in relations to welfare of their employees (Gragnano, Simbula & Miglioretti, 2020). Furthermore, WLB is a concept associated with the institutional as well as the social settings of countries hence studies have developed several theoretical perspectives necessary to have an in-depth knowledge of the fundamental issues between employee lives and work (Gragnano, et al, 2020).

2.1.1 Work-life Balance Definitions

There have been several definitions of the concept of WLB and over the years WLB has become a contradictory term known to have several meanings (Kumer & Janakiram, 2017). Table 1.1 gives the definitions of WLB by several scholars.

Table 1.1 WLB Definitions

Author/year	Definitions
Kofodimos (1993)	"Satisfying healthy and productive life that work, play, and love…"
Marcks & MacDermid (1996)	"Role balance is the tendency to become fully engaged in the performance of every role in one's total role system, to approach every typical role and role partner with an attitude to attentiveness and care. Put differently, it is the practice of that even-handed alertness known sometimes as mindfulness"
Clark (2000)	"Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict"
Pillinger (2001)	"The flexible working arrangements that allow the employees to avail of working arrangements that provide a balance between work responsibilities and personal responsibilities."
Repoport et al (2002)	"Proposed work-personal life integration "instead" of balance to encompass different parts of life and their integration depends on one's priorities, which does not necessary need to demand equal amount of personal resources."
Frone (2003)	"Low levels of conflict and high levels of inter role facilitation represent work-family balance"
Greenhans & Allen (2006)	"The extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individual's life priorities"
Grzywacz & Carlson(2007)	"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"
Kalliath & Brough (2008)	"The individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities"
Emslie & Hunt (2009)	"Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict"
Ioan Lazar et al al.(2010)	"The quality relationship between paid work and unpaid responsibilities is critical for success in today's competitive business world."
Delecta, (2011)	"An individual ability to meet their work commitments as well as other non-work and family commitment."

Source: Kumer & Janakiram (2017); Singh, (2014)

Table 1.1 above summarized WLB definitions from different studies. From the table it is seen that there is no definition that is commonly accepted even though WLB concept has been used widely.

2.1.2 Work-life Balance Theories

A number of theories have evolved based on the definitions in Table 1.1 Based on these definitions; researchers have evolved number of models to describe the dynamics of WLB. In studying various roles and their effects on WLB, boundary theory and border theory have been recognised as the two major theories that other theories used in WLB studies are built on (Kumer & Janakiram, 2017). In the different facets of WLB, the theories commonly used are as follows:

2.1.2.1 Segmentation Theory

In the relationship between work and home, this theory has the earliest view which argued that the two aspects do not affect the other as they are segmented and thereby an independent entity (Edwards & Rothband, 2000; Kanter, 1977; Staines, 1980; Young & Kleiner, 1992; Zedeck, 1992). Although Bruke and Greenglass (1987) and Voydanoff (1987) had earlier shown that family and work are closely related.

Life and work have been inherently divided by space, function and time right from the era of the industrial revolution (Gragnano et al., 2020). It has been argued that it is a way in which employees sternly holds back

thoughts, action and feelings relating to work when at home and vice versa when at work, thereby enabling employees to maintain fine-lines in relation to family and work (Piotrkowski, 1979). This allows employees to skilfully sort their life. However, it has been argued that in the relationship between employee social life and work, segmentation theory has the weakest empirical support hence being considered as only a theoretical potential (Guest, 2001). This theory has been used in WLB studies to show the relationships of different domains of employee lives to reduce stress arising from various roles (Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992; Zedeck, 1992).

2.1.2.2 Enrichment Theory

This is also called Enhancement Theory. This theory propounds that having experience in work role helps to improve the quality of other life roles and vice versa. According to Morris and Madsen (2005) this theory denotes the level in which experiences from abilities, skills, values (instrumental sources) or satisfaction and mood (affective sources) boosts the quality of the other sphere. It has been stated that employees observed that both life and work roles are enhanced due to the level in which experiences in each role boosts quality of life of other roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Therefore, having a good outcome in personal aspect of life sets precedence for the same in work life and vice versa (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). The theory generally explains that the relationship between work life and family life have positive effects on each other.

2.1.2.3 Facilitation Theory

Similar to enhancement theory, this theory refers to what ensues when the partaking in one field fosters and improves the engagement in another life field. Facilitation is argued to happen because social structures naturally use available avenues to increase positions without regard for field constraints (Grzywacz, 2002).

This theory further explains that opportunities, skills and experiences make easy the level in which an individual partakes in one field of life to bring forth good experiences and resources useful for another life field (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Frone, 2003). This is referred to as work-family facilitation which is bi-directional in nature because it involves the facilitation of family to work and vice versa (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

According to Edwards and Rothbard (2000) growth portability may comprise of knowledge, experiences, skills and resources. Therefore, facilitation ensues when positive benefits and contribution are derived for home and work roles by engaging in each field.

2.1.2.4 Spill-over Theory

This is a method whereby proficiencies in one role affect the proficiencies in another role, making the roles similar. It is the degree of relationships between work and family, be it vertical or horizontal (Sirgy et al. (2001), positive or negative (Morris & Madsen, 2007), where negative family experience is linked with negative work experience and vice versa (Staines, 1980). This is when contentment and accomplishment in one field may bring about contentment and accomplishment in another field and vice versa (Xu, 2009).

Family and work function as an entity in spill over theory, Young and Kleiner (1992) stated that this is because what happens at home affects the happenings at work. Individuals transfer skills, emotions, attitudes, and behaviours that they form in their family role into work roles and vice versa (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985).

Spillover has also been known in literature as likeness, extension, generalization, acquaintance, persistence and isomorphism (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Staines, 1980). According to Edwards and Rothbard (2000) spillover have two interpretations (i) the positive link between life and work ethics and life and work contentment (Zedeck, 1992) and (ii) transfer in totality of abilities and actions between fields (Repetti, 1987). This theory is the most popularly used in work life balance studies when investing the relationship between work and family life (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990).

2.1.2.5 Compensation Theory

This theory suggests that employees try to atone for the absence of pleasure in one field by trying to identify more pleasure in the other field (Lambert, 1990). This theory in WLB explains the efforts designed at countering negative experiences in one field through improved efforts for positive capabilities in another field. That is to say a dissatisfied employee concentrating more on family life than work life, or vice versa but compromises on one role thereby moving his inclinations for being satisfied in one role and admit dissatisfaction in the other role (Edwards and Roth bard, 2000).

Reactive and supplemental categories are the two categories of viewing this theory (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Reactive compensation denotes a person's efforts to correct negative experiences in one role they are partaking in by ensuing optimistic experiences in the other role such like relaxing actions at the end of work. On the other hand, supplemental compensation takes place when a person alters their quests for satisfying experiences from the dissatisfying role to a possible more satisfying one. This usually occurs when optimistic experiences are lacking at work, hence sort for at home (Clark, 2000).

2.1.2.6 Congruence Theory

This theory states that variables not exactly linked to family or work roles can have impact on the stability of several roles. This is done through variables like genetic forces, style of behaviour, personality traits and socio-cultural forces (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Zedeck, 1992). For example, this theory considers educational level, or intelligence as third variable and variables such as these can impact family and work roles positively (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

2.1.2.7 Inter-role conflict Theory

This theory is also called the incompatibility or opposition theory. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) it refers to challenges in meeting the requirements of one field as results of occurrences of adhering to the requirements in the other field. In other words, it means conflicts in roles.

A person faces inter role conflict when requirements from one role affects their ability to meet the requirements from another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The situations when variables conflict in relation to behaviour, role strain and time have been explained using these suggestions as follows: identifying with roles are essential; external support is linked to conflict; pressures must emanate from family and work; source of conflict determines direction; level of conflict relates positively with role salience which moderates relationships; conflict has relationship to stage and career success; conflict is substantial in situations where negatives are connected with nonconformity (Greenhaus & Beutell (1985).

2.1.2.8 Human Capital Theory

This theory propounded by Becker (1985) states that individuals arrange general fields of actions that they are keen to assign resources to and then decide on the resources that are to be spent. This is due to the fact

that energy and time are commodities that are exhaustible and when exhausted, will not be available for use in other tasks in other fields or within same field.

This theory offers a way to comprehend the direct impact of work-based efforts in conjunction with the family-based efforts on WLB. This is to say that there is a struggle to keep balance when inter role conflict happens. Argument grounded on this theory has stated that workers have access to finite basic form of personal resources which is time and energy, the former connected to behaviour and the latter is concerned with psychology and physic (Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley and Luk, 2001). Furthermore, it is stated that it becomes really demanding when work and family field have similar importance and rely on the other for resources (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

2.1.2.9 Instrumental Theory

This theory states that actions carried out in one field are ways to enable attaining things in other fields (Guest, 2002; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). This theory suggests that there is positive link between two fields making it similar to spill over theory (Guest, 2002) since actions carried out in one field assist in the achieving things required in another field. That is to say that by working, an individual gets resources to use in personal life. (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001).

2.1.2.10 Resource Drain Theory

According to Morris and Madsen (2007) when resources are transferred from one sphere to another, it reduces the resources available in the original sphere. This is because of the limited nature of the resources. These resources could be money, time or attention. Bakker et al (2009) argued that this indicated that there is a negative link between the domains of work and family.

This is due to the fact that the use of resources in one field decreases the level of resources accessible to the other fields which causes less involvement in the latter field. Edwards and Rothbard (2000) further added that resources can also be moved to domains like personal or community pursuits which are not related to either family or work.

2.1.2.11 Resources Conservation Theory

This theory is a unifying theoretical framework that assists in blending spill over and inter-role theory (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). The theory functions on the notion that individuals always have limited resources to spend.

In the work-life perspective, the theory states that both energy and time is depleted partaking in either non-work or work undertakings. That is the resources used in the performance of other fields can be affected by work. This work interference makes individuals to be sensitive to loss of resources. According to Grandey and Cropanzano, (1999) personal well-being can suffer greatly in the course of dealing and reacting to interference of work which is resource depleting.

2.1.2.12 Ecology Systems Theory

This theory states that collaboration of both the environment and a person's characteristics helps to shape their development. According to Grzywacz and Marks (2000) it denotes the idea that family and work are the combined task of time, method, perspective and individual features which is indicative of the fact that each and numerous features yield consequences that are additive to understanding of work life.

Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (2006) stated that person-in environment theory which posits that groups and individuals have vibrant associations with their physical, natural as well as their social environments was developed from the ecology theory due to similar assumptions of both theories.

2.1.2.13 Border Theory

This theory presented by Clark (2000) looks at WLB from a new dimension. The assumptions of this theory are that people's role occurs in the confines of certain life domains which are separated by temporal, bodily or emotional divide known as borders (Clark, 2000). Border crossing especially between work and home domains are among the issues addressed by the theory.

Furthermore, the theory states that the ease and limit in which people switch between family lives and work lives can affect the degree of synthesis and regulate the ease of conversions between the two domains. Additionally, that the domains are related closely with regards to the degree of conflict as well.

According to Bellavia and Frone (2005) this is because when the domains are divided, conversion becomes effortful while it is less likely with work family conflict. When domains are reasonably synthesized, common conversion becomes easier, however, work family conflict may arise. The analysis of borders in WLB can assist in indicating the level of control individuals have in issues relating to balance in work and family.

2.1.2.14 Boundary Theory

According to Zerubavel (1996) this is a common cognitive theory of social grouping that concentrates on results like denotations people give to work and home as well as the simplicity and rate of conversion between domains (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000).

Boundary and border theories have similar assumptions (Clark, 2000; Kreiner, 2002). However, the difference is that border theory is dedicated to the domains of family and work only (Desrochcers & Sargent, 2003). The result of interest in border theory is about balance of work-family with role conflict at minimum (Clark, 2000). Furthermore, the difference in description covers time, people and place which are tangible divide as well as psychological groups linked to family and work.

2.1.2.15 Integration Theory

According to Clark (2000) It is assumed that the method in which family and work encompasses all parties and when responsibilities are mutual leads to better outcomes in all concerned domains than when solutions are made separately (Googins, 1997). This theory denotes the general view that a strong process of flexible and penetrable boundaries can better expedite and inspire the domains of community life, family-life as well as work-life Clark, 2000).

Furthermore, this theory has been recognized to best explain the combination of supplementary contextual components with regards to family and work into body of knowledge (Morris & Madsen, 2007). Additionally, Morris and Madsen (2007) stated that the theory seeks a modern understanding that reshapes customary work-life standards making all concerned parties' dynamic partners with same voices in the establishment of a complete model of WLB.

2.1.2.16 Overall Appraisal Theory

It is stated that WLB can be categorized into the overall appraisal method and the components approach (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). This theory denotes a person common appraisal regarding their whole life situations. For instance, Clark (2000) definition of WLB described the concept as contentment and adequate performance at home and at work with little conflicts in the roles thereby maintaining balance and also giving life harmony (Clark, Koch & Hill, 2004).

Furthermore, Voydanoff, (2005) argued that it gives the appraisal that resources of family and work domains are adequate to take care of demands of both domains so that involvement in the domains is effective. When this theory is used in WLB question like "All in all, how successful do you feel in balancing your work and personal/family life?" is used for assessment (Clarke et al., 2004; Kumer & Janakiram, 2017).

2.1.2.17 Structural Functionalism Theory

Technological advancement of the 19th century gave rise to division of family from work at the early phase. This theory came into existence in the industrial revolution era prominent in the extrication of personal life from work. The theory denotes that there are two different aspects that are of concern in a person's life: emotional life and productive life. The latter denotes part of work life that aids one to create service or goods while the former is concerned with time spent for family and self. Furthermore, the theory acknowledges the actuality of essential separation between family and work.

2.1.2.18 Ladder theory

This theory advanced by Bird (2006) is the most basically balanced approach to WLB (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). The theory states that every story has two sides which is the same stand with WLB.

The ladder of WLB has two legs: right leg is concerned with a person's duties for the company and for themselves. The left leg is concerned with matters relating to the views of the company such as the responsibility and provision of the company to its employees. In order to have balance, it is necessary to have both legs as they are important to Work-life balance (Bird, 2006; Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

Methodology

This paper highlights the various theories in WLB. To do this, the researchers reviewed information from various online data bases such as APA PsycNet, ResearchGate, Google scholar, JSTOR, SAGE and ScienceDirect as well as manual text and unpublished resources relating to WLB. This was done to give a comprehensive review of WLB theories. This paper is developed from past literature to describe in details the various concepts and theories used in WLB studies as they affect employees. Therefore, the paper is a review on WLB theories.

4. Discussion

This paper's objective is to make a comprehensive compilation of the various theories used in studies of work-life balance (WLB) in an attempt to understand their usage. This paper reviewed the theories of WLB from the early stage to the advanced theories. Literature indicated that when explaining the link between life and work, five core theories are used. These theories were identified by Zedeck and Mosier (1990) and O'Driscoll (1996). They are segmentation, spill-over, compensation, instrumental and conflict theories. Boundary/Border theories were proposed by Clark (2000) with regards to balance in family-work roles. To indicate that in certain field people roles differ and are separated by borders/boundaries in which people cross

224

on daily basis. Additionally, to supplement the theories that were already in existence, Enhancement and Resource Drain theories were proposed by Morris and Madsen (2007) with new viewpoint regarding the balance amongst domains of family and work. Other theories discussed were also proposed by scholars with various viewpoint regarding WLB.

5. Conclusion

WLB has continued to be a concept of interest to both scholars and human resource professionals due to the need to ensure that an enabling environment is provided for organisation's human capital (Poulose & Sudarsan, 2014). A great number of researches in WLB have highlighted the discussed theories in this paper either as a single or multiple concept. This indicates that theories used in WLB researches differs in the contents and descriptions of the research which depends on the perspectives of the studies. This is to say that theories used in studies by scholars depend on the nature of the study (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Scholars (Morris & Madsen, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006) have stated that there is no one predominant perspective or framework with regards to WLB that is universally recognized. The relation of life and work investigations is basically challenged by the absence of universally established basic central theory. Therefore, it has been observed that scholars of WLB depend on and uses various theoretical frameworks and variables in the examination of work and family issues (Poulose & Sudarsan, 2014; Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

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