

An Exploratory Analysis of Work-Life Balance Preference in the Case of Lebanese Students

Jaber ABDALLAH¹
Kassem HAMMOUD²

Abstract

For a modern organization, time represents a resource that needs optimization, rationalization and control, and most employees try to identify the modality to divide their time between work, family and personal development. Finding a balance between these influences an individual both on reaching professional goals and on his or her personal life. The aim of this empirical research is to identify certain characteristics or types of behaviour that must be considered in order to achieve a balance between personal life and career, which is essential for avoiding unwanted consequences such as decreasing employee performance, their motivation or difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees. The research methodology is based on a structured questionnaire, distributed within the faculties of the two most important Lebanese universities in order to analyse the preferences of students: personal life of a career. The findings show that most respondents in the sample expressed their desire to develop a career first and foremost. Though, after they graduate and they will have a stable and well paid job, most of the respondents stated they also want to establish a family. Moreover, they want to strike a balance between the two, to be able to carry out personal development activities or together with family members, but at the same time to be able to carry out their work responsibilities without depriving family members of their presence.

Keywords: *career stage, life goals, work-life balance, workaholic.*

JEL classification: J28, L84

DOI: 10.24818/RMCI.2020.1.60

1. Introduction

The time spent at work may occupy most of the lives of people, but this is not necessarily a disadvantage, as long as a proper management of this situation is undertaken so that employees can enjoy their personal lives as well, which may involve other activities. Nowadays, most people have become more and more dependent on their jobs and activities, succeeding, with little or no concern, to care for the family, children or even themselves. Thus, achieving a balance between professional and personal life is almost impossible. However, people who have passions, harmonious relationships, concerns about self-knowledge and self-development do not end up being affected by such an impediment, managing to

¹ Jaber Abdallah, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, E-mail: jabber.abdallah50@gmail.com.

² Kassem Hammoud, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, E-mail: kassemhammoud@live.com.

strike a balance between career and personal life. Also, there is a very high share of employees for whom a professional evolution does not necessarily represent a necessity, they dedicate their lives to the family, are involved in domestic activities, childcare or may prefer to travel.

However, people try to establish a balance, which can be different from employee to employee, in order to resolve this conflict between personal and professional life. To clarify this issue, we will review the concepts of career planning and personal life, so that later we can determine people's preferences and needs.

The aim of this empirical research is to identify certain characteristics or types of behaviour that must be considered in order to achieve a balance between personal life and career, which is essential for avoiding unwanted consequences. For a better understanding of this topic and for finding solutions, we will use the questionnaire method, which we will distribute in the selected faculties in Lebanon. The research will be addressed to a target audience of students between the ages of 18 and 30 and we will try to find solutions related to the wishes and preferences that they manifest. The research sets its main objectives: to identify the students' wishes, both from a career point of view (ex: At what age do they want to have their first job?) and from a personal life point of view (ex: Are they willing to start a family?). Also, following this information we intend to formulate certain indications, so that we can facilitate the search and obtaining a work-life balance model for young people who want to have both a career and family life in the near future.

2. Literature Review

Career planning is a long-term process, a strategy for development, which is divided into several steps: choosing a job, obtaining a job, career development, the possibility of changing careers and, possibly, retirement. An interesting proposal for career planning comes from the vocational guidance department in Australia. They propose a four-step technique (Athanasou & Van Esbroeck, 2008):

1. Knowledge / self-knowledge, consists in answering a few questions meant to lead to the analysis of one's own person, then finding out a person's preferences, abilities and interests. Freud believes that knowing yourself and being completely honest with yourself is a human endeavor because this sincerity implies accepting some information about you and demands the desire for improvement;
2. Information refers to analyzing the requirements for different occupations, weighing the advantages and disadvantages, expectations of different professions and, last but not least, the awareness that these activities could become a passion, rather than a way of earning a living. Specialists recommend that, in order to answer these questions, it is necessary to have a discussion with the people who are already working in the field and who will share their experiences;
3. The decision involves a comparison between the options held and the awareness of the field that best fits. Ideally, at the end of this stage,

there is already a list of options that will direct a person to the field according to their character;

4. The action refers to: writing the CV, collecting information about companies, composing letters of intent, preparing for interviews, as well as guaranteeing that these actions or decisions are taken properly.

2.1 Workaholic or Family Dedicated

Workaholic is a term that refers to a person who is dependent on the job he or she has and who fails to strike a balance between professional and personal life. They are not necessarily happy and fulfilled, although at work they do perform. Such people are willing to do overtime work at any time, both during the week and on weekends, regardless of whether those overtime hours are paid or not. (Burke, 2000). So, many of today's companies are trying to find a remedy and a balance for the two, which apparently seem to be in competition: career and personal life. Finding a balance has effects both on reaching professional goals and on one's personal life.

For business people, the lunch break is a good opportunity to read and reply to emails, not a relaxing period. According to the World Health Organization, 25% of the adult population who have a stable job manifest symptoms of workaholism (World Health Organization, 2002). There are also some dangers that can affect both employees and employers. The lack of detachment can lead to a limitation that can jeopardize the ability to discern, analyze or make the best decisions.

Due to the undergoing stress, the employee risks, at some point, to have both physical and mental difficulties. Also, the employer may suffer, he or she may be glad that the employee fulfills and exceeds the short-term duties, but the productivity of the "workaholic" employee can significantly decrease in the long term. Due to rising costs and living standards, people tend to work more and more, despite the personal needs and responsibilities that they could fulfill. Therefore, they reduce the possibility to relax, to undertake other activities and to eliminate the stress that is becoming more and more felt. However, this imbalance can have a number of negative outcomes, such as: exhaustion or stress.

Stress can manifest both physical and psychological pressure on a person (Chrousos, 2009). Also, stress can also be the reaction of the mind and body to change or even the fear induced by an organism that tries to maintain normalcy in the face of potential agents that can affect it (Stranks, 2005).

According to Harvard Business Review on Work and Life Balance (2000), managers with a contemporary mindset want to establish a connection with their employees, being guided by three main objectives:

- Clearly informing employees about business priorities and encouraging them to set their personal priorities;
- Employee recognition and support for both the roles and responsibilities in the workplace but also those outside it;

- Permanently improving the performance of the employees and the organization/company at the same time as achieving the personal objectives of the employees.

It is not yet possible to establish a way in which employees' lives can be prioritized, as they are always oscillating between "workaholic" and being dedicated to the family. However, one concept used by organizational psychology is that of "family-friendly" organizational culture. This type of culture comes to the aid of both employees and employers, promoting and encouraging employees to achieve both their personal and professional goals.

2.2 Achieving a balance between career and personal life

The balance between professional and personal life is defined as that situation characterized by satisfaction, minimal role conflict, optimal functioning of the employee both in the tasks and roles at work and in the personal or family life. (Byron, 2005) The biggest stress-generating factor is the time that can lead to professional and personal dissatisfaction. For a modern organization, time has become a resource that needs to be optimized, rationalized and controlled, and most employees are trying to find a way to divide their time between work, family and their own aspirations. One cause of poor time management is a lack of self-discipline, which can lead to a lack of performance in the workplace (Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2015).

In order to find a balance between the two, the requirements of the workplace as well as those of the personal life must be clearly established. They differ from individual to individual and it depends on how they prioritize them in order to reach a balance in the end. One of the methods that could make it more efficient to strike a balance between career and personal life would be the best time management. A more efficient time management can be achieved by establishing the exact goals that help to direct the effort in a more constructive way leading to the current fulfillment of the requirements. By this method, the control over the activities and the time invested for their accomplishment is increasing, thus progressing according to each activity is observed.

With these methods of making time management more efficient, a balance between personal and professional life can be established, given the ability to experience control and to remain productive and competitive in the workplace, while maintaining a happy and healthy personal life, with family and children. Also, one could reach such a balance also by:

- Delimiting in a realistic way the personal life of work;
- Prioritizing work tasks and events, both at work and in private life;
- Schedule some leisure activities with family, friends or set a time period when you will not do anything about the job;
- The "to-do list" setting;

- Establishing things that are really important and which are less important. Studies show that almost 80% of the working day is wasted on less important activities;
- Regularly reviewing the working agenda, as the professional obligations change. For example, if in certain periods the work schedule is lighter, that time should be spent with the family.

Peter Drucker (2018) suggests that people should focus only on what they can really do, the rest of the activities should be delegated or neglected. More than an hour and a half can be saved weekly by delegating small tasks. Also, it is advisable to establish a clear plan, on days and actions related to what follows in the direction of the professional and of the time spent in this regard, but also in the direction of the things to be done regarding the personal life.

Professors Boris Groysberg and Robin Abrahams (2014) from Harvard Business School conducted a study on this topic, and the results showed a difference between men and women, which is how they handle the conflict between careers and personal life. According to professors' observations, men tend to choose a career without any regrets when the conflict arises, because it is natural for them to be the provider, which seems to diminish the feeling of guilt. One of the interviewees said, indeed, that he did not regret at all that he was divorced, because he was always a good provider for his family, able to achieve his professional goals, and now he would spend more time with his children over the weekend. Also, in the case of the interviewed women, they prefer to avoid the marriage and the appearance of a child precisely because they do not want to face a potential conflict between personal life and career. The most demoralizing conclusion of these results remains, however, that both men and women who answered questions regard the conflict between career and personal life as a problem that further aggravates women. However, nowadays things have changed significantly, and a balance between career and personal life can be achieved, by both women and men.

3. Research methodology

Regarding the chosen topic, the main research instrument is the structured questionnaire, distributed within the faculties of American University of Beirut and Lebanese University in Beirut, Lebanon during February and March 2019. The two were chosen because they represent the largest institutions of higher education in Lebanon and they cover various fields of study, which gives heterogeneity to the sample of respondents. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions divided into: questions to find out general information and differentiation of respondents, questions regarding career and questions related to family and personal life. The purpose of this survey is to analyze the preferences, namely: choosing between personal and professional life in the case of students, aged between 18 and 30 years, from all fields of activity: mathematics and natural sciences, engineering sciences, biological and biomedical sciences, social sciences, social sciences,

humanities and art, sports science and physical education. Also, through this research we aim to establish some desires that young people will manifest by completing the survey, namely: establishing a successful career or a family.

4. Findings

The expected results are the achievement of the objectives and the answers to the research questions. After centralizing the results, the total number of respondents was 151 students, of which 90 men and 61 women.

After analyzing the data, a very high share of the young people in the field of social sciences (legal, economic, military and public order, political, communication sciences, administrative, psychological) was observed, more precisely a weight of 62.25% of the total respondents. The analysis of the questionnaires highlights the fact that, on average, the majority of young people want to have their first job at the age of 21-22. However, there were respondents who stated that they have found a job from an earlier age, as well as students who mentioned they divide their time between classes and a job.

Table 1 shows the centralization of the data from the received answers regarding the variables related to general information and differentiation of respondents. It can be observed that the majority of the respondents were men (59.6% of the total respondents), with ages between 18 and 30 years. From the point of view of the level of studies, the highest percentage of the respondents of 70.86% is registered for Bachelor Studies. The best represented field of studies is that of the social sciences, followed by humanities and art and mathematics and natural sciences. It is worth noting that it was desired to include in the research sample of students from various fields of study in order to achieve the most objective results.

Table 1. Data analysis regarding respondents' gender, age, level of studies and field of studies

Variables	Choice Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	90	59.60
	Female	61	40.40
Age (years)	Less Than 18	5	3.31
	18 - 20	32	21.19
	20 - 25	78	51.66
	25 - 30	36	23.84
Level of studies	High School	5	3.31
	Bachelor Studies	107	70.86
	Masters Studies	36	23.84
	Other	3	1.99
Field of studies	Mathematics and natural sciences	14	9.27

Variables	Choice Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
	Engineering sciences	8	5.30
	Biological and biomedical sciences	6	3.97
	Social Sciences	94	62.25
	Humanities and art	19	12.58
	Physical education	10	6.62

Source: The authors based on data analysis from the questionnaire

The answers of the interviewees registered to the first question regarding career shows that the majority of the respondents (47.02%) would be willing to allocate between two and four hours weekly for career development (Figure 1). Only 4.64% said they would spend more than eight hours of their free time on their careers. These answers show that students are much more focused on completing their studies, but also on maintaining some time that they can enjoy with friends, family or developing a hobby.



Figure 1. How much of their free time the respondents are willing to dedicate to their career daily

Source: The authors based on data analysis from the questionnaire

The next two questions aimed at prioritizing the expectations of the respondents from their future employers, as well as prioritizing the aspects that they consider the most relevant. The target group had to give grades from 1 to 5 depending on the importance it attaches to each criterion, with 1 representing an important note and 5 being very important (Likert scales). Figure 2 shows that, in close proportion, all four available options were considered important by respondents. Therefore, the students surveyed stated that from the future employer they want both financial motivation and monthly bonuses and possibility to work from home, but most of them want a flexible work schedule (66%).

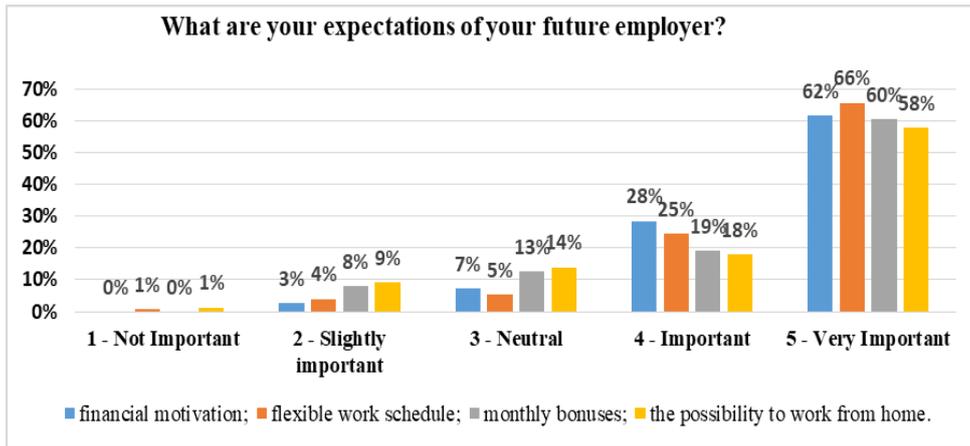


Figure 2. Graphic representation of respondents' expectations of their future employer

Source: The authors based on data analysis from the questionnaire

Figure 3 shows the answers of the respondents regarding the options they consider most important for them. Time with friends and career were the choices that got over 50% of the answers to value 5, the most important choice. The time for personal development is the one for which the answers were most evenly distributed within the sample, with values approaching 20% for each of the five Likert scale values. Also, family time is well represented for each of the 5 available values, which indicates that the students in the sample have different preferences and their choices vary depending on the values that they prioritize.

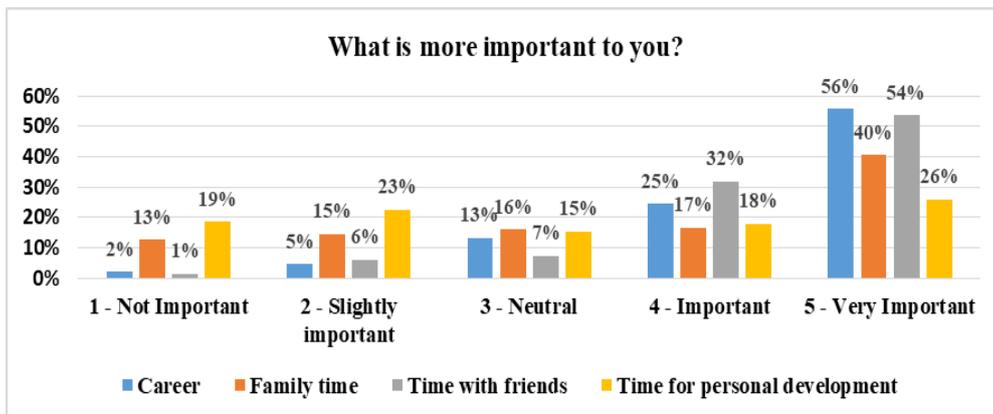


Figure 3. Graphic representation of respondents' preference regarding career, family time, time with friends and time for personal development

Source: The authors based on data analysis from the questionnaire

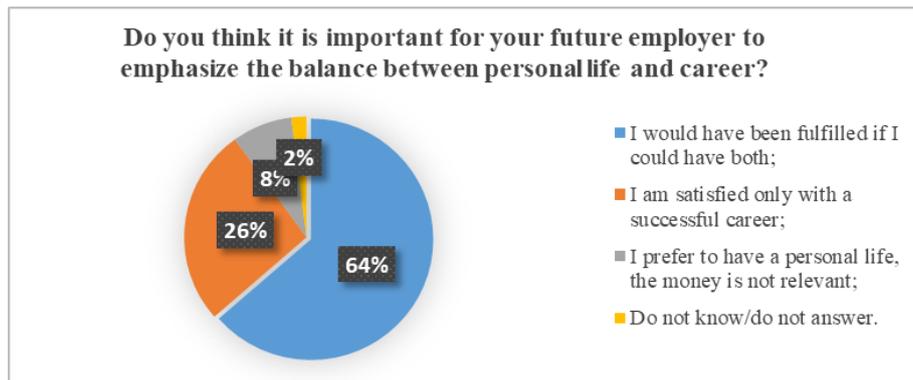


Figure 4. Graphic representation of respondents' expectations for their employers to emphasize the balance between personal and career life
Source: The authors based on data analysis from the questionnaire

Regarding the expectations of students for their future employers to emphasize the balance between personal and career life, it is noted that most respondents stated that they would be fulfilled if they could have both (Figure 4). What is surprising is that the next option that registered a high percentage of 26% was the one in which the students said they are satisfied if they have a successful career and only for 8% of those surveyed it is more important to have a personal life, stating that money is not relevant.

Another question concerned the availability of people to work overtime, and the majority stated that they are willing to remain after hours only if they are paid for it (Figure 5). The next answer that accumulated a significant percentage was for those who prefer to have a stable work schedule (30%).

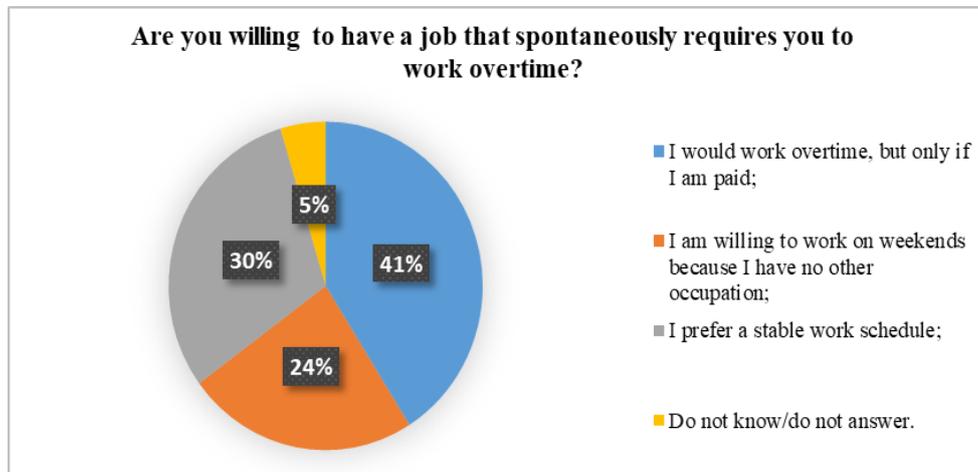


Figure 5. Graphic representation of respondents' willingness to have a job where they should sometimes work overtime
Source: The authors based on data analysis from the questionnaire

Thus, the tendency of the employees or the future employees, depending on the status of the interviewees, is to dedicate their time to the career, but to the extent that this brings them short-term benefits, respectively additional financial remuneration, or if they have no other obligations (24%). In the other situations, the respondents, during the time outside the normal working hours, want to deal with activities other than those related to the job.

5. Conclusions

In order to have a balance between personal life and career, it is important to have a realistic and objective perspective in order to be able to set certain limits in terms of professional development. Also, it is essential to maintain a balance, as well as a proper management of activities so that there is a time for work, a time for family, a time for friends and a time for ourselves.

The students who constituted the sample of our research expressed their desire to develop a career in different fields or even in an entrepreneurial direction. After they graduate and they will have a stable and well paid job, most of the respondents (94 people) stated they also want to establish a family. Moreover, they want to strike a balance between the two, to be able to carry out personal development activities or together with family members, but at the same time to be able to carry out their work responsibilities without depriving family members of their presence.

As a result, companies operating on the labour market today need to emphasize and promote strategies for maintaining a balance between office life and personal life in order to be part of high-performing employees and an increased emotional balance. An example of this is the 3M company that offers its employees the opportunity to make a good management of their professional and personal lives through a program called "Family Care Link Resource and Information Service", as well as with the event "Family Day" which is held annually within the organization. During these events the members of the families of the employees can participate in various activities organized by and within the company.

Thus, such an approach will bring benefits to both sides, not only for the employee, who will be able to achieve a balance in his or her life, but also for the employer, who will have employees who perform, are transparent and honest in arguing their needs.

One of the main limitations of this research would be the sample size. Our research included 151 students from the selected Lebanese universities. We consider that the possible results obtained from a more detailed analysis, carried out over a longer period of time (one year), including a sample of over 500 respondents, will be validated so that the results obtained can be reported to the population. This approach requires the involvement of a symmetrical number of respondents selected based on age categories and coming from several cities in the country. We also consider that in the future, an econometric analysis of the results obtained through the completions achieved through econometric software such as STATA and SPSS may be useful to make it possible to correlate several variables.

References

1. Abbasi, I.S. and Alghamdi, N.G., 2015. The prevalence, predictors, causes, treatments, and implications of procrastination behaviors in general, academic, and work setting. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 7(1), 59-66.
2. Athanassou, J.A. and Van Esbroeck, R. (Eds.), 2008. *International handbook of career guidance* (Vol. 21). Springer Science & Business Media.
3. Burke, R.J., 2000. Workaholism in organizations: The role of personal beliefs and fears. *Anxiety, stress and coping*, 13(1), 53-64.
4. Chrousos, G.P., 2009. Stress and disorders of the stress system. *Nature reviews endocrinology*, 5(7), 374.
5. Drucker, P., 2018. *Essential Drucker*. Routledge.
6. Groysberg, B. and Abrahams, R., 2014. Manage your work, manage your life. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(3), 58-66.
7. Harvard Business School Publishing; Hbs., 2000. *Harvard business review on work and life balance*. Harvard Business School Press.
8. Stranks, J., 2005. *Stress at work*. Routledge
9. World Health Organization, 2002. *The world health report 2002: reducing risks, promoting healthy life*. World Health Organization.