

Work-Life Balance – An Integrated Approach

The case for joint and several responsibility

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Table of Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	3
Key Findings	4
1. Objectives	5
2. Conceptual Framework	5
3. Methodology	7
4. Profile of Respondents	8
5. Results	
5.1 Work-life Balance assessment and outcomes	9
5.2 Work-life Balance indicators	14
5.3 Demands	15
5.4 Resources	16
5.5 Dispositional characteristics	18
Summary	25
References	26
Useful Websites	27
Authors' Profiles	28
Acknowledgments	28
Appendices	29

Executive Summary

The legal profession consists of a body of working men and women who, because of the demands of their occupation, find achieving a satisfactory relationship between their work and personal lives to be very challenging which has consequences for their health and well-being. The literature on the legal profession strongly indicates that work demands are major sources of stress for members of the legal profession which often leads to work interfering with their non-work life. Of relevance, the Annual Professions Study is the largest independent research project in Australia, made possible through collaboration between a range of industry groups, associations, professional service firms and a research consultancy. The 2007 study examined issues of health and well-being for people in the professional and business community (Beaton Consulting 2007). The survey found that professionals and students experience more depressive symptoms than the general population. When comparisons between the professions were made, lawyers were found to experience the highest incidence of depressive symptoms, followed by attorneys (Beaton Consulting 2007). As a result, the issue of work-life balance, coping strategies and health and well-being is on the Australian legal profession's business agenda.

The purpose of this report is to present the results of research conducted by the University of the Sunshine Coast in collaboration with the Queensland Law Society into the area of work-life balance.

The main aims of the report are to:

- review evidence which shows that the successful management of work-life balance is of benefit to individuals and organisations working in the legal profession and is, therefore, of strategic importance;
- outline a comprehensive framework to assist individuals and organisations to better understand the area of work-life balance;
- provide a practical resource which will contribute to the better management of work-life balance, specifically in the legal profession.

“Although there is no blue-print for work-life balance, there is a need to assist employers and employees jointly in finding ways to accommodate the competitive needs and the personal concerns of the individual worker in a manner consistent with their particular circumstances”
(Lotte Bailyn 2006).

The current research makes a useful contribution to the work-life field. It is difficult to make a business case for work-life balance or to assist employers and employees in a practical sense, without knowing precisely what we are talking about. By using a measure of work-life balance and taking an empirical approach, the current study moves beyond the theory of earlier work. As a result of this approach, an opportunity has been provided to gain valuable insight into the differences between individuals who report higher levels of perceived work-life balance, compared to those reporting lower levels.

The results of this research also shed light on individual, interpersonal and organisational factors contributing to the perception of work-life balance and also the links between perceived work-life balance and a range of consequences of relevance to employees and employers.

Key Findings

This report identifies and outlines the following key findings:

- the perception of work-life balance can be measured and was found to consist of two components:
 - a sense of control and synchrony across life's domains, and
 - a sense of doing what is required to achieve work-life balance;
- the perception of work-life balance is a significant predictor of a range of individual outcomes including:
 - life, job and career satisfaction,
 - intention to remain in the legal profession,
 - general well-being,
 - mental health and
 - self-rated performance;
- individual and contextual characteristics combine and contribute to work-life balance, recognising that the responsibility for achieving work-life balance is shared by both the organisation and the individual;
- while both women and men are active agents in the creation of successful work-life balance, several gender differences were found in the study.

“Redesigning work, so as to increase employees' resources for meeting work and family demands, offers great promise for enhancing satisfaction with work-family balance” (Lotte Bailyn 2006).

1. Objectives

The primary objective of the current research has been to examine how personal and environmental characteristics contribute to the perception of work-life balance.

In particular, the focus is on how various factors in an individual's work and non-work life act as enablers versus barriers and how they collectively contribute to the perception of work-life balance.

Further, this study's aim was to determine how the resultant perception of work-life balance impacts upon an individual's general health, wellbeing, job, career and life satisfaction and work performance.

2. Conceptual Framework

A 'situationist' perspective has been taken in the current study. Situationists would argue that work-life balance is not an end in itself, but a *perception*; it is a state that gives rise to satisfactions that are of value to the individual and his or her stakeholders. Therefore, in this study we are interested in study participants' perceptions of work-life balance and how these perceptions impact on their professional and personal lives.

For research on work-life balance to be of value we need to understand more about causes and consequences. To that end, a 'demands-and-resources' theoretical framework has been adopted for the conceptualisation of work-life balance and for the model put forward in present research (see Appendix B).

The approach taken to linking the components of the model begins with considering an individual's personal and environmental demands and resources. Resources are assets that may be used to help performance, reduce demands or generate additional resources. Examples of work-related resources that have been studied in the work-life field include: autonomy (the extent to which employees are able to decide how and when they do their job); family-supportive benefits and policies and how supportive the work environment is towards work-life balance, including supportive co-workers, supervisors and workplace culture. A number of researchers have also found that family support is a significant resource.

Demands have been defined as structural or psychological claims to which individuals must respond or adapt by exerting physical or mental effort. Work-related demands that have been linked with work-family conflict include long working hours and working extra hours without notice; job insecurity; and work pressure. Non-work related factors that contribute to levels of conflict include the number and age of dependants at home; having both parents working; and combining household/family tasks with paid employment.

Demands are generally seen as causing conflict and resources to result in facilitation. Facilitation occurs when engagement in work and home roles contribute positively to and benefit each other. Alternatively, conflict occurs when the demands of work and home roles are incompatible in some respect so that meeting the demands in one domain (work or home life) makes it difficult to meet the demands in the other domain. It is suggested that the resultant unique combinations of conflict and facilitation may be pivotal to understanding perceptions of work-life balance and its consequences. Further, lower levels of conflict and higher levels of facilitation are likely to be associated with higher levels of perceived work-life balance.

In addition, an individual's disposition, coping style and personal strategies also need to be taken into account. Researchers have suggested that personality be given greater consideration in understanding how an individual views and experiences work and family roles as the individual creates his or her own experience. In addition, previous research has shown that even if conflict is a likely consequence of engaging in work and family roles, it is how people cope with such conflict that determines their personal outcomes.

“Researchers should avoid the temptation to assume that all indicators of work and family experiences are equivalent to ‘balance’ and instead use theory to solidly ground their empirical measurement decisions” (Carlson, Grzywacz & Zivnuska 2009).

The consequences of work-life balance are then considered, such as work performance, satisfaction and general health and well-being. Perceptions of work-life balance are likely to be associated with positive reports of job, career and life satisfaction, well-being and self-rated performance.

3. Methodology

Members of the Queensland Law Society (QLS) were invited to participate in the online survey on work-life balance through the QLS's weekly e-newsletter, 'QLS Update' (see Appendix A). The research was also supported and promoted by the then Chief Executive Officer, Mr Peter Carne. Mr Carne endorsed two articles regarding the research which appeared in the QLS publication, 'Proctor' in October and November 2008. The survey was available for members to access online from 8 October to 22 December 2008.

Response rate: Three hundred and forty-two QLS members participated in the survey, resulting in 232 complete and 110 partially complete questionnaires. While participants were given the opportunity to claim a professional development point, a number 'dropped out' of the survey at different stages of the questionnaire.

Of the participants 142 requested feedback which was provided in the form of a 'Work-Life Balance Individualised Report'. They were entitled to a full professional development point for taking part in the research if they requested and actioned this feedback. The aim of the report was to provide individuals with an overall appraisal of their current work-life balance status and an opportunity for personal and professional development.

The data were analysed using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. These are summarised in the following sections – please contact the authors should you require further information in this regard.

4. Profile of Respondents

The following provides a 'snapshot' of the participants who responded to the survey:

Demographics: The survey sample consisted of 60% females and 40% males. In terms of age at the time of survey: 6% of participants were younger than 25 years; 45% aged between 25 and 34 years; 25% aged between 35 and 44 years; 17% aged between 45 and 54 years and 7% aged 55 years or more.

Work status: The majority of respondents reported working full-time (89%); 11% reported working part-time. The majority of respondents indicated that they were employed on a permanent basis (87%), 1% reported being casually employed, with the remaining 12% engaged in self-employment. The number of years practising law ranged from less than a year to 39 years, with an average of 9 years. Of study participants 58% reported being associates or employees of a law firm; 13% partners; 9% solo practitioners; 9% in-house company employees; 5% government employees and 1% incorporated legal practitioner directors.

Work Organisation: In terms of the size of organisation in which participants worked – 2% of respondents reported working from home; 40% in micro or small businesses; 34% in medium sized organisations and 20% in large organisations. Just over a third (35%) of participants reported working in the commercial/property sector of law, with others represented as follows: 16% in general practice; 6% in corporate law; 11% in family law; 3% in criminal law; 6% in insurance law; 7% in personal injury law; 5% in banking/finance law; 5% in building/construction law ; 4% in administrative law and 2% in a variety of areas (e.g., maritime, aviation, mining and information technology).

Family status: The majority (72%) of participants reported having a partner (married/de facto), with the remainder of respondents' family status reported as being single, divorced/separated or widowed. Fifty-one percent of respondents' partners (where applicable) worked full-time and 11% worked part-time. Further, 42% of the sample reported having dependants living at home (children, parents or others).

5. Results

5.1 Work-life balance assessment and outcomes

The current research used a previously validated, cross-cultural measure of work-life balance. The online survey asked participants a range of questions relating to their perception of how integrated their work life and home life appeared. Two components of perceived work-life balance resulted:

- a sense of control and synchrony over life's domains; and
- a sense of planned action (establishing priorities and investing energy).

With regard to the first component, respondents with higher levels of perceived work balance reported that there was a good 'fit' between their home, social and work activities and that they felt they had the resources to juggle the multiple demands of their work, family and personal lives. With regard to the second component, respondents with higher levels of perceived work balance reported that they had established priorities for their work and home life and focused their energy on the aspects they felt were important.

A total work-life balance score was calculated for each participant. Statistical analyses revealed an equal split in the sample between those reporting higher levels of perceived work-life balance and those reporting lower levels, providing an opportunity to compare these two groups of individuals.

Importantly, perceived work-life balance was found to be a significant predictor of the following personal outcomes:

- life satisfaction and well-being,
- job satisfaction,
- career satisfaction,
- intentions to leave the legal profession,
- self-rated performance,
- psychological health.

5.1.1 Life satisfaction and well-being

The Australian Personal Wellbeing Index (AWI) was used in the present survey to gauge participants' perceptions about how satisfied they were with their life in general and with different areas of their lives - their health, personal relationships, personal safety, standard of living, what they are achieving in life, community connection, future security and spirituality or religion. The AWI measures subjective well-being which is a more stable state of being well, feeling satisfied and contented. It refers to a deep, long-lasting sense of contentment as opposed to a passing moment of happiness.

The majority of work-life balance research has been undertaken in other parts of the world, which raises a question about the generalisability of the results to an Australian context. However, the use of the AWI as a benchmark is a welcome change, allowing comparisons to be made between respondents in the current study and the national average.

In terms of satisfaction with life as a whole, respondents reporting higher levels of work-life balance were on average 72% satisfied with their lives, which is close to the national average of 78%. The average life satisfaction score for participants reporting lower levels of work-life balance was 54%, well below the national average.

In terms of personal wellbeing as measured by the AWI, respondents reporting higher levels of work-life balance were on average 73% satisfied with the different areas of their lives, which is close to the national average of 76%. The average index score for participants reporting lower levels of work-life balance was 58%, once again well below the national average.

Overall, the results indicate a strong positive relationship between perceived work-life balance and life satisfaction and wellbeing. No gender differences were found.

If, as the current research suggests, work-life balance is a predictor of life satisfaction and wellbeing and we know that there are legal professionals who experience high levels of perceived WLB and are satisfied with their lives, it is important to understand the variables that differentiate these individuals from those at the other end of the spectrum.

5.1.2 Occupational satisfaction

Previous research suggests that both job and career satisfaction are comparatively low in the legal profession (e.g., Beaton Consulting 2007). In the current study, occupational satisfaction was gauged by investigating participants' job satisfaction, career satisfaction and their intention to leave the legal profession.

In line with the results from other studies, intention to leave the legal profession was more strongly, positively associated with job satisfaction than with career satisfaction – those with higher levels of job satisfaction expressed the desire to continue working in the legal profession. For all three measures of occupational satisfaction, those with higher work-life balance scores were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and their careers. Those with lower levels of work-life balance were more likely to be dissatisfied with their career, their job and expressed their desire to leave the legal profession.

Qualitative results from the current research support this quantitative data, as a number of participants revealed that they had made the choice to leave their job and to actively seek out employment where the opportunities to balance their work and home life were provided, in some cases for less income. The following quote from one participant sums up this sentiment:

"Not sure if this counts, but finding a great boss who is very understanding of the need for work/life balance. My previous employer did not understand this, so I made it an unspoken condition for my future place of employment."

Overall, work-life balance was found to be a positive predictor of job and career satisfaction and was found to be negatively related to intentions to leave the legal profession.

"Organisations need to embrace the realities of 21st century careers and recognise the importance of programs and policies that enable the careers of their employees" (Reitman & Schneer 2008).

According to the results of this study, the perception of work-life balance is, therefore, of strategic importance. From an employer's perspective, it is more challenging than ever to recruit, to engage and to retain top talent and to maximise productivity. However, employees now expect employers to be responsive to their need to balance their work and home lives and organisations that do not take this factor into account may find it difficult to maintain a competitive advantage and will continue to bear high turnover costs.

5.1.3 Self-rated performance

On the subject of productivity, the current study also investigated participants' perceptions of their work performance.

While self-rated performance has been criticised because it may not accurately reflect actual performance, interestingly the results of this research indicate that perceptions of recent performance are related to perceptions of work-life balance.

Participants with higher levels of work-life balance rated their performance in the previous week significantly higher than those with lower levels. However, the result for self-rated performance over the previous six months was not significant. In addition, in the general model, work-life balance was found to be a significant, positive predictor of self-rated performance for the previous week.

Today, working adults experience many challenges in their ability to be productive employees and to experience satisfaction, health and well-being. Human resource professionals and managers are continually trying to improve the performance of their organisations and employees. Successful work-life balance management looks to be part of the solution, according to the results of this study.

5.1.4 Psychological health

In light of the results of the Annual Professions Study cited earlier, the issue of mental health is of significance (Beaton Consulting 2007). The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) was used in the current survey to measure participants' general psychological health at the time of the survey. The GHQ is the most common assessment of psychological health used in Australia.

At the time of the survey approximately 30% of participants reported feeling symptoms of depression more than usual, such as losing sleep over worry, feeling constantly under strain, inability to concentrate and feeling like they could not overcome their difficulties. Participants reporting higher levels of work-life balance were less likely to report symptoms of depression and more likely to report symptoms of positive mental health, than those with lower levels.

In general, the results of this study indicate that work-life balance is significantly, negatively related to psychological ill-health – those with lower levels of work-life balance perceptions are more likely to report symptoms of depression.

Respondents who requested feedback on their results were encouraged to discuss their symptoms with their medical practitioner, particularly if they had been ongoing. A "Where to Find Help" section was also included in the individualised report.

For the future, however, these results should not be ignored and it is important for employers to be aware of the prevalence of depression and to have the facilities to recognise and support employees who may be suffering from symptoms. Similarly, it is important for individuals to realise when they need help and then to access it. More importantly, rather than treating only the symptoms, the underlying causes need to be addressed.

It is recommended that both employers and employees access the resources provided on the QLS website for assistance with stress and depression.

"The relationship between workplace effectiveness and mental health is important to note given that employees with poorer mental health have lower productivity on the job and generate higher health care costs for employers – not to mention the pain, suffering, and costs experienced by the workers themselves and their families" (Burton, Conti, Chen, Schultz & Edington 1999).

5.2 Work-life balance indicators (conflict and facilitation)

The current research supports the view of other researchers who suggest that work, family and individual characteristics interact in ways that may be either facilitative or conflictive. However, this study takes the view that measures of conflict and facilitation are *not* measures of work-life balance. Rather, conflict and facilitation are useful for understanding the effects of the demands and resources associated with the work and personal life domains, serving as useful 'indicators' of work-life balance – lower levels of conflict and higher levels of facilitation are expected to be associated with work-life balance.

Results from the current survey indicated that work interferes with home life more than home interferes with work life, when it comes to time and energy. On the other hand, participants reported that their home life provided them with the opportunity to relax and regain their lost energy:

- *Work-family conflict:* 60% of study participants agreed that their work keeps them from activities at home more than they would like and 55% agreed that when they get home from work they are often too 'frazzled' to participate in activities/responsibilities at home.
- *Family-work conflict:* on the other hand, 19% of study participants agreed that the time they spend on responsibilities at home often interferes with their work responsibilities and only 14% agreed that tension and anxiety from their home life often weakens their ability to do the job.
- *Work-family facilitation:* 68% of respondents agreed that because they work, they enjoy their time at home more. However, only 6% of respondents reported that when they get home from work they often feel energised, making them feel more like participating in activities/responsibilities at home.
- *Family-work facilitation:* only 32% of respondents agreed that because of the time they spend on their home life, they enjoyed their work more. However, 56% of respondents agreed that because they relax and regain their energy at home, they can better concentrate on their work.

Overall, the results of this study support the theory and the proposed model – lower levels of conflict and higher levels of facilitation were found to be associated with higher levels of perceived work-life balance. The strongest result was the positive, negative relationship between work-family conflict and work-life balance. Work-family and family-work facilitation were positively associated with work-life balance. Family-work conflict was negatively associated with work-life balance, but the result was not significant.

Taken together, these results provide strong evidence for the need to understand more about the antecedents of conflict and facilitation – in the current study, this means demands and resources.

5.3 Demands

Work and family demands are generally related to work-family and family-work conflict and the current study supports this previous finding. An overall measure of work demands was positively related to work-family conflict and an overall measure of home demands was positively related to family-work conflict.

Demands at home - the responses for questions relating to the time, energy and attention demands placed on study participants were mixed. While 57% of the sample did not agree that home requires all of their attention, 45% felt that they have a lot of home demands and 68% agreed that they have a lot of responsibility in their home life. In addition, 70% of participants felt they did not have enough time to get everything done at home and 61% agreed that they often have obligations at home that compete with one another.

Demands at work - with regard to work demands, 63% of the sample agreed that work requires all of their attention, 81% felt that they have a lot of work demands and 87% agreed that they have a lot of responsibility at work. In addition, 81% felt like they have a lot to do at work, 86% agreed that work requires a lot from them and 81% felt that they often have obligations that compete with one another at work. Sixty-five percent of respondents felt that they often over-extend themselves at work and 64% often feel rushed in their job.

Work-related demands that have previously been linked with work-family conflict include long working hours and working extra hours without notice. Long working hours and working out of business hours were both positively associated with work-family conflict in the current study.

The majority of participants reported that they would prefer to work fewer hours than they currently do (61%); 37% reported being happy with the hours they work and only 2% reported that they would prefer to work more hours. Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported working more than 40 hours in a typical week and 40% reported spending between two and ten hours attending work related activities after work.

The number and age of dependants at home are non-work related factors that have been found to contribute to levels of conflict. In the current study, there was a positive relationship between having children under the age of 12 years and family-work conflict. However, other previously related factors, such as both parents working and having other dependants were not related to family-work conflict in this study. Marital status was negatively related to family-work conflict – having the support of a partner is likely to help reduce family-work conflict.

While there were no gender differences with regard to work demands, women reported higher levels of home demands than men. Gender differences were found as women reported spending more time on domestic duties than men. However, men reported having to work longer hours outside of business hours than women.

“A first step in the process of achieving balance is to examine stressors (which cause conflict) and resources (which may result in facilitation)” (O’Driscoll, Brough & Kalliath 2006).

5.4 Resources

Several studies have shown that resources may buffer the impact of demands and that they are likely to be related to facilitation. Work-related resources that have been studied in previous research include work-life initiatives. Work-life initiatives address structural (flexible job design, human resource policies) and cultural (supportive supervisors, climate) factors. Previous research has shown that the availability of work-life benefits, in conjunction with a supportive supervisor and an organisational climate promoting their utilisation aids organisations in attracting and retaining employees.

The results from this study show a positive association between managerial and colleague support, positive work-life balance culture and usage of work-life benefits with work-family facilitation. Gender differences were found with men more likely to perceive their workplace as having a positive work-life balance culture and women more likely to perceive their workplace as having a negative work-life balance culture. The importance of managerial support for their employees' work-life issues is now so well established that it cannot be ignored. A recent study has shown that training managers to be more supportive of work-life balance is a simple and inexpensive route to improving employee health and satisfaction, proving that small interventions can have a big impact throughout an organisation.

With regard to the benefits offered in the current study, a number were utilised when needed and offered:

1. flexitime (i.e., choice in starting and ending work times) – 27% needed and used this benefit;
2. compressed work week (i.e., working 4 x 10 hour days) – 8% needed and used this benefit;
3. telecommuting (i.e., working from home at least one day a week) – 15% needed and used this benefit;
4. part-time work (25% needed and used this benefit).

However, many more participants indicated that these benefits were not offered and that they would use them if they were offered – flexitime (34% would use benefit if offered); compressed work week (41% would use benefit if offered); telecommuting (34% would use benefit if offered); part-time work (12% would use benefit if offered).

With regard to child and elder-care, it would appear from this survey that a range of benefits are not being offered. However, participants would use these benefits if they were available – on-site child-care (26% of respondents would use benefit if offered); subsidised local child-care (26% would use benefit if offered); child-care information/referral services (22% would use benefit if offered); maternity/paternity leave (23% would use benefit if offered); elder-care leave (15% would use benefit if offered).

“Organisations must learn to be able to support a variety of ‘flexstyles’ as a diversity attribute of the varied preferences and needs workers have regarding the degree of desired blending of work and family roles throughout the workday or week. More individuals want to work in different ways across generations, lifestyle and family configurations. Employers need to adapt to view work-life preferences for integration and separation as a new form of workforce diversity” (Kossek, Lewis & Hammer 2010)

Characteristics of the job that have been linked with lower work-family conflict are flexible job design and job autonomy (the extent to which employees are able to decide how they go about doing their job). Results of the present study support these results – flexibility in selecting work location and work schedule and having a high degree of autonomy on the job were negatively related to work-family conflict. Men reported higher levels of work autonomy than women.

A number of researchers have found that family support is significantly and negatively associated with conflict at the work-family interface and others have found that family support was significantly related to family-work facilitation. In the present research the majority of participants with partners reported that they provided them with support, so this was not a differentiating factor. However, support from family and friends was associated with higher levels of work-life balance and support from friends was related to family-work facilitation in the current study.

5.5 Dispositional characteristics

Researchers have noted the disproportional emphasis on environmental and situational characteristics and the relative neglect of individual differences and psychological characteristics as contributing factors in the work-life field. They suggest the need to incorporate relevant environmental and individual variables within a single study, in order to broaden our understanding of the complex work-life phenomenon. The current research has taken up this call with the inclusion of personal characteristics such as personality traits, coping style and strategies, considering them as contributing to the overall dynamics of work-life balance.

5.5.1 Core self-evaluations

An individual's core self-evaluation (CSE) or positive self-regard, is the basic fundamental appraisal of their worthiness, effectiveness and capability as a person. In general, the results of the current survey indicated that participants felt they performed well across a variety of situations – 92% agreed that they complete tasks successfully and 83% agreed that they are capable of coping with most of their problems. While 64% of participants reported feeling satisfied with themselves overall, 63% agreed that they sometimes felt depressed and 71% agreed that sometimes they do not feel in control of their life.

An important finding from this study is the relationship between core self-evaluations and perceived work-life balance. The results indicate that those with positive core self-evaluations report higher levels of perceived work-life balance. Such results make sense because these individuals have been found by CSE researchers to see themselves as capable, worthy and in control of their lives. The link between positive core-self evaluations and work-life effectiveness warrants further investigation.

5.5.2 Personality

The study investigated personality using the widely-adopted 'Big Five' scale comprising the dimensions of: extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience. Previous research found the traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness to be related to work-family facilitation but not to work-family conflict.

In the current research, the trait of conscientiousness was found to be associated with lower levels of work-family conflict and lower levels of conflict were found to be strongly associated with higher levels of work-life balance. The results make sense in that conscientiousness is thought to reflect dependability, that is, being careful, thorough, responsible, organised, planful, hard-working, achievement-oriented and persevering.

5.5.3 Work-life balance management

The current study asked participants about the ways they usually cope with stress in their life. The survey included measures on a range of coping strategies – specific behavioural and psychological efforts used to master, tolerate or reduce the impact of stressful events.

Generally, effective coping strategies are found to be better ways to deal with stressful events than ineffective coping strategies. Participants indicated that they used a range of *effective* coping strategies a medium amount to a lot of the time:

- acceptance (82%);
- planning/using strategies (80%);
- active coping/direct action (78%);
- positive thinking (61%); and
- seeking advice/assistance from others (61%).

Participants indicated that they are unlikely to find comfort in the effective strategies religion or spirituality (64%) or to seek emotional support (55%).

Participants indicated that they are *not* likely to use a range of *ineffective* coping strategies:

- giving up trying to cope (83%);
- denial (78%);
- self-blame (71%);
- substance abuse (62%) and
- venting of emotions (54%).

Disengagement (giving up), expressing negative feelings (venting) and self-criticism were ineffective styles of coping most associated with lower levels of work-life balance. Women reported that they are more likely to use planning and organising strategies and to call on others for support than men. However, they were also more likely to vent and to criticise themselves. Men reported that they are more likely to spend time with their partners and children (where applicable), to take part in leisure and self-care activities and to use technology as work-life balance management strategies.

5.5.4 Strategies

Participants were asked to describe the strategies that they had used which had been successful in helping them to integrate their work and home life. Following qualitative data analysis, seven themes were identified – boundary management, technology, leisure activities, support, flexibility, cognitive strategies and behavioral strategies.

The key findings, reflecting the attitudes and perceptions of participants with regard to effective work-life balance management strategies, are presented below. In the description of findings that follows, quotes have been selected from the data to illustrate the themes and to depict the intended meaning of the study participants.

Boundary management

The main theme identified in this study relates to how participants manage the boundary between home and work. Segmentation is a strategy used by employees to separate work and non-work time and activities, whereas integration is a strategy whereby the person overlaps these role experiences. Many participants reported making conscious decisions not to take work home or to work over weekends, “so that there is a separation”; while others made sure they focused on work during work hours and did not think about it when they went home – these are examples of segmentation strategies.

The following responses from two respondents who work from home reflect the fact that people vary in their preference for segmentation or integration as a work-life balance strategy:

“I work completely from home and I have learned to turn off the computer at night and not to check work emails on the weekend. I have also learned that if possible, work should stop by 7.00 pm or I have trouble sleeping.”

“I work from home and move from work jobs to home jobs multiple times per day - I hang out the washing at morning tea and often have kids working on the computer in the background while I am answering phone calls or emails.”

It is important for employees to find a 'fit' between their preferred boundary management strategy and workplace policies and practices and for employers to understand that employees have preferences, as research evidence suggests that when there is incongruence, employees experience lower job satisfaction and commitment.

Technology

Despite extensive speculation on the effects of technology on work-life balance, there appears to be very little research to support the speculation. The current study lends support to the view that the use of technology increases people's autonomy and work functioning and enables the successful integration of multiple life roles:

“Ordering groceries on-line and getting them delivered has significantly reduced amount of time I spend on the (precious) weekend doing chores and weeknights cooking dinner/making lunches for the next day.”

Technology is also being used for relaxation purposes, such as participating in social networking activities:

"I use the internet/Facebook at the end of the day and at home to relax from the office work routine."

Given the dearth of empirical research, it would appear that this is an area worthy of further investigation by work-life balance researchers.

Leisure activities

The current study supports a growing body of published literature theorising that leisure can be an effective coping strategy helping to maintain employee health and wellness. A large number of study participants reported the importance of the planned participation in leisure activities as a strategy for successful work-life integration. Leisure included passive activities (e.g., watching television), active activities (e.g., playing sport, exercising) or taking time out (e.g., holidays, days off):

"I have negotiated so that I am able to take the Christmas school holidays off - this prolonged break last year gave me a great restorative boost to my sanity and has made this year easier to cope with knowing that it will occur again."

"Try to take some time out for myself. I like to have a massage and watch something really dumb on TV when I get home from work."

"Playing sport / exercise helps provide a division between work and home."

"Exercise and relaxation techniques."

Leisure activities offer opportunities for recovery, rejuvenation and greater resilience in coping with stress. Organisations that encourage and support their employees taking vacations, participating in social activities and taking time for leisure may find they have happier employees and a healthier work environment.

Support

Results of the current study provide telling evidence emphasising the importance of a work environment that is supportive of the need for work-life balance, particularly the impact of having a supportive supervisor and workplace culture. These results reiterate a recurrent theme in the work-life literature:

"In my current job I do have much better work-life balance than other jobs I have had. I probably could be earning more elsewhere but I have continued in my current job because it is a family-friendly environment."

Research has shown that support from others is an effective coping strategy. In particular, employees who report that their spouses provide support experience less difficulty in balancing the work and home domains.

It is also important for individuals to actively understand themselves, their personal needs and to communicate effectively as communication plays a key role in fostering support. The current study lends support to this view:

"I communicate with my spouse that I am the primary breadwinner and potential baby-maker, so I need him to contribute e.g., cooking dinners and doing washing, and talk about him staying home with any potential baby. Communication has worked in terms of weekday"

home chores but not so much on the weekends. Also communication with my employer that I need help, when it gets too much."

"My wife and I work together (not that getting married was an integration strategy!), but co-ordinating work and home life together assists each of us in managing both spheres of life."

Flexibility

As reported previously, findings from the current study lend support to the importance of flexibility as a factor in the achievement of work-life balance, which is another common theme in work-life research.

In particular, respondents reported the perceived value of flexible work arrangements and the negotiation of same, for example:

"I work from home at least one day a week which enables me to care for an infant."

"My hours have been negotiated so that I am able to drop my children to school each morning and collect them each afternoon."

Cognitive strategies

A theme identified in the current research supports the conceptual and empirical research found in the coping literature, focusing on cognitive coping strategies. A number of study participants identified positive cognitive restructuring strategies such as acceptance, humour and positive reappraisal as contributing to their successful work-life balance, for example:

"My work tends to be either a flood or a drought. Over the years I have learnt to accept that's the way family law is. When it's really busy I have to put in long hours. When it's quiet I try to spend more time with the family."

"I do not take myself too seriously."

"Facing the reality that some things just can't be achieved or engaged in helps reduce stress."

In particular, the following participants' responses provide insights into how cognitive re-appraisal involved a reinterpretation of their situation in line with their values and beliefs, leading to actively revising their expectations and scaling back within the work domain:

"I left the sixty hours / week inner city 'successful' legal life two and a half years ago ... I also left all the rhetoric about what you needed to do and be to succeed in law. Guess what, you can be a very competent and successful lawyer and have a good life outside of work."

"Change to a less stressful job. Deliberately avoid working long hours. Accept slightly lower pay as a trade off. Stop the obsession with money and position."

"After several years as a lawyer I made a conscious decision to change roles to achieve better job satisfaction and a better work-life balance. The legal profession, in my view revolves around stress, deadlines, constant client demands, time recording, money money money, and longer than average working hours. It seems that you are simply a conveyor belt for files; a machine whose purpose is to pump out billable hours. There isn't much scope for actual enjoyment of the law and I often went home stressed and dissatisfied. While staying in the profession, I decided to change roles to move away from direct client work and fee earning. This has substantially improved my lifestyle."

The above comments emphasise the point that employees now expect employers to be responsive to their need to balance work and life commitments and organisations that do not meet their employees' work-life balance needs will find it hard to retain their staff. The results also highlight the challenges of achieving work-life balance in the legal profession.

Behavioural strategies

The current study supports previous research reporting the use of behavioural strategies to manage the work-life interface. Participants reported using planning and organising strategies. Other strategies mentioned were time management, prioritising and goal-setting:

"Set time limits to come home early to spend time with the family instead of staying in the office after hours."

"I try and organise my day so that I work from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm during the week and so I do not need to work on weekends. I am fortunate that there is not a lot of pressure where I work to bill a certain amount per month. Having said that, I do the best I can and am always improving my work practices to increase my efficiency."

"Sorting out priorities, and reminding myself that I need to look after my marriage as that is the most important thing."

"Set quantifiable and realistic goals and consciously and firmly allocate time to specific activities regarding the four sectors of self, family, work and community involvement."

"Decide what is important and then revolve around those 'immovable' aspects. Once I realised that I cannot please everyone and focused on pleasing/focusing on what is most important, then as long as I was meeting those commitments, I diminished the feeling of failure in respect to 'everything' as was only 'failing' at things which I designated as 'not as important'."

The above results indicate that individuals engage in specific behavioural strategies aimed at achieving work-life balance, suggesting a range of personal and professional development opportunities as appropriate interventions. For example, by implementing flexible work arrangements at the organisational level and introducing time management practices at the individual level, perceptions of control and work-family balance are likely to be fostered.

Summary

Putting it all together: the data gathered in the current research supports the conceptual model put forward, such that:

1. demands are related to conflict;
2. resources are related to facilitation;
3. work-family conflict, work-family facilitation and family-work facilitation are significantly related to work-life balance;
4. the perception of work-life balance is a predictor of a range of outcomes relevant to individuals and their workplaces.

It is important to be able to translate research outcomes into practical solutions for the 'real world'. The current conceptualisation has implications for individual and organisational endeavours to promote work-life balance. From an individual's perspective it is suggested that any intervention needs to be based upon an audit of the demands and resources present, along with an assessment of their impact on a person's life. For example, this research shows that the extent to which a person has access to support at work and in the family can be critical to reducing the negative effects of work-family conflict.

From a human resource management perspective, practitioners responsible for promoting work-family balance should implement multi-level interventions which involve creating co-ordinated activities at the individual and organisational level that support each other. Human resources professionals can enhance the effectiveness of work-life policies and programs by assessing and understanding the extent of demands, the availability of resources and the effectiveness of adaptive strategies and tactics that employees use at home and work to fulfil their responsibilities.

In conclusion, it is evident that work-life balance is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. At an individual level, employees should be encouraged to be pro-active in the management of their own work-life balance by taking into account their particular set of personal characteristics, demands and available resources and to utilise a range of effective strategies. At an organisational level, participants in the current research revealed that success at managing the work-life interface is often dependent upon contextual factors, in particular, responsive workplaces where the culture and management are supportive, lifestyle-friendly programs are available and jobs are characterised by reasonable work hours and a degree of flexibility and autonomy.

The benefit of this holistic approach lies in its recognition that the responsibility for achieving work-life balance is shared by both the organisation and the individual. At a societal level, it would appear that we need to continue to address the imbalances that still exist between men and women on the domestic front and in the workplace. It should be noted, however, that while much can be gleaned from the current study, the generalisability of the results is limited due to the size and geographical restriction of the survey sample and the fact that participants came from a single occupation, namely, the legal profession.

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Useful Websites

Australian Centre on Quality of Life and the Australian Wellbeing Index (AWI)

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/index.php>

The Australian Centre for Research in Employment and Work (ACREW):

<http://www.buseco.monash.edu.au/mgt/research/acrew/>

Australian Institute of Family Studies

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/>

Centre for Work + Life and The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI)

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/default.asp>

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/projects/awali.asp>

Griffith University, Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/business/centre-work-organisation-wellbeing>

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

<http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/>

Sloan Work and Family Research Network

<http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/>

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Andrew Hede is Professor of Management and was the Foundation Dean of Business at the University of the Sunshine Coast (1995-2000). He graduated in the mid-70s from Sydney University with a doctorate in Psychology. He is a registered psychologist and has had extensive experience as a senior manager in the Australian Commonwealth and State public services as well as private sector experience as the inaugural director of the Public Policy Research Centre in Sydney. Dr Hede has more than 100 scholarly publications on a range of topics including community noise, leadership, organisational conflict, senior civil service, public policy, and employment equity. His main areas of expertise and current interest are mindfulness, leadership, interpersonal conflict, team dynamics, and women in management. In association with the Australian Institute of Management he offers consultancies and workshops in stress management (see www.totalcalm.com.au).

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Work-Life Balance Survey Via Queensland Law Society's Weekly E-Newsletter 'QLS Update'

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND YOU

The University of the Sunshine Coast, in collaboration with the Queensland Law Society, is conducting research into the topic of work-life balance and the legal profession in Queensland. The University and the QLS recognise that achieving a satisfactory relationship between our work and personal lives can be very challenging at times, which then impacts upon our general health, wellbeing, satisfaction and performance.

Much is known about the challenges and effects of lack of work-life balance; too little is known about how to improve it. The current research intends to address this issue by investigating the positive, as well as the negative aspects of the equation, resulting in a better understanding of the work and personal life interface. We would like your contribution in this regard.

What does the study involve?

The study involves completion of a strictly confidential, online survey which takes approximately twenty minutes. QLS members will have the option to request an individualised report on their survey results.

How will the study benefit you and others?

QLS members who complete the survey, request an individualised report and develop their own action plan will be **eligible for one full CPD unit** under QLS guidelines. The report will offer members an opportunity to develop specific strategies to build on the positives and overcome any negatives in relation to their work-life balance, thereby enhancing their career and personal development.

The overall results will be made available to the QLS to assist them in providing support to members in this increasingly recognised area of importance for work performance.

We invite you to go the following link which will be open between 1 October and 30 November 2008, to contribute to our research:

<http://survey.usc.edu.au/opinio/s?s=1421>

We thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any queries, please telephone Barbara Haddon on (07) 5459 4573 or email bhaddon@usc.edu.au.

Appendix B:

Model of Work-life Balance – An Integrated Conceptual Framework

