



DETERMINANTS OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE AMONG BANKING PROFESSIONALS: AN INQUIRY INTO A PRIVATE BANK IN SRI LANKA

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INTRODUCTION

Psycho-social wellbeing is a dynamic, multivariate process that involves a broad spectrum of constructs. In recent years, wellbeing and its relationship to the work-life interface have received increasing attention from both the academia and the practitioners due to employee doubts related to the choice between the demand of the job and their family responsibilities (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Bardoel, De Cieri, & Santos, 2008; Tabassum, Farooq, & Fatima, 2017). Most of the individuals play multiple roles as a spouse, parent, child, or deal with other religious and leisure activities and require managing the stress, strain, and time issues associated with their responsibilities (Tabassum et al., 2017). As a result, inter-role conflicts could occur when one's role as an employee is incompatible with the other areas. Numerous scholars have defined work and life balance (WLB); however, the definitions have stayed fairly consistent over the years (Clark, 2001; Morrissey & Schmidt, 2008). The balance between work and life was identified as the satisfaction and good functioning at work and home with minimum role conflict (Morrissey & Schmidt, 2008). Moreover, it is important to be aware of the different demands upon individuals and personal resources to understand the work-life balance; time, and energy. However, considerable research has been carried out to understand the antecedents of work-family conflicts in the hope that a better understanding of the causes of work-family conflicts will help people to avoid them (McFarland, 2004). In this backdrop, work-life balancing has been studied in many professions: accounting (Opatha & Perera, 2017); construction (Tijani, Osei-Kyei, & Feng, 2020); and banking (Dharmawansa & Madhuwanthi, 2020; Zoyza & Sivalogathan, 2018). However, most of the studies were quantitative (e.g: Dharmawansa & Madhuwanthi, 2020; Zoyza & Sivalogathan, 2018). This shows the necessity of focusing on the real experience of banking professionals to explore how they balance their work with life to identify the determinants of work-life balance.

In the Sri Lankan context, the banking and finance sector which is an important contributor to the economy, recorded a performance of 15.4 percent in 2020 with a 5 percent increase compared with the period of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2019 (The Central Bank, 2020). This outstanding sector comprises twenty-four (24) licensed commercial banks and six (6) specialised licensed banks (The Central Bank, 2021). Out of licensed commercial banks, only two are government banks and all other banks are private entities. The sector has employed 2.2 percent of the labor force in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, in terms of gender, the male participation was 50.4 percent while 49.6 percent were females in the banking and finance sector (Ministry of Labour, 2018). This reflects that both males and females have equal participation in the banking sector. However, banking is one of the professional sectors with a higher workload, long working hours, and pressure to perform the tasks accurately on time. It was anticipated that banking employees undergo more work exhaustion due to workload (Obiageli, Uzochukwu & Ngozi, 2015; Adikaram & Jayatilake, 2016; Tabassum et al., 2017). Similarly, the banking employees in Sri Lanka need to work mostly from 9 am to 5 pm with tight deadlines and unpredictable workflow pressure.

Many employees report that they experience job stress and work-life imbalance (Adikaram, 2016). Furthermore, the competition for market leadership in the banking sector may urge the



bank managers to burden their employees with an excessive workload to meet their targets. Employees try their best to survive in the organization by spending more time at work, to the detriment of their personal life. All these may affect the upbringing of children, lead to broken and unhappy homes and poor social life (Obiageli et al., 2015). Studies about grievances of employees in Sri Lanka (e.g: Opatha, 1994; Akuratiyagamage & Opatha, 2004; Opatha, 2005) reveal that the large number of grievances created by the job are the most serious. This indicates that many studies have been conducted on psychological outcomes of the work-life imbalance but limited studies have addressed the aspect of determinants or solutions to mitigate employee grievances occurring due to the work-life imbalance. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to explore the determinants of work-family balance among the banking professionals working in the head office of a private bank in Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative, interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) to explore the determinants of work and family balance among the professionals in a Sri Lankan private bank by analysing the views and experiences of the banking professionals who participated in this study (e.g: Goulding, 2005). The rationale behind the adoption of IPA is that it facilitates extracting the lived experiences of the participants and it has been employed in the exploration of the phenomena of work-life balance (e.g: Lewis, 2003; Millward, 2006; Woodward, 2007; Rehman & Roomi, 2012). The purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. The sample was 10 married executive-level employees with children, working in the head office of the chosen private bank in Sri Lanka. The reason for selecting the employees based in the head office is the difference observable in roles and the workload handled by employees in branches and those in the head office. Therefore, combining branch staff and head office staff tends to distort the findings and results. Additionally, the participants were selected deliberately handpicking them based on their gender. Accordingly, 5 females and 5 males were selected since both male and female employees have an equal representation in the banking and finance sector (Ministry of Labour, 2018); they willingly shared their personal experiences, challenges, and input in relation to work-life balance leading to meaningful insights into the determinants of work-life balance. Semi-structured interviews were carried out for the data collection of the study. Interviews were conducted to the point of theoretical saturation where a new respondent provides no new views and experiences about their work and life (e.g: O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Since the participants were selected to get their lived experiences, the participant views were taken as 'fact' and the sampling was 'purposive and prescribed from the start' and the interviews were the main instrument of data collection (Goulding, 2005). The instrument was structured based on open-ended questions to obtain insights into the self, family, and work-related experiences of the participants. Thematic analysis has been applied to analyse the data. There are various approaches to conducting a thematic analysis, but this study followed the most commonly adopted steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for generating themes and codes manually using their six-step method of familiarizing, identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes. The process was conducted until no new themes were emerging.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

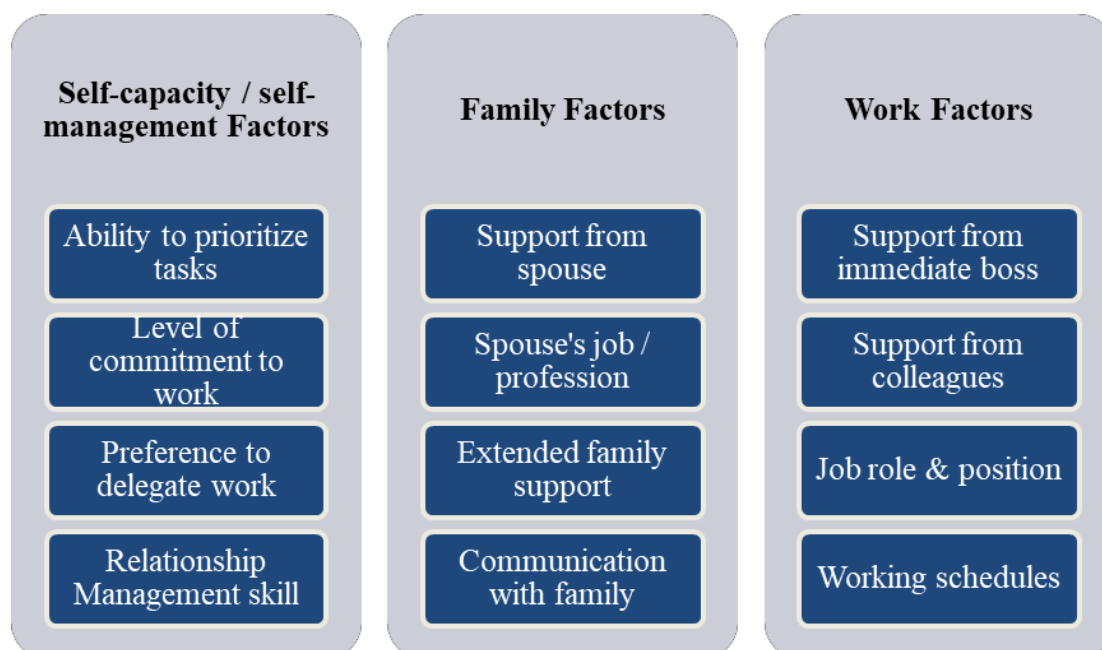
The demographic profile of the respondents of this study was five male and five female managerial level employees in the age range of 29 – 40. Most of them have only one child. It was noted that some employees have little work experience in the bank while some have been employed in the same place for quite a long time extending up to 11 years.

Table 1 shows the factors highlighted by the respondents as the determinants of the work-life balance. They were categorised into three broad aspects as self- capacity/self-management, family and work as the determinants of work-life balance. By considering the issues raised



by the respondents, the ability to prioritize tasks, level of commitment to work, and preference to delegate work, relationship management skills were grouped into the broad theme of self-capacity / self-management. Secondly, support from the spouse, spouse's job / profession, extended family support and communication with family were the family factors. Furthermore, the identified work-related factors were the support from the immediate boss/supervisor, support from colleagues/ co-workers, job role and position and working schedules.

Table 1: Determinants of work- life balance



According to the results of the study, it was indicated that work-life balance was perceived as a combination of self-capacity / self-management, family and work factors. Respondents also highlighted the significance of the prioritization of work. This covers work as well as personal life.

“Prioritize based on importance, delegate of unimportant activities, prioritize and complete your work. So, you will be peaceful when you are at home” (Respondent 1).

Their view of WLB was also influenced by the banking sector and the people dynamics determined by their community connections, spouses, and other related factors. For example, of family and support from the spouse, respondent 2 stated,

“My blessing is my family. They are helping me a lot to keep the balance and if I have to attend to more work, my wife manages the family activities. She herself is a banker and we have a very good understanding” .

Respondent 6 who is a female relationship manager stated, *“I’m really grateful and, thankful that he is there for me through thick and thin. If not for him by now I’m sure I would have ended up in divorce since the work environment is so unreasonable all the time”*.

Thus, WLB from the perspective of banking employees was influenced by many factors other than their work. Employees who are married with children experience work-life balance



uniquely based on their age, gender, social support from home, and individual personalities. However, Ratnesh, Ali, and Sinha (2019) who compare work-life balance among Asian nationalities representing India, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, and China identify flexibility as the most prominent determinant of work-life balance among the Indian and Pakistani employees instead of self-management while social support is the most vital determinant of work-life balance among Chinese and Malaysian employees. Further, among Chinese and Singaporean employees, job satisfaction is the most important determinant of work-life balance which was not highlighted in this study. Similar to the findings associated with Chinese and Malaysian employees, it emerged that family factors are a major pillar that strengthens employees, especially working couples in Sri Lanka. This could be due to the reason that Sri Lanka is an Asian country highly driven by an extended family culture (e.g: Opatha & Hasini, 2017). However, many studies show that the support from spouse, spouse's job/profession, extended family support, and communication with the family has created a great positive impact equally on their professional and personal life in the Asian context (e.g: Rehman & Roomi, 2012; Tabassum et al., 2017; Talukder, Vickers, & Khan, 2018). But self – management aspects were highlighted in this study (e.g: Tabassum et al., 2017) instead of flexibility which is commonly identified in studies related to India and Pakistan (Ratnesh et al., 2019). However, work-related factors identified in this study which are the support from the immediate boss/supervisor, support from colleagues/ co-workers, job role and position, and working schedules are supported by several studies (e.g: Obiageli et al., 2015; Tabassum et al., 2017; Ratnesh et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the determinants of the work-life balance of banking employees in the head office of a private bank in Sri Lanka. Further, this study explored how these banking employees experience and balance their work and life with several commitments, day in and day out. This study makes a theoretical contribution by proposing three broad categories as self- capacity / self-management, family, and work as the determinants of work-life balance. However, it is a known fact that the experience of WLB changes over time as it is a process facilitated by the interconnectedness of multiple roles played by an individual to gain work-life balance and the study points out how those main factors play a main part in everyone's personal and professional life. However, in this study, the employees have not highlighted the change of WLB experience along with time. Furthermore, this study has several implications useful for the human resource policymakers and practitioners in the private sector banks in Sri Lanka. First, self-capacity / self-management factors could change from person to person depending on the level of their skills which have been little identified in previous studies of other Asian countries (Ratnesh et al., 2019). This is an indication that the experience of WLB of these employees which is subjective encompasses individual factors. However, when implementing WLB programmes in banks, it is necessary to focus on improving self-management aspects of the employees to get a proper understanding of how to prioritize work with effective time management. Many employees also balance their work with the support from their spouse and family while most of the respondents' spouses are bankers. This shows that policymakers have to recognise the family support received through strategies such as developing scales to appreciate the family for employee achievement. Moreover, it is necessary to facilitate the employees who do not have such support from their family.

Furthermore, Kottawatta and Arunika (2015) in their study on work-life balance and job satisfaction highlight that banks have implemented more customer-oriented strategies to attract more customers through long opening hours, more branches, more workload, and high work pressure on the employees in order to create an efficient and effective work environment. It creates a poor work-life balance among employees and high dissatisfaction with the job. This leads to additional workload, overtime, and work stress directly impacting the work-life balance



of banking employees as the work proportion becomes larger in an individual's life not only in the banking industry but in any industry anywhere in the world. It is noteworthy that the employees who were interviewed were extremely helpful, enthusiastic, and open in giving their feedback on the topic. They expressed their issues/limitations openly which contributed to the richness of content of this study.

However, there is still a lot of room for further research to be carried out to explore this subject. Apart from the factors discussed in this study, there could be many other factors that were not mentioned by the interviewees. This study has presented many findings based on many employees who are currently working in the head office of the bank located in Colombo. However, the view of employees in branches could be different from these findings. At the same time, as an industry that hugely contributes to the national economy there is more room to research the work-life balance of employees in the banking sector as a whole. As the banking sector in Sri Lanka provides a considerable percentage of employment opportunities, it will be interesting and useful to explore into the work-life balance levels of those employees. More importantly, it will be a massive support to bring the issues they face into the limelight and resolve them with the recommendations which will in return enhance their productivity and efficiency levels. Overall, it will support the service sector of the country.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge all the respondents who participated.