

Work & Life Balance in the Post-Pandemic Period in Romania

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Abstract

The world is constantly changing and urging people to prioritize their Work & Life Balance according to their personal needs and make sure they can adapt themselves to the environmental requirements to be socially accepted. The coronavirus pandemic has challenged people to change their lifestyles and shift their attention toward their mental and relationship health while also prioritizing physical well-being. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze different points of view and degrees in which the pandemic has affected people located in Romania by using Cornbach’s alpha coefficient. Through Google Forms, a number of 160 Romanians took part in the survey conveying their experience during the coronavirus pandemic.

Key words: work, life, balance, economy, Coronavirus pandemic

J.E.L. classification: D23, Z1

1. Introduction

Even though WLB does not have a precise definition, scientists have defined it as the notion that refers to the equilibrium between the professional life and the personal life of an individual or a group of people in such a way that both parts ensure a harmonic method of navigating life. Therefore, people can lead their lives as they please following their desires, abilities, and possibilities so they can seize the most outstanding opportunities in their lives while still striving for an overall healthy balance between their private life and professional performance. (Thilagavathy *et al*, 2021)

Considering that WLB is a part of Organizational Behaviour, it is extremely important to recognize the significance that is being brought into the economic and social aspects of life by contributing with a groundbreaking method of finding the most suitable balance between both elements. The main purpose of Organizational behavior is to facilitate effective collaboration between individuals and the groups they interact with to succeed in anything they aim to achieve.

2. Literature review

This social construct is made of several factors that bring their contributions such as government policies that shape how the work is being done lawfully so that it can sustain a healthy environment while ensuring the minimum wage and several other benefits for laborers who might find themselves in dire need of sick leave or parental leave. Regulations and policies are seen as means of bringing benefits to the working society and its environment.

A second factor is the organizational practices that help in shaping the form in which labor is being done, whether it has a full-time schedule, a part-time, a flexible schedule, a hybrid one that combines working from home with working on-site or working fully remotely, thus having the opportunity of becoming digital nomads. Another vital factor is the individual circumstances that arise in one’s life.

Circumstances can differ from one another just like organizations or people. When it comes to WLB, there is no such thing as ONE SIZE FITS ALL. What could perfectly work for someone could be detrimental to another’s mental health, well-being, or life satisfaction. For instance, working flexible hours might be extremely beneficial to someone who needs more control over their free time

and their activities such as studying, pursuing different hobbies, or taking care of someone else. (Gravador *et al*, 2018).

Moreover, the responsibility of making sure that both aspects of life are in equilibrium needs to be taken into consideration by all parties. The individuals, the organizations, and the government are all responsible for ensuring a beneficial and thriving environment where work can be conducted healthily. (Stefanovska *et al*, 2019). The reason why all of them should aim to do so is because one cannot achieve satisfactory results by itself while ignoring the vital role that each of them has. The uniqueness of each role can be seen in how the environment and labor force are being shaped so that it can fully satisfy each need. (Ollier-Malaterre *et al*, 2016). Individuals can not obtain wellness in their day-to-day lives without the support of the organization where they work and governmental policies that protect them from being overworked and underpaid. Without organizations, individuals can not sustain themselves financially. Thus, all of them are interconnected so that WLB can satisfy the nowadays' societal needs and norms.

This multi-faced concept has been shaped by major events that happened in history such as the Industrial Revolution, women's rights, and WW1 and WW2. (Brough *et al*, 2020). The Industrial Revolution made sure that several people would move from rural areas to urban ones to work and gain more. From a financial point of view, it helped production grow and the economy evolve. However, from a domestic point of view, it changed the familial status of having a sole provider in the family to having both partners active in the workforce to sustain the new urban life. (Clark, S. C, 2000). Women's rights is another moment in history that brought financial and overall independence to women, turning them from caregivers into breadwinners. While men were fighting in both wars, women were in their home country making sure that the economy ran as smoothly as possible.

Throughout history and not only, WLB has been deeply influenced by cultures and different groups of societies. Certain practices and policies that prevail in a place can be impractical and not suitable in certain societies. For instance, in Eastern Asia the culture is known as being mostly collectivistic, therefore people care more about what others think of them rather than following their gut feeling. In Eastern Asia, the practice of working long hours at the expense of the time spent with their families is considered as being something normal contrary to the European standard of working. (Vallury, C. 2012).

It is also worth mentioning that according to Geert Hofstede, countries can have either individualistic values or collectivistic. In an individualistic country, individuals care less about impressing their social circles and more about their well-being, while in collectivistic countries it is the other way around. (Hofstede, 2011).

Another cultural aspect is the prevalence of patriarchy in collectivistic societies where household chores and duties are divided according to societal expectations over gender roles rather than interests and abilities. Men are seen as being the sole breadwinners while their female partners most of the time are caregivers. (Adisa, T.A. *et al*, 2019). This adds a certain level of pressure on both partners, one dealing with the pressure of sustaining the whole family at the expense of their mental health and the risk of becoming workaholics and putting their health at risk. (Shockley, K. M. *et al*, 2017). However the financial pressure is also being felt by the female counterpart since financial independence is taken away or even though women would still work, they would be the primary caregivers for everyone else around while also managing other tasks. (Adisa, T.A. *et al*, 2019). Another example of cultural difference when it comes to WLB is the Nordic Europeans's preference to work fewer hours to gain more free time to invest in other activities that bear more importance to them in their overall life such as investing time in hobbies, making memories with family and friends or spending time in nature.

No matter the industry or organization, the primary source that holds the most vital role is the human resource. Due to the changes that happened around the world at a social and economic level, the idea of artificial intelligence (AI) has turned from a futuristic dream into a necessity. Although at first, most people thought that AI would be the antihero that would wreck the labor market and people's lives on different levels, it turned out to be a useful tool to alleviate and solve several business issues. Because the labor market has changed, life shall too. Time is the value that shifts and brings changes if it is used as an actual investment in something that brings healthy outcomes. Time and energy are vital resources that can be used to achieve wellness. If there is wellness, there

is fulfilment in every aspect which results in achievements. Therefore desires, values and attitudes can align to succeed in everything an individual or a group aims to achieve.

To analyze the evolution of Work & Life Balance not only as a theoretical concept but also as a practical one, it is tremendously important to consider that WLB can come in different shapes and forms. Nevertheless, these forms can either bring a positive outcome as known as enrichment, or a negative one, also known as conflict, therefore under the umbrella of WLB, individuals can find themselves in situations that influence their relationship with the professional aspect of their life, the relational one or the personal one. (Erdirençelebi, M., 2020). On one hand, situations when WLB can be satisfactory can vary from WFE (Work & Family enrichment); FWE (Family & Work Enrichment); WLE (Work & Life Enrichment), or LWE (Life & Work Enrichment). In situations like these, every aspect alleviates the general unwellness and ensures diminishing unpleasantness that comes with a lack of time or energy to be present and proactive in society.

On the other hand, there can be times in one's life when WLB is nothing but a mere distant dream that can not be found dwelling in the present moment. Times like these are impacted by an obvious conflict that can influence the other side badly also known as WLC (Work & Life Conflict), LWC (Life & Work Conflict), WFC (Work & Family Conflict) or FWC (Family & Work Conflict). Every form of psychological conflict brings distress and toxic energy.

The various times of WLB were extremely visible during the pandemic time. The Coronavirus urged the world, not only to change the way things would normally happen but also the pace. Digitalization was a vital tool to tackle this issue. (Gualano, M. R. *et al*, 2023). Within the context of social distancing, working from home was not an option anymore, but a mandatory shift towards the idea of putting things into perspective and helping individuals think more about their mental and relational health. (Putri, A. *et al*, 2021). In such a context, the boundaries between work and life started to get blurred from some people resulting in high levels of stress, burn out and anxiety. (Lamprinou, V.D.I. *et al*, 2021). Work tasks blended into household chores, therefore the chances of turning this into a toxic experience got higher and higher. However, for other people, the idea of not having to commute and being able to work in their own comfortable place helped them redefine their individual idea of work & life balance. (Irawanto, D. *et al*, 2021).

Society may not know what the future holds but it is safe to say that digitalization is here to stay no matter what events may occur, therefore it should be used as a tool to alleviate WLB's issues and ensure overall life satisfaction.

3. Research methodology

Considering the common interest for WLB that crossed every geographical and cultural boarder, I thought it would be extremely interesting to analyze the WLB situation during the Corona virus pandemic in Romania. In order to do so, the study was conducted with the purpose of observing from several points of view with the help of Cornbach's alpha coefficient. The survey was created by using Goggle Forms. The total number of participants were 160 Romanian people from different backgrounds.

4. Findings

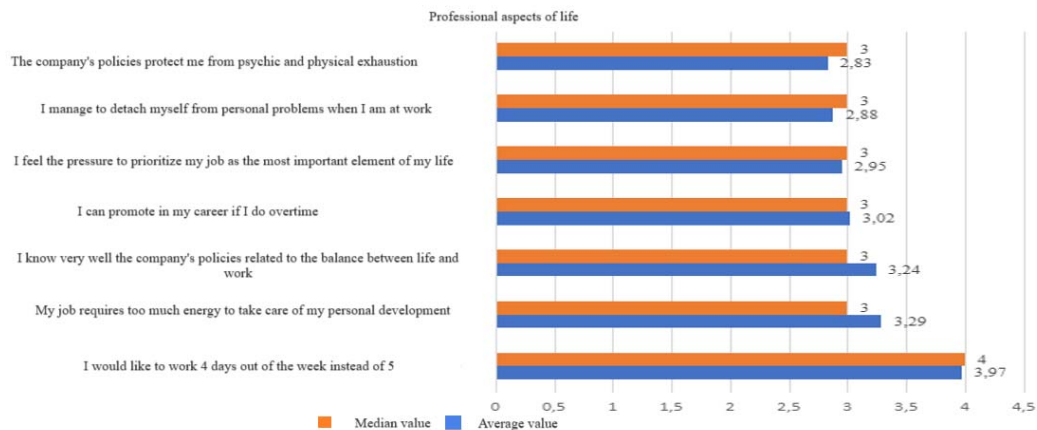
The Knowledge of the notion of WLB reached a moderate level, considering that half of those who took part in the survey had never encountered the term Work & Life Balance. This fact highlights that WLB is still a relatively new concept for many Romanians. Out of 160 participants, it has been found that 48% were trainees, 27% worked part-time, 14% worked full-time, 6% worked as entrepreneurs, and 5% performed their work as freelancers. The Flexible schedule was chosen as being the most important thing that their workplace could offer. Most people choose family as their primary source of life satisfaction, then personal development, friends, work, and volunteering activities. This detail shows that Romanians are socially driven people who prefer to invest in relationships and keep family values alive. Despite the prevalent patriarchal values, people believe that in Romania, men and women are equal when it comes to dealing with household chores. Financial independence helps tackle gender issues. Moreover, the younger generations of men are more present in the family life by engaging in household chores. Most people considered that if they

lived in an individualistic country, they could achieve WLB easier than in a collectivistic one such as Romania. On an income-based scale, less than 50% of people have an income greater than 5000 lei. Over half of the people that took part in the survey, consider that they can achieve balance through personal and mental health development while taking more vacations to spend more time with family and friends.

In the context of the Corona virus pandemic, 26% of people prioritized physical health, another 26% of people thought that mental health is the most important thing while the rest of them either changed their job or worked a more flexible schedule.

From a descriptive point of view: 78% of the participants identify themselves as females, while 22% as males, most of them being between 20 and 30 years old, most of them being either single or in a relationship delaying the moment they would become parents. The job field in which most of those surveyed (respectively 22.50%) carry out their activity was the economic field, followed by trade (18.75%), industrial activities (13.13%), HoReCa (12.50%), education (8.75%), medicine (7.50%), entrepreneurship (5.63%), transport and storage (3.13%), construction (3.13%), and 1.25% were people who carry out activities in the IT environment or were unemployed at the time of the research.

Figure no. 1 Professional aspects of life



Source: Author's elaboration

From a descriptive point of view: Following the analysis of the aspects related to professional life, most of the items have the median 3, the average obtained start with 2.83 for the item "the company's policies protect me from psychic and physical exhaustion". The effectiveness of how WLB policies bring a benefit to both the company and the workers are visible at the medium level. This may be due to the ignorance offered by the employee on these aspects. For the second item, "I manage to detach myself from personal problems when I am at work" the media was 2.88. For the third item, "I feel the pressure to prioritize my job as the most important element of my life" the media has reached the level of 2.95. For the fourth item, "I can promote in my career if I do overtime" the average was 3.02. For the fifth item, "I know very well the company's policies related to the balance between life and work" media has reached 3.24. For the sixth item, "my job requires too much energy to take care of my personal development." The media was 3.29; And for the seventh item, "I would like to work 4 days out of the week instead of 5" the media reached the value of 3.97. It was possible to find that the highest average with Median 4 was obtained by the last item meaning agreement.

From a correlational point of view:

- It was found that there is a negative correlation, of very weak intensity, statistically significant (RHO = - 0.168 and P = 0.034 <0.05), between the desire to work four days a week and the existence of the time allocated to achieve Volunteer activities, that is, as he says he has less free time for volunteering, the more he wants to work only 4 days a week. Once there is more free time, the chances of actively involved in the community increase.

● It was found that there is a positive, medium-intensity, statistically significant correlation ($RHO = 0.406$ and $P = 0.00 < 0.05$), between the success of the company's WLB policies to protect employees of physical and mental exhaustion and professional satisfaction, That is, the increased the success of the company's WLB policies to protect employees from physical and mental exhaustion, the more the professional satisfaction of the employees. Employees feel appreciated and safe in an environment in which they are protected from the toxic tendencies related to the ways in which companies are concerned about making profit in exchange for the use of workers.

From the point of view of the loyalty coefficient Alpha Cronbach:

Table no. 1 Cronbach's alpha loyalty coefficient

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,648	0,647	7

Source: Data analyzed by using SPSS

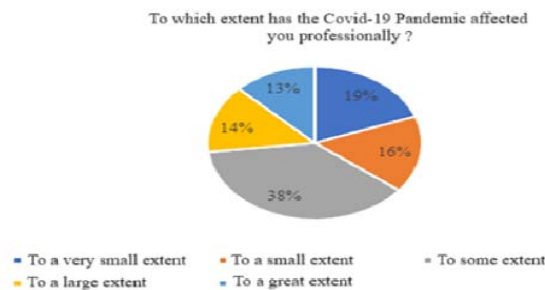
The coefficient of alpha fidelity of the 7 -item scale had a value of 0.648 which exhaustion; the very good knowledge of the company's policies related to the balance between life and work and the opportunity to promote career through overtime; And so it would have reached a loyalty coefficient Alpha Cronbach of 0.708, on a 3-item scale. demonstrates a good level of loyalty; a higher value could have been obtained by eliminating the following items: total detachment of personal problems within the professional framework; The company's policies protect from psychic and physical.

Table no. 2 Cronbach's alpha loyalty coefficient

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,708	0,71	3

Source: Data analyzed by using SPSS

Figure no. 2 The extent to which the Covid-19 Pandemic has affected professionally



Source: Author's elaboration

From a descriptive point of view: in terms of the degree to which the Covid-19 Pandemic affected the employees from a professional point of view it was found that on a scale of 1-5 where 1 represents "to a very small extent", 2 -"to a small extent", 3-"to some extent", 4-"to a large extent" and 5-"to a great extent", average 2.84 and Median 3, thus resulting that the Pandemic has impacted from a professional point of view to a medium level, it is possible to improve the pandemic situation by different ways such as professional re-profiling.

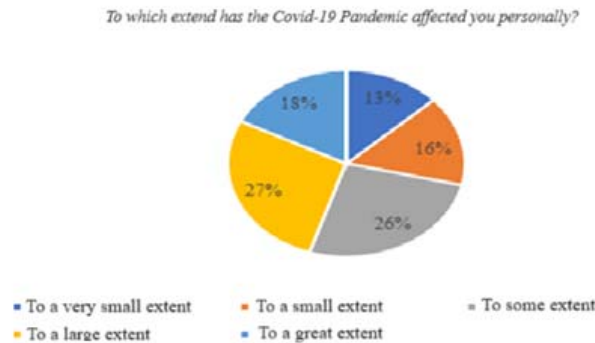
From a correlational point of view:

● It was found that there is a positive, medium intensity, statistically significant correlation ($RHO = 0.529$ and $P = 0.00 < 0.05$), between the extent to which Covid-19 affected professionally and the extent to which Covid -19 has affected from a personal point of view, that is, the more the Covid-19

Pandemic affected more professionally, the more personal life has been affected due to pandemic conditions. Most of the personal life depends on the financial well-being in order to be supported at the level of satisfaction established by man. Considering the state of uncertainty offered by the pandemic, it is obvious that the lack of financial stability has affected personal satisfaction.

- It was found that there is a positive, poor intensity, statistically significant correlation ($RHO = 0.287$ and $P = 0.00 < 0.05$), between the extent to which Covid-19 has affected professionally and the level of professional stress brought home, that is, the more the pandemic has affected professionally, the more the level of professional stress has increased from work at home. It was possible to find that people were incapable of detaching themselves from their work issues.

Figure no. 3 The extent to which the Covid-19 Pandemic has affected personally



Source: Author's elaboration

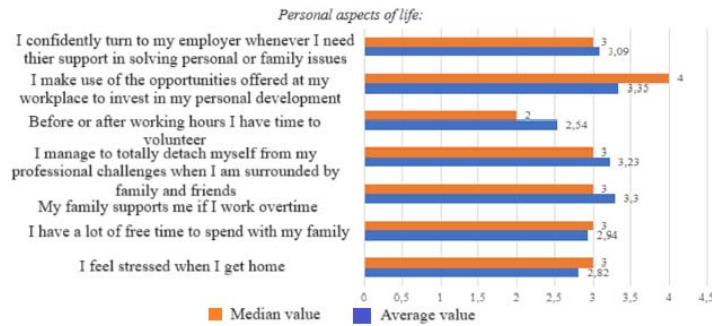
From a descriptive point of view: in terms of the degree to which the Covid-19 Pandemic affected the employees from a personal point of view it was found that on a scale of 1-5 where 1 represents "to a very small extent", 2 -"to a small extent", 3-"to some extent", 4-"to a large extent" and 5-"to a great extent", the average 3.21 and the median 3. This shows that the Pandemic has personally influenced at an average level the way people were able, despite the obstacles from the circumstances due to the virus, to return to normal, even if they were forced to recur to different sacrifices.

From a correlational point of view:

- It was found that there is a negative correlation, of very weak intensity, statistically significant ($RHO = -0.169$ and $P = 0.032 < 0.05$) between the extent to which the Covid-19 Pandemic affected the employees from a personal point of view and the level in which the level in which The employee is detached from personal problems in the workplace, that is, as the level in which the employee manages to detach from personal problems at work is lower, the more the extent increases the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the employees from the point of view. personal vision. The uncertainty provided by the global virus has brought stress and financial pressure that has affected personal satisfaction often by increasing caution related to daily expenses.

- It was found that there is a negative, very weak, statistically significant correlation ($RHO = -0.189$ and $P = 0.016 < 0.05$) between the extent to which the Covid-19 Pandemic affected the employees and their monthly income, the more the pandemic affected the employee more personal, the lower the monthly income. Material safety represented many a source of stress to overcome the vulnerable situation in which the pandemic brought people by making them worry about their well-being in the future.

Figure no. 4 Personal aspects of life



Source: Author's elaboration

From a correlational point of view:

- It was found that there is a positive, medium-intensity, statistically significant correlation ($RHO = 0.448$ and $P = 0.00 < 0.05$), between professional stress and lack of energy for personal development activities, that is, as professional stress increases, the more the lack of energy increases for the achievement of personal development activities due to fatigue. The greater a person he has to become a workaholic, the less he prioritizes his personal well-being to the detriment of his career.

- It has been found that there is a positive, poor intensity, statistically significant correlation ($RHO = 0.240$ and $P = 0.002 < 0.05$), between the use of personal development opportunities offered by the job and professional satisfaction; The use of the personal development opportunities offered at work, the more professional satisfaction increases. It can be seen that the material resources accompanied by extra wage rewards are the most appropriate way to implement relational management in the company.

From the point of view of the loyalty coefficient Alpha Cronbach:

Table no.3 Cronbach's alpha loyalty coefficient

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,643	0,638	7

Source: Data analyzed by using SPSS

The coefficient of alpha fidelity of the 7- item scale had a value of 0.643 which demonstrates a good level of loyalty. A higher value could have been obtained by eliminating the following item: the professional stress brought home and would have reached a loyal coefficient Alpha Cronbach of 0.745, on a 6-item scale.

Table no. 4 Cronbach's alpha loyalty coefficient

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0,745	0,745	6

Source: Data analyzed by using SPSS

5. Conclusions

Work & Life Balance is not an utopic concept because it is achievable if every party aims to improve the living and working conditions. The individual has is the most responsible one for their own well-being and the decisions they make which have to be in accordance with their desires and abilities.

The Covid-19 pandemic helped people reset their priorities. Health, time and energy represent the pillars that form a strong foundation towards wellness and satisfaction in life. The lower the life or work satisfaction level, the more has to suffer the individual. Professionally satisfied individuals represent organizational investments that ensure the success of every company. Technology can be a tool in order to achieve better performances and a better balance. Happy people make a happy and productive environment, moreover, happy environments create a happy society.

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