

**A qualitative investigation into the
relationship between work–life balance
and organisational commitment:
Evidence from American software
companies in Ireland**

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MSc in International Business

National College of Ireland

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, August
2018.

Abstract

Thesis Title: A qualitative investigation into the relationship between work–life balance and organisational commitment: Evidence from American software companies in Ireland

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The study explores work-life balance and organisational commitment of employees working in American software companies in Ireland. The researcher developed a conceptual framework examining external factors, individual factors, different types of benefits and mediators for utilising work-life balance programmes.

The researcher chose an exploratory phenomenological research approach for this study. Seven employees participated in semi-structured interviews, from 4 different organisations. The researcher sought a balance of male and female participants, parents and individuals without children, managers and employees.

The results indicate that work-life balance and organisational commitment cannot be viewed in isolation. The main differences were found between working parents and individuals with no children with regards to their perceived experience of work-life balance and organisational commitment. In addition, the influence of technology and flexible working provided challenges and opportunities to workers. While workers were conscious of the negative effects of technology, specifically with regard to switching off after work, commitment levels were not affected by this. Further influence factors, such as organisational culture or quality of work contributed towards employee commitment.

The developed framework proved useful throughout the research and together with the empirical findings contributed to the growing collection of literature on work-life balance and organisational commitment.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to all interview participants who took the time to take part and contributed greatly to this study. Thank you to my colleagues and classmates for sharing ideas and advice, particularly during the last few months.

Thank you to the lecturers and staff of NCI, for their generous encouragement and to my supervisor Fabian Armendariz during this final stage.

I want to thank my family and friends for their constant support. Finally, to Marc, who encouraged and supported me to keep going and assured me that it would all be worth it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's global economy, work-life balance has become a central topic for the media and researchers. An increased competition through globalisation, fast advancing technological advancements, as well as demographic changes with higher number of dual career households and an ageing population change demands for both organisations and employees (Grattan, 2010; Grady, McCarthy, Darcy and Kirrane, 2008; Smith and Gardner, 2007). As part of this development, the work environment (Schwarzmueeller, Brosi, Duman and Welp, 2018) and employee values (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman and Lance, 2010) are shifting; providing both challenges and opportunities for organisations and employees.

In software companies, a large percentage of employees work in highly demanding roles. Long working days, a highly competitive and fast-paced work environment have been identified as major contributing factors for "performance pressures" (Pradhan, Jena and Kumari, 2016). According to Perlow and Porter (2009) employees working in the software sector believe that an "always on" ethic is vital for individual and organisational success in the global marketplace. At the same time, employer and employee expectations of working conditions are high (Burke, 2010). A recent CIPD study among 938 businesses in Ireland showed that working hours have increased in 46% of organisations over the past two years. Among participating businesses, 69% indicated that they offer an employee wellbeing policy or programme, to tackle challenges around work-life balance and working hours (CIPD, 2017).

Compared to younger workers commonly referred to as Generation X and Y (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008) have been described to be more concerned with pursuing a career which allows sufficient time for personal interests. Wey Smola and Sutton (2002) highlight that an increased focus on leisure values among

younger employees exists. From over 400 organisations that participated in the 2017 Irish HR update survey 26% focused on flexible work options to attract employees (IBEC, 2018).

Together, these findings show the importance of organisations placing emphasis on organisational benefits to increase commitment levels of employees. This paper seeks to explore individual experiences of work-life balance and organisational commitment, focusing on employees working in American software companies in Ireland.

1.2 Structure of the Study

The study has been divided into seven chapters:

Chapter one presents the introductory chapter. Chapter Two will refer to current literature on work-life balance and organisational commitment. It concludes with a conceptual framework based on key characteristics surrounding the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment. The conceptual framework shall be used as a guide for this research. Chapter Three outlines the research objectives and sub-objectives, while Chapter Four is concerned with the methodology used in this study. The fifth section presents the findings obtained during primary data collection. Chapter Six analyses those findings and compares and contrasts them with current literature. In addition, the limitations of the study will be presented. The final chapter draws upon the entire thesis and presents a conclusion, a discussion of the implications of the findings for future research into this area and makes recommendations for employers. The research questions will be answered in the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a broad overview of literature and sets the frame for this research. The author's search included but was not limited to the following databases: EBSCO Host, Emerald, SAGE, ResearchGate, ELSEVIER (Science Direct), Google scholar and the library catalogue. During the search, the researcher used advanced search functions. The search terms used were "work-life balance", "organisational commitment", "work-life conflict", "work-life balance policy", "technology company", "software company". The researcher used the terms "software companies" and "IT industry"; as well as "work-life balance initiatives", "organisational benefits" "work-life balance policies" and "organisational policies" interchangeably.

While research is extensive on the topic of work-life balance, there is little research emphasising focussing on software companies. In addition, past research has mainly investigated experiences of working parents and did not include the wider workforce. As part of this literature review, the researcher will critically review the existing literature of work-life balance and in particular outline work-life balance in software companies. The literature review further outlines the importance of work-life balance for organisations and employees and details the different types of benefits and organisational commitment.

Following on from the organisational commitment, the researcher details the key concepts which emerged repeatedly throughout the literature. These themes form the five key elements of the conceptual framework: (1) The changing nature of work, (2) the influence of technology on work-life balance, (3) changes in employee's value perceptions, (4) the influence of a supportive culture on work-life balance – including supervisor support and (5) the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment. The criteria described will be discussed in relation to their role in the overall framework in the course of this chapter.

During the review of literature, the following key arguments were identified and will be applied to a conceptual framework.

A study by Cegarra-Leiva, Sánchez-Vidal and Gabriel Cegarra-Navarro (2012) highlighted that the relationship between work-life balance initiatives and organisational commitment cannot be viewed in isolation and introduced work-life balance supportive culture as a mediator between both variables. This view was adapted in the conceptual framework of this study. In addition, as noted by Grady et al. (2008) employees have different attitudes and perceptions towards effective work-life balance initiatives which will be considered in this study. Lastly, a change in employee attitude (Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002) towards work combined with higher expectations (Burke, 2010) provide challenges for organisations that cannot be overlooked in the lively work-life balance debate.

2.2 Work-Life Balance Literature

Traditionally, literature promotes work-life balance as a topic relevant to families. Researchers argue that organisational benefits are often reduced to family-friendly policies and only applicable to working parents (Haar and Spell, 2004). It can be argued that researchers are ignoring the wider workforce and dividing employees into two distinct groups: working parents and individuals without children. Muse, Harris, Giles and Feild have stated that both domains cannot be examined interdependently: “Work and family are indeed intertwined and need to be treated as such” (Muse et al., 2008, p. 172).

Other studies referred to work-life balance as the perception of balance and satisfaction employees encounter between their professional and personal lives (Grady et al., 2008). For this study, the sample chosen consists of working parents and individuals with no children. The description of Grady et al. (2008) is therefore more relevant.

A link between work-life balance and employee attitude was identified by Casper and Buffardi (2004). This phenomenon was first evident in social exchange theory, which can be referred to as “employee-employer relationship as an exchange of valued resources” Blau (cited in Muse et al., 2008, p. 173). Similarly, Lambert states: “Social exchange theory identifies the conditions under which people feel obligated to reciprocate when they benefit from some person's, or entity's, actions” (Lambert, 2000, pp. 801-802). This theory is important for research investigating work-life balance as it can be used to describe underlying factors influencing and driving the employee-employer relationship. In addition, social exchange theory reveals the psychological drivers behind parties’ actions.

2.2.1 Organisational Benefits

Work-life balance policies are described by Gregory and Milner (2009, pp.1-2) as benefits that “intentionally or otherwise, increase the flexibility and autonomy of the worker in negotiating their attention (time) and presence in the workplace”.

Caillier (2012) identified three types of work-life balance initiatives: flexible working, family-friendly policies and health and wellness benefits. Flexitime was referred to as being the most common work-life balance initiative offered by organisations. This view is coherent with other studies describing provided benefits (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz and Shockley., 2012; Twenge et al., 2010).

Others suggest that work-life balance also enables employees to balance work with community, leisure and personal time (Grady et al., 2008) or pursue professional development (Muse et al., 2008). A different study by Casper and Buffardi (2004, p. 391) among students found evidence that applicant’s intentions to pursue job opportunities with future employers were influenced by “work schedule flexibility” and “dependent care assistance” offered.

For this study, the researcher will mainly refer to the benefit flexible working due to its popularity and wide-ranging definition. Family-friendly policies are the antecedents of work-life balance policies and take a special role; a previous studies stated that family-friendly policies cause confusion regarding availability and accessibility among employees (Huang et al., 2007). Negative association between childcare policies and organisational commitment was also found due to its exclusivity to a distinct group of employees (Haar and Spell 2004).

The ideal work-life balance initiative has been defined as an initiative that is tailored to employee needs (Kim, 2014; Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). Haar and Spell state: “organizations must be aware that how employees perceive work-family practices can influence their commitment towards the organization” (Haar and Spell, 2004, p. 1040). The generalisability of Haar and Spell’s finding need to be confirmed, particularly to determine if only a small group felt this way or a majority of employees. Demographic characteristics, such as parenthood, age or gender impact the outcomes and use of work-life balance (Smith and Gardner, 2007). Others found differences in behaviour of female and male employees: Men tend to prefer “informal flexibility” and often improve their work-life balance “marginally” (Gregory and Milner, 2009, p.5).

2.2.2 What are the objectives of organisational benefits?

Some researchers outline that initiatives are used to reduce work-life conflicts in the form of time-constraints and job pressures and help employees and managers to combine work with family responsibilities and leisure activities (Beauregard, 2011). Companies use work-life balance policies to retain and attract employees (Kim, 2014).

The importance of flexible working hours for both employees and organisations is evident from much of the research, though the findings on the relationship of flexible working and work-life balance are controversial (Table 1). Throughout

literature, this division of organisation and individual focus of work-life balance initiatives was found. However, the majority of literature focused primarily on the employee. Overall, summarizing the studies from table 1 from an employee perspective, an increased quality of life is the aim of participating in initiatives. From an employer perspective in return, work-life balance initiatives support employee benefits and increase engagement and commitment levels.

Benefits for organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased organisational commitment (Kim, 2014) - employee engagement (Caillier, 2012) - higher productivity levels (Caillier, 2012; Beauregard, 2011) - increased in-role performance (Kim, 2014) - reduced turnover intention (Guest, 2002; Allen, Herst, Bruck and Sutton 2000) - market coverage through flexible working (Caillier, 2012) - affective commitment (Kim, 2014) 	Benefits for employee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - control over work life/private life; reduced work-life conflict (Twenge et al. 2010) - job satisfaction (Gyanchandani, 2017; Allen et al. 2000) - psychological well-being (Brauchli et al., 2014) - employee loyalty (Roehling, Roehling and Moen, 2001) - affective commitment (Muse et al., 2008) - higher work autonomy (Kotowska, Matysiak, Styrc, Paillhe, Solaz, Vignoli, Vermeylen and Anderson, 2010)
Challenges for organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negative correlation between child care policies and affective commitment among individuals without children (Huang et al., 2007; Haar and Spell, 2004) 	Challenges for employee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flexible working hours led to long working hours and influenced work-life balance negatively (Sturges and Guest, 2004) - use of work-life balance initiatives is related to career damage (Smith and Gardner, 2007; Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999)

Table 1 Benefits and challenges of work-life balance initiatives

2.3 Organisational Commitment

According to Allen and Meyer (1990) it is evident that organisational commitment is closely linked to work variables such as turnover, organisational behaviour and job performance. Other factors which can be influenced through workers commitment to an organisation are perceived role stress, empowerment job insecurity, and distribution of leadership. As part of this study, researchers explored how workers feel about their jobs to understand underlying motivations leading to an increased commitment of employees towards organisations.

Allen and Meyer (1990) introduced three components of organisational commitment: Affective commitment (1) is linked to enjoyment and to the emotional link an employee can form with an organisation. It results from an employees' desire to stay with the organisation instead of remaining with a company because of moral obligation (normative commitment (2)) or cost-benefit (continuance commitment (3)).

This theory is well incorporated in reviewed literature and can be determined as key theory surrounding the concept of organisational commitment. For this study, "affective commitment" will define the type of commitment that will be explored in relation to work-life balance.

Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, (1989) linked overall job performance and the willingness to be promoted among employees within the organisation to the levels of organisational commitment. Other outcomes reported were employee innovativeness (Allen and Smith, 1987) and turnover intention (e.g. Brauchli et al., 2014). Research by Wey Smola and Sutton (2002) challenged the importance of job security. Findings on younger workers showed that younger workers compared prioritised life-long learning or attaining transferable skills over job commitment. This study will particularly focus on the validity of affective commitment for the software industry and commitment as outcome of work-life balance.

2.4 Work-life balance and organisational commitment in the software industry

The IT industry is considered highly competitive, innovative and work environments are fast-changing. While these factors are interesting and attracting a lot of employees, particularly younger people who want to work in a hyped start up or a well-known organisation, these forms of characteristics also represent immense pressures (Pradhan et al., 2016). Similarly, Burke (2010) outlines that the industry expects high levels of commitment of employees especially regarding time and energy spent at work in order to meet high organisational standards.

In the IT industry in particular, workers “have enjoyed considerable labor market power in recent years, a situation that has encouraged mobility across organizations rather than promoting loyalty to a single organization” (Rani, Kamalanabhan and Sevarani, 2011, p. 85). As a result, many IT organisations offer work-life balance programmes aiming at increasing employee loyalty toward the organisation (Rani et al. 2011). Ev Williams, co-founder of Twitter highlighted the important of work and life coexisting in harmony: “Take care of yourself: When you don’t sleep, eat crap, don’t exercise, and are living off adrenaline for too long, your performance suffers. Your decisions suffer. Your company suffers. Love those close to you: Failure of your company is not failure in life. Failure in your relationship is” (Young, 2015).

These studies outline that IT firms provide a highly demanding environment for employees. In addition, IT companies offer a range of benefits to attract and retain top talent. For example companies such as Google offers particular services to their employees to ensure a better work-life balance such as subsidised childcare or flexi-time. Two other companies, Indeed and Hot Jar offer a range of benefits including unlimited PTO and remote working as. All employers at Hot Jar are working remotely. With different offerings available, it will be interesting to research how employees describe these offerings available to them and if they contribute towards their personal commitment levels.

2.5 Conceptual framework elements influencing the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment

The previous chapters have identified characteristics of work-life balance initiatives, described different types of organisational benefits, the objectives of work-life balance as well as implied challenges and benefits for both organisations and employees. In addition, the concept of organisational commitment was discussed with regard to the IT industry.

The objective of this literature review is to identify the key elements surrounding the relationship of work-life balance and organisational commitment and build a conceptual model that can be used as a framework for this research. In the next part, the core elements of the conceptual framework will be discussed and reasons for their inclusion will be given. The framework will be presented following the component discussion. Work-life balance and organisational commitment were outlined before, therefore this study will not specify them again in the elements section.

The choice of framework elements was partly influenced by previous studies that explored the relationship of work-life balance and organisational commitment in different contexts. Deery and Jago (2015) conducted a study in the hospitality industry and identified work-life balance as main driver for employee retention. The framework used in that study, combined industry attributes, employee attitudes, personal employee dimensions, work-life conflicts as well as organisational strategies in the form of work-life balance initiatives.

For this study employee attitudes were generalized to individual factors relating to work-life balance. Industry attributes were discussed with regard to commitment and work-life balance but are not proactively used in the framework. The reason for this is that industry attributes are not exclusive for the IT industry.

2.5.1 External Drivers

As an initial step, the drivers for organisational policies and benefits provided to employees have been identified. The starting points are external factors and pressures set by the changing nature of work. Gratton (2010, p. 16) describe the work environment in relation to flexibility available to employers and organisations by stating: “Work is universal. But how, why, where and when we work has never been so open to individual interpretation”. Relevant to this research are socio-economic factors (ageing population, dual career households) and the influence of technology forming the environment in which organisations operate. To elaborate on this point, Grady et al. (2008) explain that the Irish work-force is aging and more working mothers entered the workforce, which means that organisations are required to offer a greater level of flexibility to attract and retain those specific employee groups.

The influence of technology is the next driver researchers consider when designing organisational policies related to work-life balance. While mostly beneficial, it has been identified as one main challenge for employees in obtaining a healthy work-life balance (Ross, Intindola and Boje, 2017). Due to technology, many employees struggle to switch off after work and find it challenging to separate the two domains of work and home. This view builds on a study by Guest (2002) who pointed out that the borderless work place can lead to an increased imbalance between work and home responsibilities. In addition, it is arguable if work-life balance policies are designed primarily with the employee in mind or if organisations provide technological devices to better control employees and encourage them to work longer. This claim will be explored further in the later stages of this paper.

In addition, technological advancements can be seen as underlying contributing factors for organisational initiatives and are therefore crucial for the work-life balance of employees. Without this facilitator, arguable the foundation of flexible working would be impaired. Physical presence is therefore no longer a predominant requirement as workers autonomy has been increased through technology allowing them to conduct their day-to-day job from anywhere in the world. Albeit a very

vague statement, Schwarzmüller et al. (2018, p. 123) explain the reality of flexible working in the IT industry well: “work is no longer defined by working hours between 8 am and 6 pm but takes place around the clock, with breaks during traditional core time” .

2.5.2 Individual Factors

Employee attitudes and needs are central for the discussion of work-life balance and organisational commitment, as this study uses the perspective of employees on this phenomenon. Work-life balance is a highly subjective topic because of differences in needs and perceptions of individuals. Researchers argue that employee expectations have shifted from primarily being driven by the pure nature of finding an employment that suits employee’s qualification to “a desire for balance between work and non-work obligations” (Oludayo, Falola, Obianuju, Demilade, 2018).

Researchers state that demographics and non-work commitment influence an individual's view of work-life balance (Beauregard, 2011; Gregory and Milner, 2009; Smith and Gardner, 2007). Similarly, Guest (2002) identified “individual life course” in an earlier study as the main driver for one’s work-life balance. A study by Twenge et al. (2010) investigated future work place expectations among American students and found out that job seekers believed that high workloads affecting private life negatively would be a reason to look for a different job. The implications of those findings suggest that younger people are mainly motivated in pursuing a career that allows sufficient time for personal life over a work place where personal life is subordinated to the work role. A decline in work centrality and work ethic, coherent with an increased focus on leisure values over the generations can be examined. While Twenge’s study (2010) is limited in size and scope and most certainly not representative for the younger generation, it nonetheless raises questions regarding the work ethic of the younger generation, or the modern worker

in general. Correspondingly, it carries implications for organisations' human resource strategies.

Employee needs can be a vital part to the effectiveness of organisational benefits and commitment levels. Researchers found that if needs are not observed correctly by employers, resentment and envy among employees opposed to the desired positive outcomes benefits can be the results (Huang et al., 2007; Haar and Spell 2004). This argument refers back to the negative effect of family friendly policies (see table 1).

Throughout the reviewed literature, researchers highlight the importance of employers knowing employees needs and including those into the design of initiatives. Previous studies have shown that employee values and perceptions vary and highlighted the importance of organisations designing policies that incorporate employee needs (Darcy et al., 2012). Pradhan et al. (2016) also agreed with this point and add that employers are obliged to address work-life balance issues proactively. In addition, the researchers argue that with gained knowledge about worker's perceptions and attitudes, work-life balance initiatives should be constantly improved.

As said previously, individual factors, in particular employee needs are a crucial factor for designing work-life balance policies. Hence, when exploring work-life balance in an organisation, the failure of consolidating policies with employees to match their perceptions would arguable affect the value of benefits to employees negatively. The research will in part investigate how individual factors differ between employees and how this adds to an individual's work-life balance and commitment levels.

2.5.3 Mediators/Barriers

Next, work-related factors that act as mediators and/or barriers for employee's use of organisational benefits will be discussed for inclusion into the framework. Not all employees avail of provided company benefits related to work-life balance. This is partially due to different perceptions and values of employees regarding work-life balance but also because often there is a lack of information regarding availability and accessibility of benefits (Beauregard, 2011).

Organisational culture

Research found by Smith and Gardner (2007, p. 10) state that the use of benefits is dependent on “organisational climate”. Even though, a very obvious statement in this context, Kim (2014) states organisational culture supportive of work-life balance initiatives help employees to feel comfortable using initiatives offered. As described previously and showed in Figure 1 Cegarra-Leiva et al. (2012) developed a model that uses supportive culture as mediator between the availability of organisational benefits related to work-life and organisational outcomes.



Figure 1 Model proposal (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012, p. 365)

Different to the study of Cegarra-Leiva et al. (2012) this study will investigate the relationship with organisational commitment.

Managerial support

Managerial support has been described as the second major influencing. Historical research by Pfeffer (1994) claimed that a shift from hierarchical structure at work

to an empowerment model created a more autonomous workforce. As a consequence the existing control structures for employers were changing. A different perspective can be derived from an early study by Allen (2001), who argued that time management and task assignment are manager driven. More recent research by Rani et al. (2011) challenged some of Allen's conclusions, arguing that leadership holds "both formal and informal power". Their research investigated facilitators and barriers to work-life balance policies in IT companies in Serbia. Managerial support has been reported as a key driver for work-life balance.

Career development and other barriers

Barriers to employees availing of work life balance initiatives which should be taken into consideration are customer expectations (Nord, Fox, Phoenix and Viano, 2002) and career advancements. The research showed a conflict between organisational support and conflicting customer expectations due to expected interruptions of customer-organisation engagement. This barrier is an essential influence factor and of particular importance to employees facing in customer facing roles, such as the participants selected for this study. For other roles, this barrier might not be as important as customers can interact with different employees and not a specific employee is needed to maintain the business relationship. Throughout research, there seems to be limited research on the influence of customer expectations on work-life balance initiative use.

Career progression is highly controversial as factor influencing employees choice of participating in offered benefits. By availing of work-life balance initiatives, such as compressed work hours, flexitime or maternity leave an employee's career progression can be affected (Smith and Gardner, 2007).

2.6 Conclusion

From a general perspective, there is a deficit in the availability of theoretical background around organisational commitment as direct outcome of work-life balance. As a result, the researcher's understanding of the correlation between work-life balance and organisational commitment is fragmented and mostly derived from research on work-life balance with other organisational outcomes (embedded in Table 1). An integrated perspective is required for future research that focuses on the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment.

A second issue has been described during the introduction; the literature review highlights the major focus of previous studies on working parents and women.

Thirdly, the differences in perceptions of employees working in American software companies have not been investigated sufficiently – a high number of studies were conducted as quantitative studies, which generated a high volume of data around the employees perspective of work-life balance initiatives but only a minority used qualitative research to explore individual factors leading to employees use of work-life balance policies. To sum up, the limitations explained above should also be seen as an opportunity for further research into this area.

2.6.1 Conceptual framework

Based on the reviewed literature, the framework shown on the next page was developed (Figure 2). The framework shows how the discussed elements relate and influence each other. Furthermore, it provides the broader context around this research on work-life balance and organisational commitment. The framework draws on the study by Cegarra-Leiva et al. (2012) and details the underlying steps surrounding work-life balance and organisational commitment.

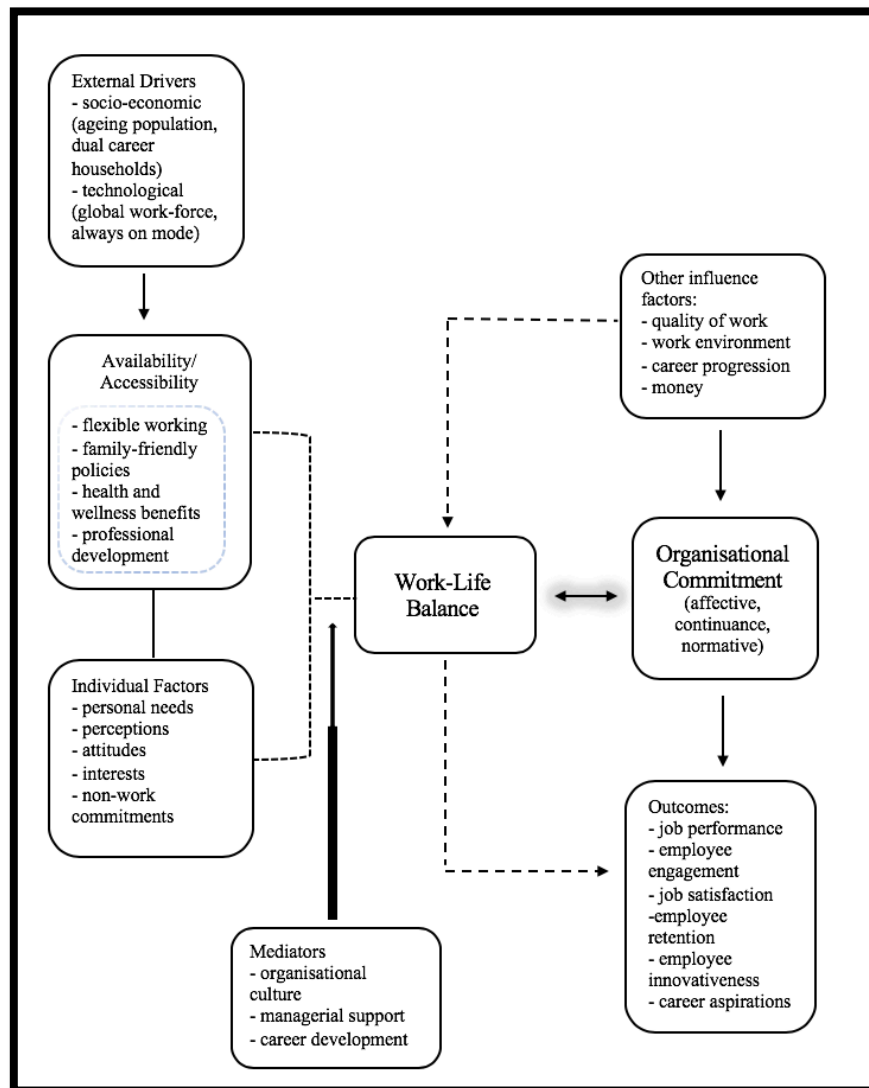


Figure 2 A conceptual framework for linking work-life balance and organisational commitment

How can these concepts be linked to each other?

External factors provide challenges and opportunities for organisations: Through those external factors, awareness among employees and organisations for work-life balance increased and encouraged the spread of offerings provided by organisations. The availability and accessibility of benefits paired with individual factors such as personal needs, desires and interests determine how employees organise and combine their work and private life. Combined, individual factors and organisational benefits facilitate the achieving of work-life balance.

Mediators as described earlier (organisational culture, managerial support, career development and in particular cases customer expectations) influence on whether an employee utilises organisational benefits to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Mediators can have positive and negative effects on employee decisions regarding the use of work-life balance programmes. They are crucial for the usage of benefits. Prior studies argue that one has to distinguish between availability of benefits and use of benefits (Caillier, 2012), however the difference will be further explored in this study as mediators vary on a case-by-case basis. Given the exploratory nature of this research, mediating concepts influencing on employees use of benefits will be investigated (Marshall and Rossman, 2014).

The presented conceptual framework entails that work-life balance and organisational commitment cannot be seen in isolation, as work-life balance is not the only factor determining an employee's organisational commitment. Organisational commitment equally influences an employee's perception towards work-life balance; however the study will further elaborate on this point in the discussion section of this study as additional data is required to describe this relationship in more detail. Further outcomes and influence factors of work-life balance and organisational commitment are presented in the framework which can be explained through interrelated factors surrounding work-life balance and organisational commitment and cannot be ignored as part of this relationship. While all components of the framework are important to understand the significance of the research topic, this study will primarily focus on the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment.

Chapter 3: Research Aims and Questions

Following the literature conducted and the development of the conceptual model framing this research, a first notion can be derived regarding the interplay of concepts unveiled. According to the framework, the external drivers lead to an increased awareness of work-life balance. An increased range and availability of benefits have been uncovered as a result of external influence factors.

With the help of the framework, the researcher was able to identify the outcomes and influence factors contributing towards work-life balance and organisational commitment. Additional data is required to explore the missing links between the different drivers for using work-life balance policies. In the framework these are presented as individual factors, mediators and external factors (figure 2, p. 18). The controversial debate around flexible working perceived as a challenge or benefit by employees will be explored through the research undertaken in this study. The following research questions were selected for this study:

Central question:

How does work-life balance contribute to organisational commitment in American software companies in Ireland?

Based on the central research question and review of existing literature the following sub-questions were developed to facilitate the research:

- What aspects of work did participants perceive as most challenging?
- What mediators did participants perceive might help them using work-life balance policies?
- How are organisational benefits such as flexible working practices experienced by participants with regard to their private life?
- How does this experience of working in the IT industry with access to organisational benefits shape work-life balance and organisational commitment of employees?

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Following the literature review and description of research questions, this chapter will outline the methodology used to carry out this research study. A description of the research philosophy applied as well as a critical evaluation of the methodology approach chosen will be given. The author will discuss the choice of semi-structured interviews, the sample as well as underlying ethical considerations and the type of data analysis employed to analyse the data collected and answer the research questions (presented in Chapter 3). Limitations on the chosen research path will be presented.

4.1.1 Research Process

According to Quinlan (2011, p. 99) “Research is undertaken in order to make a contribution to knowledge; it is fundamentally concerned with the nature of knowledge and the means of knowledge creation”. The figure below outlines the research process by Crotty in 2005 (as cited in Quinlan, 2011).

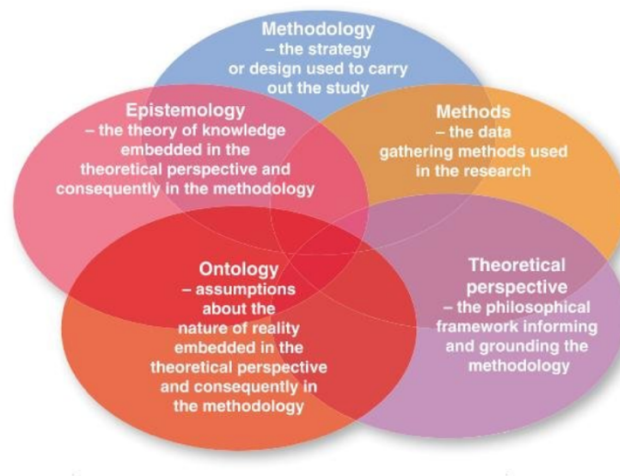


Figure 3 The five basic elements of the research process (Crotty, 1998, p. 2)

Based on the research process, four questions were designed by Crotty (1998, p. 2) and answered in this chapter with regards to the current research study:

- “What methods do we propose to use?
- What methodology governs our choice and use of methods?
- What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question?
- What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective?”

4.2 Research Philosophy

King and Horrocks (2010, p. 6) highlight the importance of including an examination of “philosophical assumptions about reality and associated theoretical perspective(s)” in the form of epistemological perspective and ontology as part of a well-justified research. According to Crotty (1998, p. 8) the theoretical perspective can be described as the researchers “way of looking at the world”. The research philosophy or theoretical perspective specifies beliefs and assumptions that support and form the basis of a research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

Assumptions are classified into three different types: Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology.

Ontology is defined as the study of “the nature of existence and what constitutes reality” (Gray, 2013, p. 19). A researcher’s ontology shapes the way in which the data is collected and analysed, how research questions are understood and what methods are applied. According to Crotty (1998, p. 10) “ontological and epistemological issues tend to emerge together”.

Epistemology assumption refers to acceptable knowledge about the social world. The three main epistemologies are objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism.

Constructivism implies the idea that different realities created through individual's experiences and understanding of 'reality' coexist. This view involves the uniqueness of reality to each individual which is formed by experiences and beliefs. Phenomenology is related to constructivism (Quinlan, 2011; Crotty, 1998). In contrast, positivism is assuming that "objective facts offer the best scientific evidence and is based on deductive theory which will recommend quantitative research methods (Saunders et al, 2016, p. 127).

4.3 Research Design

The research design as stated by Crotty (1998) comprises a description of the research strategy used. The choice of research design is accompanied by the chosen nature of research: explanatory, descriptive or exploratory research. For this study, the researcher decided that an exploratory phenomenological study would be best suited. This will be explained in section 4.3.2.

4.3.1 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

Quantitative research focuses primarily on numerical data and relationships between variables. It is characterised as being a deductive approach to research (Saunders et al, 2016). For this research, quantitative studies were not applicable as experiences of participants are considered highly subjective. The researcher decided that qualitative data was needed to explore underlying influence factors of employees with regard to work-life balance and commitment levels.

Qualitative research is defined as research design that uses explores non-numerical data. Alshenqeeti (2014, p. 39) explains qualitative research as follows: "with the use of non-numerical data, this line of research seeks to explore and describe the 'quality' and 'nature' of how people behave, experience and understand". In addition, participants personal experiences and perceptions can be explored in great detail with this choice of research design.

Lastly, a mixed methods approach can be used as research design; combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Gyanchandani (2017) used this approach in his study. He describes it as valuable for researchers who investigate a large sample and as a part of that want to focus on a distinct participant group.

The researcher selected qualitative methods. Qualitative research offers an effective way of exploring participants experiences of work-life balance and gain insights into how these influence on individual commitment levels. Another reason for qualitative research is the subjectivity of employees experiences. An important factor to consider was outlined by Qu and Dumay (2011) who argue that poor language in non-numerical data sets can diminish data quality. The researcher will ensure that data quality from interviews is consistent and of high quality data.

Creswell (1998, p.53) distinguishes between five different qualitative methodologies: “narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies”.

4.3.2 Phenomenological Research

This study utilised phenomenological research methodology which according to Creswell (2014, p. 14) is defined as a research methodology that “describes the lived experiences of individuals about a lived phenomenon”. In phenomenology, the researcher aims at capturing the subjective experience of the participant on a phenomenon. In the framework the researcher described that work-life balance is impossible to measure and subject to interpretation dependant on the individual.

The chosen methodology allowed the researcher to investigate a relatively small but complex sample. According to Tesch, cited in Gray (2013) sample sizes of 5-15 participants are recommended. One characterising element of phenomenology

is “to suspend all judgments about what is real—the natural attitude—until they are founded on a more certain basis” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52).

The phenomenon explored for this research comprised of participants who currently avail or previously used work-life balance policies provided by their employer in American software companies in Ireland.

4.4 Sample and participant profiles

The criteria for the sample were employees that utilise organisational benefits and work in American software companies in Ireland.

Purposive sampling was chosen as a sampling technique for this study. Compared to convenience sampling, which chooses participants from a population randomly, the purposive approach is used to identify a sample of information-rich cases linked to the phenomenon of interest.

The subjects were selected on the basis of a degree of homogeneity of their occupation type and age. All participants work in sales-related roles in four different software companies in Ireland and belong to a similar age group. According to Calder, Philipps and Tybout (1981) a homogenous sample is desired. Creswell (2014) described that sample size increases with the level of distinct group variables to ensure a tendency can be determined.

The study followed the recommendations for sample sizes in terms of quantity and group characteristics (Saunders et al., 2016; Creswell, 2014; Gray, 2013). 15 employees were invited for the interview with the hope of receiving 8 replies from employees interested in participating in the research. Eight replies were received. One participant was unable to conduct the interview, therefore only seven interviews were conducted.

To display and structure the sample, the researcher used a participant summary and sample breakdown (see figure 3 and 4, p. 25).

Participant	Gender	Age	Family Status	Tenure	Job title
1	Male	31	Married, 1 child	4 years	Senior Account Executive
2	Female	28	Single, no children	2 years and 6 months	Account Executive
3	Female	26	Married, no children	2 years and 6 months	Team Lead Sales
4	Female	35	Married, 2 children	1 year	Customer Success Manager
5	Male	25	Single, no children	1 year and 2 months	Business Development
6	Female	31	Married, 1 child	4 months	Account Executive
7	Male	37	Married, 1 child	1 year	Sales Manager

Table 2 Participant summary

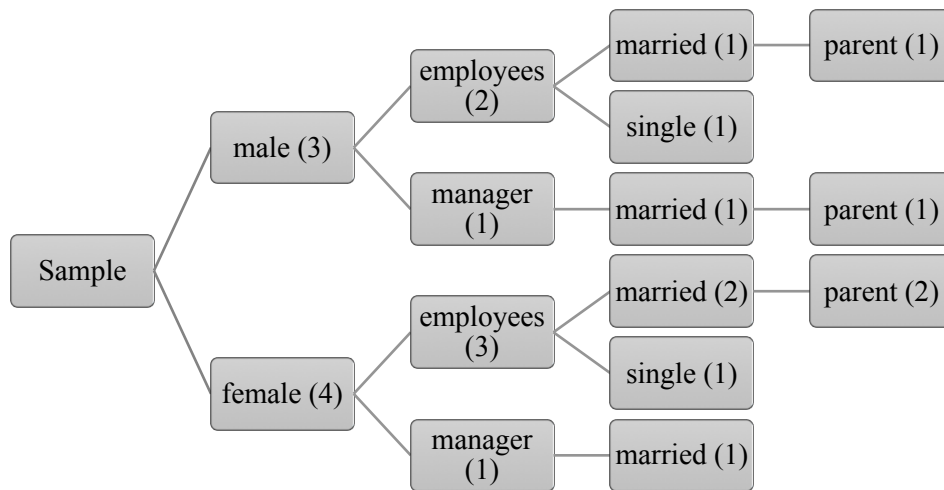


Figure 4 Sample breakdown

The participants ranged in age from 25 to 37. 7 interviews were conducted, with three male and four female participants. Participants have different cultural backgrounds and nationalities (German (2), Irish (2), Dutch (1), French (1), Polish (1)). Each participant was known by the researcher prior to the interview, which

made it easier for the researcher to schedule and conduct the interviews. As described in the earlier, a balanced sample was desired by the researcher.

4.5 Research Instrument

In phenomenological research interviews are the typical data gathering method (Creswell, 2014). Interviews are categorised into different types: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al., 2016). Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are described as a more natural conversation. According to King and Horrocks (2010) semi-structured interviews allow researchers to work with an interview protocol that can be used to structure the interview into themes relevant to research objectives.

Advantages of interviews

The main objective for this research was to understand the views and experiences of employees in the Irish software industry with regard to challenges related to their personal work-life balance and related commitment levels (shown in chapter 3).

Previous studies have based their criteria for method selection on authenticity and depth of findings acquired through interviews. According to Gyanchandani (2017, p. 58) the interviews conducted for his research, helped in “gaining deeper insight into participants’ experiences”. Silverman, cited in Sturges and Guest (2004, p. 9) describe attitudes and experiences revealed in interviews as “authentic”. For the current study, the researcher wanted to collect rich-data that could help explore the underlying motivators for work-life balance to be able to fully explain the conceptual framework and answer the research questions (see chapter 3).

Researcher bias

When conducting interviews, the quality of data collected through interviews is highly dependent on interviewer's skill set, experience, commitment and relationship with the participant (Kumar, 2014). The researcher is actively involved in the data collection and interview process. Saunders et al. (2016, p. 397) highlights that interviews are linked to researcher bias: "This is where the comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour of the interviewer creates bias in the way that interviewees respond to the questions being asked". The researcher ensured that interviews were conducted in a professional manner and interviewees were not biased through researcher behaviour.

4.6 Research Process

4.6.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the interviews with one participant. For the pilot study, the researcher used convenience sampling. The researcher used the pilot to test the interview questions and to ensure times set for the interviews were accurate for later use on a larger scale.

During the pilot, the researcher was able to trial the understanding of the questions. Two questions were confusing for the participant and one additional question was added to ask for further comments. The interview was not recorded but was considered useful throughout the actual interview process.

4.6.2 Interview Process

The main interviews were conducted over two weeks which allowed for optimisation and re-evaluation of interview questions (26 July and 9 August and ranged from 24 minutes to 41 minutes. The interviews were conducted at a quiet location of participants choice.

In preparation for the interviews, a protocol was developed with the aim of ensuring consistency and validity of data collected. The full interview protocol is shown in appendix 1. Organisational policies were studied afterwards to verify interviewee information and the findings of the researcher were in line with employee responses. It would have been beneficial to study the HR policies of the designated companies prior to the interviews.

Overall, the interviews went well. When asked for feedback on the interviews, participants described they felt the interview was very pleasant and a very natural conversation.

4.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which was gathered from personal interviews. The interviews were recorded using the researcher's mobile phone and transcribed following Braun and Clark's approach of thematic analysis (described below). The data analysed comprised of interview transcripts (example transcript in appendix 3) and handwritten notes made by the interviewer during the interviews. Notes concerned behaviour and links between responses.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) an advantage of thematic analysis is that it provides a high level of flexibility to researchers. It helps the researcher to reduce and simplify the data collected. In accordance, Creswell (2014, p. 196) describes data analysis as a process that analyses and categorises "significant statements" into "meaning units".

The following the six stages of thematic analysis laid out by Clarke and Braun (2006) were adapted as a guideline for the data analysis of this study:

- 1) Firstly, the researcher is required to develop familiarity with the data. Conducting and transcribing the interviews helped the researcher in doing so.

Due to immediate transcribing of interviews (within 48 hours after conducting interviews), high levels of accuracy and detail were achieved.

- 2) Then the transcripts were coded and analysed one-by-one identifying consistent findings and ideas within the transcript. As recommended by Clarke and Braun (2006), the researcher looked for surprising answers as well as comparable and contrasting views to the literature reviewed.
- 3) As a next step, the researcher identified themes by cross-referencing transcripts with one another. Key themes and sub-themes were developed.
- 4) Themes were reviewed and a thematic map was created. The entire data set was re-scanned to ensure all themes were mentioned in the codes.
- 5) The fifth step was to define and name themes. Themes were divided into key themes and sub-themes (referenced as other themes in section 5.1). The aim of defining the themes was to develop a structured data set for final analysis.
- 6) In the final step, themes were converted into the final report to help accomplish the research aims (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Limitations of thematic analysis include that it does not allow researchers to assert language use (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and potential pitfalls with regard to flexibility, such as inconsistency during theme creation stage (Holloway and Todres, cited in Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). The researcher took those limitations into consideration during analysis and ensured that the analysis remained consistent throughout analysing the data, including an equal consideration of all interviews for the coding stage.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The main ethical consideration for every research study according to Saunders et al. (2016) is to avoid intruding on a participant's privacy or cause harm in any other way. This is particularly important for topics such as work-life balance and commitment levels, which are considered sensitive data. Some participants are expected to be very cautious when discussing their private life and perceived

commitment levels towards an employer in public. The researcher outlined that all participants remained anonymous during data collection as well as in the final version of the dissertation.

An outline of the questions and a consent form were given out prior to the interviews. A copy of the consent form can be found in appendix 2. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from answering questions they were not comfortable to answer.

In addition, all interviews were transcribed to ensure objectivity by collecting “data accurately and fully” (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 255).

4.9 Limitations

In qualitative research, non-probability method of sampling is generally used (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls and Ormston, 2013). According to Saunders et al. (2016) purposive samples are not generalisable or statistically representative for the target population. Since all participants worked in sales-related roles, the researcher acknowledges that the focus of the current study is narrow. The individual experiences of work-life balance and organisational commitment were explored with no emphasis on company function. A view of participants working in non-sales roles would have broadened the reach of the current study.

Another limitation refers to the group sample. There is an imbalance of 2 to 7 between employees in managerial roles and other employees. This may affect the data gathered as findings are primarily collected from employee who are not managers.

Since the limitations were disclosed, future researchers should be able to evaluate the scope of this study with regards to its limitations well.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data collected during interviews. Following the approach of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) the interview data was segmented into themes and linked to the research question outlined in chapter 3.

Three key themes were identified from the interview, which are linked to individual factors, external factors and mediators presented in the conceptual framework. The key themes, which derived from the analysis were:

1. Individual perceptions of work-life balance initiatives vary
2. Managerial support as a key factor
3. Influence of technology

During the interview stage, the researcher noted that expectations and beliefs of participants regarding work-life balance and commitment varied between working parents and individuals without children. Overall, participants described flexible working as a positive way of working. Other themes described were:

4. Rise in expectations
5. Target achievement influencing on work-life balance
6. Levels of commitment and work-life balance

The research findings are presented in the following section: 5.2.2 Thematic analysis.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

5.2.1 Theme 1: Individual perceptions of work-life balance initiatives vary

Findings from this study show that work-life balance initiatives were perceived differently across participants. While all seven participants felt that flexible working arrangements have had positive influence on their work-life balance, participants hold different reasonings for using policies. For example, one interviewee said: *"I feel that employees are conscious of time and we are able to design our own work-schedule to create room for our personal lives. I can start early and leave at 4.30 to collect my son from creche"* (Participant 6). Another participant said that she liked travelling and used flexible working to get an extra week abroad. *"I have my own laptop and I can work from other offices abroad – last year I went to Australia for 3 weeks, I travelled two weeks and in between I worked out of our Melbourne office for a week"* (Participant 3).

In terms of initiative design, participants were asked what they feel makes a work-life balance initiative valuable to employees. A common view amongst interviewees was that work-life balance initiatives had to be available to all employees. Participant 4 said: *"I think organisations need to understand that work-life balance is not just important to employees with children or people who maybe have to commute as they live far away. So I think it is important that companies are aware that work-life balance is important to everyone"*.

In addition, two interviewees described that friends they knew did not accept promotions and job changes because the new job did not offer the same level work-life balance (Participant 1 and 6).

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviews that flexible working practices could help with managing time conflicts. Participant 1 wished for the option to work one day per week from home: *"I feel less distracted at home, I can work more productive and also organise myself at home by doing grocery shopping that day etc."*. Participant 7 outlined positive aspects of working from

home due to the fact that he was less tired when did not commute to work every day. As he put it: *“a complete waste of time and it’s very frustrating”*.

Participants 4 often works from home and described that she finds it difficult to take breaks: “When you are in an office there is distraction. So you go for your coffee and go for your lunch break but when you’re at home, you really have to remind yourself to take a break. I would just work nonstop and work, work, work. That was one of the things that even my boss said, you’re going to have to try it because otherwise it becomes a habits”.

5 out of 7 participants reported a healthy work-life balance. Participant 6 said that the reasoning for feeling that work-life balance is lacking was because of her being relatively new in the position and not yet familiar with all the processes. Participant 7 claimed that for him, work-life balance was not as important *“as a manager number one priority is to be available to your team. On paper, I wouldn’t say I have a great work-life balance I never switch off but if you enjoy what you are doing then that’s fine. The quality of job is what matters to me”*.

Employees with children reported that the main benefit of availing of flexible working initiatives, such as *“flexi time”* (Participant 1 and 6) or *“being able to work from home”* (Participant 4 and 7) was to facilitate creche or spent more time with their families. Employees without children used work-life balance initiatives and flexible working arrangements mainly for travelling or to pursue leisure activities and hobbies. Parents reported that they used flexible working practices for leisure activities, too. When asked about how they spent extra time they gained through flexible-working practices, participant 1 said: *“I have a lot of things going on outside work, spending time with my family is important to me but I am big into my health so I would also take a 1 ½ hours lunch break to go the gym”*. Another interviewee answered the same question as follows: *“I don’t have children. So for me travelling is the most exciting thing in life that I do next to work. Flexible working helps me be more time efficient and explore other countries which is a huge benefit for me”* (Participant 2).

A common theme emerging through the various experiences of the participants was their references to life stage. Participant 1 outlined different needs varying across the different life stages. *“I got excited by the whole start-up thing. The company was so small. I knew I can make a difference here and that kind of stuff. They didn't really have any policies or maternity leave until one of my colleagues got pregnant so they made one for her. When I joined I was at a completely different life stage. I didn't even care less about work life balances or anything of that, but now it's a big part of why I'm still here and why I won't go anywhere else”.*

A statement made by Participant 2 shall be highlighted in this context. She does not have children, leading to her using flexible working arrangements for leisure activities: *“I don't have children. So for me travelling is the most exciting thing in life that I do next to work. Flexible working helps me be more time efficient and explore other countries which is a huge benefit for me”.*

5.2.2 Theme 2: Managerial support as key factor

A number of participants commented on how they felt managerial support was important for work-life balance and commitment levels. A supportive organisational culture in favour of work-life balance was key driver for employees availing of initiatives (participants 2, 3, 5, 7).

Participant 5 believed that organisations are aware of work-life balance levels of employees and are constantly looking to improve work conditions for employees. Participant 2 also made a comment on how managerial support increased her productivity levels *“I feel that if you are in a good place and your manager is supportive then you want to give back and show that you are thankful. I want to give back for the flexibility and deliver good results”.* Participant 7 explained that the company *“offers a high level of autonomy”* and *“self-responsibility”*. He described that team members were more committed once they were able to design their own schedule.

Participant 1 outlined that “*trust*” plays a major role when it comes to flexible working. He said: “*My manager knows the situation well – often I need to be flexible to collect my child from creche or stay at home to mind a sick child*”. Similarly, participant 4 commented that when she had to work from home a flexible leadership was important. Participant 7 stated “*that often managers have to follow up with employees to ensure that employees take PTO days*”.

Participant 2 provided an example, of how she felt managerial increases commitment levels employees feel valued. Employees reported that managerial support is closely linked to the overall organizational culture and work environment. The majority of participants highlighted that overall culture and atmosphere were other factors leading to high commitment levels. Participant 4 stated: “*You spent 40 hours per week at work so it’s important that you find the right job for you. Nice colleagues and a good atmosphere are key*”. Similarly, participant 5 said: “*I have to come to work every day, so I have to enjoy what I am doing. If I don’t like the people I am working with I could have the best job in the world but I would still change jobs*”.

5.2.3 Theme 3 Influence of technology and flexible working practices

As part of the interviews all participants were asked if they experienced conflicts between the two domains of work and private life. All participants commented that they had been in a conflict situation.

Talking about this issue participant 3 said, her employer offered consultation regarding strategies to better manage work-life conflicts: “*Work is always kind of in the back of my head. It’s kind of a curse and a blessing to have our own laptops and be able to work from home because for example, if I see an email popping up from a client after I finish work I look at it immediately and I am back at work. For me because work is so flexible, it’s difficult to switch off but I personally would probably need to work a bit more on it*”.

Participant 5 described that everyone is provided with a laptop and people check work emails on their personal phones, too. He said: *“It’s stressing me out, everyone can reach me on my phone 24 hours, seven days a week. Often I work for an hour or two during the weekend”*. Similarly, participant 6 felt that *“I feel that people are addicted to a certain level of connectivity, I have a smartwatch which I use to check if I received any important emails”*.

Participant 1, 4 and 6 reported that they felt that even though their job provided flexibility to take on family responsibilities they often felt *“pressurized”*. Participant 1 outlined that she had to ask her manager on the same day to leave the office earlier to collect her child from creche: *“My hours are built around creche, so it would be nice to have that formalised as my manager never knows when I leave that day as I’m taking turns with my partner”*.

On the other hand, the participant that outlined that he never switched off from work presented different reasonings for his opinion: *“I don’t think people are primarily motivated by work-life balance. Work is not a negative activity I enjoy working so I wouldn’t say that working outside office hours affects my work-life balance negatively”* (Participant 7).

Participant 7 is a manager and described how he supports his team *“I encourage my team to switch off during holidays, leave their laptops at home and so on. For me the worst would be if someone from my team comes back after holidays and worked during the vacation and as a result is under the impression that he wasn’t on holidays, but actually at work”*.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Rise in expectations

A common theme emerging through the various experiences of participants was their references to expectations towards the variety of work practices in the IT industry. Participant 5 said that *“employees kind of expect all those benefits from*

those American tech companies. Like let's say someone wants to work from home 4 days a week and the current employer is not supporting it, then they would just say ok, but there's another company that offers it". Participant 2 also commented how the labour market changed: *"There are a lot of software companies here in Dublin. It feels like the situation shifted from having a lot of applicants for a job to a lot of open positions and companies looking for applicants".*

5.2.5 Theme 5: Target achievement influencing on work-life balance

A common theme in the interviews was expectancies of organisation. All participants worked in Sales related roles with monthly/quarterly sales targets. Business goals were therefore mentioned by the majority of participants as driver for using work-life balance initiatives. As participant 3 outlined, *"we have unlimited PTO in our company. Every employee is free to manage their own time but you potentially would be shooting yourself in the foot because, you know there's a target to hit and so it's not that you can just check out completely. Everyone is giving their own laptop so you can work from anywhere in the world".*

Participant 7 made a comment regarding career progression: *"For example you are starting at 9 every day and you finish at 5 every day - so you are super strict. You are still performing. You are maybe not seen as somebody that's doing this extra step and this might affect your progression. It's a shame because if we look about who get promoted we look at high level of engagement. For example, if I have two great candidates, one staying late, very engaged - the other often working from home or finishing early because he is prioritising work outside of work, too. Same performance - which one would I chose?"*.

5.2.6 Theme: 6 Levels of commitment and work-life balance

When asked about the centrality of work versus private life, participant 1 described that *"I am here a long time so I have a huge amount of security around my day to*

day job, I can now pursue other things and worry about work as it's taking care of itself so I can go out and do other things like go on holidays, travel etc.". Participant 2 also commented on how she felt more comfortable about her job now after being in the same role for a longer time *"I worked long hours in the past because I was new and not yet familiar with the tasks my manager didn't expect us working over-time or staying longer in the office"*.

In terms of commitment levels participants were asked if they felt their commitment levels would be affected if their work-life balance was not good. Out of 7 interviewees 6 believed that their commitment levels towards the organisation would be affected negatively. Participant 7 commented that *"I think a healthy work-life balance has a positive effect on commitment. Let me tell you as a manager I have experienced individuals that are under immense pressure at work because they want to leave at 4.30pm and others were you would think that work is taking a lot of space as they are often working longer hours but they are very relaxed at work"*.

All 7 participants felt that they had a relatively healthy work-life balance regardless of issues with switching off from work on holidays or during weekends. 3 out of 7 employees consider moving jobs within the next 2 years. The reasonings were mainly related to how the company develops and next to work-life balance what kind of progression paths were available to them. Participant 2 outlined that *"if you are not happy or if you think the job is taking too much time and you don't have enough time for other things that interest you then it's time to look for alternatives"*. Participant 5 described managerial support as a mediator between work-life balance and commitment levels. *"I wouldn't be able to work flexible working hours or work from home without my managers consent. Therefore, I think that the organisational culture and leadership are hugely important"*.

In addition to this, participant 4 outlined that *"work-life balance is difficult when you have kids"* but *"if you pick the right industry then you can have a career and still have the healthy work-life balance and not miss the kids"*.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6. 1 Introduction

The study sought to explore the lived experiences of employees working in American software companies in Ireland who were using company benefits to balance their work and personal life. While a high volume of research had been carried out in the field of study, little research studied the direct effects of work-life balance on organisational commitment. Given the topicality of work-life balance and attracting/retaining top talent in the software industry in Ireland, this topic is considered highly relevant for both organisations and employees

For the discussion, the researcher decided to focus on key findings related to the conceptual framework (figure 2, p. 18), including external drivers, organisational policies, individual factors and mediators. The researcher will discuss the implications of work-life balance and organisational commitment at the end of this chapter.

6.2 Discussion of key themes and conceptual framework

6.2.1 Individual perceptions of work-life balance initiatives vary

As outlined in the conceptual framework, perceptions are highly subjective and a form of individual factors surrounding the decision to utilise work-life balance policies. Individual perceptions determine the lived experience of an employee and decide whether initiatives are considered useful for an individual. Participants spoke about different motivators for using work-life balance initiatives, including *“being-time conscious”* (participant 6) and being able to cope with different roles and collect children from creche or school (participant 1, 4 and 6).

In other cases participants expressed that they had more time for travelling or to spend quality time with family abroad (participant 2 and 3). Participant 3 stated *“I have my own laptop and I can work from other offices abroad”*. Participant 1 and 4 in contrast experienced organisational benefits, such as work from home as beneficial. *“I feel less distracted at home, I can work more productive and also organise myself at home by doing grocery shopping that day.”* (participant 1). Kotowska et al. (2010) supported this experience in their study and argued that flexibility is linked to higher work autonomy.

Expectations of employees were mentioned by Participant 5, who shared *“employees kind of expect all those benefits from those American tech companies”*. Participant 2 also commented on how the labour market changed. *“There are a lot of software companies here in Dublin. It feels like the situation shifted from having a lot of applicants for a job to a lot of open positions and companies looking for applicants”*. Both opinions go in line with a study by Pradhan et al. (2016), who described the labour market power of skilled software workers as being very strong.

Current literature and findings included that flexible working practices need to be accessible to everyone (participant 5) and not just to working parents. This has also been the experience of Participant 4, who suggests *“I think organisations need to understand that work-life balance is not just important to employees with children or people who maybe have to commute as they live far away”*.

While not specifying different employee groups, Darcy et al. (2012) argue that policies need to be designed for employees moving through different career stages. Participant 1 confirms this view and remembered that he had different interests when he started in the company. *“When I joined I was at a completely different life stage. I didn't even care less about work life balances or anything of that, but now it's a big part of why I'm still here and why I won't go anywhere else.”* One interviewee does not view work-life balance as an area that motivates him. As mentioned in the previous chapter Participant 7 described *“I don't think people are primarily motivated by work-life balance. Work is not a negative activity I enjoy*

working so I wouldn't say that working outside office hours affects my work-life balance negatively". This view was not confirmed by other participants or literature.

Differences between working parents and individuals without children were identified by the researcher in the individual interview stage and can be linked to all concepts related to work-life-balance and organisational commitment. While not being listed as part of the conceptual framework, the differences between individuals are underlying factors driving individual needs and perceptions. Previous researchers referred to offerings exclusively available to parents and the researcher identified an overall focus on work-life balance experienced by working parents and women (Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson and Sawang, 2012). Scandura and Lankau (1997) found that impact of flexible working hours on organizational commitment and job satisfaction were the highest among participants with family responsibilities.

6.2.2 Managerial support and organisational culture as a key factors

The concept of managerial support was an important factor for all participants. Rani et al. (2011) studied the impact of managerial support and argued that the importance of the concept was due to the formal and informal power a manager holds. When participants described leadership as mediator for using work-life balance, they used the words "encouraging" (participant 4) and "supportive" (participant 2). Participant 5 commented *"I wouldn't be able to work flexible working hours or work from home without my managers consent"*.

Participant 1 explained that his manager played an important part in him utilising the available paternity policy. While paternity is up to 4 months for all employees in his organisation, participant 1 described that he was worried with the changes and that he only took 2 months instead of 4. A fast-moving environment

characterises the software industry (Pradhan et al., 2016) and is often challenging for employees. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Organisational culture and work environment were described by all participants as important factors for commitment. Participant 4 stated “*Nice colleagues and a good atmosphere are key*”. These findings are consistent with existing literature. Kim (2014) suggested that a supportive culture acts as an encouragement for employees considering work-life balance policies. Participant 5 commented that that job satisfaction and quality of work which were described as influencing factors on organisational commitment interrelated with their work-life balance, such as “enjoying coming to work”. This view was shared by all participants. During the interview, participant 2 answered “*if you think the job is taking too much time and you don’t have enough time for other things that interest you then it’s time to look for alternatives*”. Participant 5 shared this view “*if I don’t like the people I am working with I could have the best job in the world but I would still change jobs*”.

Participant 1 spoke about the fact that for him it was difficult to distinguish between supportive culture and managerial support. He stated “*my manager knows the situation well – often I need to be flexible to collect my child*”. Participant 7, who is a middle manager in his organisation described that it is culture that mediates the use of work-life balance initiatives. Throughout the interviews all participants reported positive experiences with leadership. Effects of negative managerial support were not examined but are expected to influence the use of benefits negatively.

6.2.3 Influence of technology and flexible working practices

The researcher’s findings present technology as underlying driver for flexible working practices. Throughout current literature, researchers argue that due to technology many employees struggle to switch off after work. According to Ross

et al. (2017, p. 203) “smartphones, laptops, and other portable communication devices have exacerbated the work–life balance issue”.

Participants felt that technology influenced their work and private life greatly. The majority of participants reported difficulties with switching off from work outside work hours or during weekends. As stated in the findings Participant 3 described that *“it’s kind of a curse and a blessing to have our own laptops and be able to work from home”*. Participant 6 explained that she feels that *“people are addicted to a certain level of connectivity, I have a smartwatch which I use to check if I received any important emails.”* One of the managers described how he supports his team. He said: *“I encourage them to switch off completely because I prefer that they are relaxed after the holidays”*.

These experiences are supported by Schwarzmüller et al. (2018), who investigated effects of digital transformation on organisations. They found that employees availability and constant connectivity is as a result of boundary less organisations.

The high standards expected by the software industry in terms of employee commitment (Burke, 2010) are linked to time, energy and trust. Participant 3 supports this view in her description of her work ethic. She said that *“every employee is free to manage their own time but you potentially would be shooting yourself in the foot because, you know there’s a target to hit and so it’s not that you can just check out completely”*. This can be seen as a paradox. Organisations offer flexibility as a benefit and people spent more time with work related tasks, particularly during non-work hours. Participant 4 often works from home and she described having difficulties taking breaks. She argued that in an office environment, you have *“distraction”*. Participant 1 and 2 described that they were very strict with regards to working outside office hours. Participant 3 explained in that regard that for her *“it’s difficult to switch off but I personally would probably need to work a bit more on it”*.

6.2.4 Limitations to the current study

The generalisability of this research is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the interview sample consisted of 7 employees working in sales-related roles across four American software companies in Ireland. The extent to which the experience of this participant group is representative to different roles in the same industry was not identified.

Social exchange theory was established as a thesis underlying the experiences and actions of employees but was not further examined during this research. The researcher did not focus on the psychological drivers behind work-life balance.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research set out to investigate under an exploratory manner the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment. This study was prompted by the topical debate of work-life balance and the limited previous research into the subject across American software companies in Ireland. Particularly, external factors such as technological and socio-economic change (Gratton, 2010) have been identified as contributing factors for the increased importance of work-life balance for employees in Ireland.

The chosen industry, characterised by its fast-changing environment and demanding environment provided an excellent setting for this investigation. The conceptual framework developed during the literature review (see figure 2, p.18). acted as basis for the research. The factors surrounding an employee's work-life balance and commitment were broken down into external factors, job-related factors, individual factors and mediators.

7.1 How do the research findings relate to the research questions?

Sub-question 1: What aspects of work did participants perceive as most challenging?

Two distinct challenges emerged from the interviews: influence of technology and reconciliation of work and family life. The employees experienced the influence of technology as major challenge in their everyday life. The participants felt that flexible working contributed towards them spending more of their private time with work related tasks, including working weekends or during holidays. The study has shown that self-control contributes to achieving a healthy work-life balance.

The second dominant finding was experienced by working parents. They described difficulties with balancing work and family time. All parents described that organisational benefits helped them to spend time with their families outside of work, e.g. to do school runs or collect children from creche. These findings are

consistent with previous findings from other industries (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012; Thompson et al., 1999).

Sub-question 2: How do employees experience mediators for using work-life balance initiatives?

The current study found that two dominant mediators influence the use of work-life balance: managerial support and organisational culture. The participants were conscious of mediators in regards to utilising benefits. This view was not confirmed by participants. Only one manager referred to career development and expressed concerns that employees using flexible working extensively or mainly work from home could experience disadvantages compared to a colleague who sticks to a less flexible working schedule. Previous studies support this experience (see table 1).

Sub-question 3: How do employees experience organisational benefits such as flexible working practices with regard to their private life and choice of work?

This study has found that participants liked the flexibility available in their jobs. During the interviews, this group of participants described that they found flexible working challenging at times.. In table 1 (p. 8) the researcher referenced benefits and challenges for employees and organisations with regard to work-life balance initiatives. The negative effects, such as working longer hours through flexible working policies where not seen as a reason for being less committed by participants. Interviewees mentioned competition in the industry as external factors that influenced the types of benefits offered to accommodate worker's needs. Current literature suggested that from an organisational perspective those benefits were used to increase employee attraction and retention. The findings show that to an extent businesses use flexible working to prolong work times (Caillier, 2012; Beauregard, 2011).

Sub-question 4: How does this experience of working in the IT industry with access to organisational benefits shape work-life balance and organisational commitment of employees?

From the responses, the two themes emerged: a healthy work life balance is an important driver for organisational commitment and other influence factors contribute towards organisational commitment. The information collected during the interviews linked well with the conceptual framework. The employees felt that their designated organisations offered attractive benefits that were well-suited for their needs. With that they described higher commitment levels. Affective commitment was investigated but only a minority reported this level of commitment towards their organisation. Other influence factors leading to organisational commitment were consistent with previous research (figure 2).

To sum up, the research questions were used to explore the validity of the conceptual framework as a means to explain the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment. The researcher concludes that the framework together with the investigated experiences explain the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment well. The findings of the study showed that it is important that software companies tailor benefits to the needs of employees. While work-life balance is an important influence factor for organisational commitment, organisations need to be careful to not overlook other important influential factors such as quality of work or organisational culture.

These findings enhance the understanding of the complex phenomenon of employees' work-life balance and commitment levels.

The framework which proved useful for this study confirmed that mediators are important influence factors for employees. Furthermore, the empirical data collected provide a new understanding of employees experiences of work-life balance and organisational commitment in American software companies in Ireland.

7.2 Implications for future research

Based on the study carried out there are a number of recommendations for further research into this area.

Managerial support was considered a dominant theme throughout the study and found as important mediator for employees availing of available benefits. Replicating this study with a different sample, focusing on managers and how they experience work-life balance and organisational commitment would be an interesting area to dive into. Effects of negative managerial support were not examined but are expected to influence the use of benefits negatively.

Social exchange theory as underlying concept for work-life balance and organisational commitment could make an interesting research topic. The concepts of the framework combined with social exchange theory could be highly beneficial and add psychological drivers, such as employee stress levels to the framework.

Another area for further research would be to investigate the relationship between career development and work-life balance. Different studies mentioned career damage as influencing factors (Beauregard, 2011; Smith and Gardner, 2007). In the current research only one participant mentioned career development as influence factor for utilising work-life balance policies.

Further research might explore a theme introduced by Wey Smola and Sutton (2002) who stated that employees are more interested in transferable skills over job security. Parents asked on this topic did not agree with the statement. For them factors such as job security and flexibility were more important.

In contrast, the participants without children agreed that they were interested in a job which provided transferable skills. This is coherent with the literature investigating job motivations of younger workers (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008).

Technology as important influence factor for employee's work-life balance represents another area of focus for future research. While this study captured

important experiences of employees with regard to influence of technology and particularly flexible working on their work-life balance, this topic will continue to change our work lives. Again, the statement by Gratton (2010) characterises the legitimisation for future research on the topic of work-life balance well: “Work is universal. But how, why, where and when we work has never been so open to individual interpretation”.

7.3 Practical recommendations for employers

Taken together, the findings of the study can be used by American software companies to develop strategies that help employees better cope with challenges generated from flexible working practices. The present study shows evidence that workers currently struggle with switching off from work and all participants were aware of this issue. Policies surrounding strategies to better manage challenges of flexible working would be beneficial. Furthermore, the findings and themes emerged from current literature and interviews should be useful to any employer interested in improving organisational policies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview protocol

A qualitative investigation into the relationship between work–life balance and organisational commitment: Evidence from American software companies in Ireland

Overview of the research:

The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of employees working in American software companies in Ireland who were using company benefits to balance their work and personal life. The researcher aimed to provide recommendations to businesses striving to provide organisational benefits to employees. In addition, this study will explore employees' perceptions of work-life balance, the role of mediators such as supportive organisational culture and managerial support as well as barriers to employees availing of provided benefits.

Objective of research:

- Explore the employees experience of work-life balance and organisational commitment
- Investigate the main work challenges for employees
- Investigate individual factors, external factors, mediators for using benefits through the use of a framework
- Explore outcomes if employees' expectations are not met

Research questions:

- What aspects of work did participants perceive as most challenging?
- What mediators did participants perceive might help them using work-life balance policies?
- How are organisational benefits such as flexible working practices experienced by participants with regard to their private life?
- How does this experience of working in the IT industry with access to organisational benefits shape work-life balance and organisational commitment of employees?

Script prior to interview:

Thank you again, for doing this interview today. As I have explained before, my study seeks to understand how work-life balance relates to organisational commitment. I am looking at this phenomenon from a business perspective and I want to understand how employees experience work-life balance and how this affect their commitment levels towards the employer. I am interested in hearing how you perceive organisational benefits and if there are factors contributing to the use of available benefits. Our interview today will last approximately 35 minutes.

[review consent form with participant]

Are you still ok with me recording our conversation today? Yes No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if you want me to pause or stop the recorder at any time during the interview.

If no: Ok, I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we start, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions] If any questions (or other questions) arise during the interview or later feel free to reach out to me.

Rapport building and background questions:

[Consider the below questions as a starting point. Try to ask all of the below questions. However, to ensure a good flow to the interview, you may vary the questions or ask additional probing questions. Consider difference between parents and individuals with no children.]

What is your current job title?

How long have you been with this company?

What's your date of birth?

Do you have any children?

Are you married, cohabitating?

Work-life balance

What kind of benefits does your organization offer?

Can you describe how you use organisational benefits related to work-life balance?

To what extent does your organisation promote flexible working arrangements?

From your experience is there anything stopping employees from using work-life balance initiatives?

Can you describe how you use flexible working hours? (do you wish you had more time to spend with your family/ friends or to pursue hobbies?)

How many hours do you spent at work?

When you finish work for the day, can you switch off and enjoy your personal time?

What is your experience with working outside office hours?

If you could change something in your work conditions in order to improve your work-life balance what would be on your wish list?

In your opinion, how would you describe a well-designed work-life balance initiative?

Organisational Culture

Do you think your organisation is creating and maintaining a culture supportive of work-life balance?

[If yes: Could you describe that for me?]

In your opinion, and when thinking of your daily work, what is the effect that technology has on work-life balance? Mobile, emails?

In your experience, what are the factors leading to high employee commitment towards an organisation?

Work values

In your opinion, do you feel that employees work values have changed over time?

Organisational commitment in software companies

To what extent do you feel valued at work?

From your experience what emphasis do software companies put on employee retention?

Do you feel emotionally attached to your organization?

[If yes: Could you describe that for me?]

Generally, are you satisfied with your work life balance and do you feel a healthy work life balance can affect commitment levels?

[If yes: Could you describe that for me?]

Do you intend to look for a job within another organisation within the next year?

[If yes: Could you describe that for me?]

What factors influence your personal commitment levels at work?

Is there anything else you want to say before we end this interview?

Closing:

Thank you for meeting me today. If you have any questions or thoughts about what we have discussed, please contact me.

Appendix 2: Consent form

Purpose of this study

The purpose of my dissertation study is to explore employee experiences of organisational benefits in relation to organisational commitment and work-life balance.

Confidentiality

Information gathered through the interviews will be strictly confidential and only be used for the current study.

Risks of the study

There should be no risks for employees participating in this research. The participant can withdraw from taking part in the study or answering questions at any given time.

By signing below I am agreeing to:

- Take part in this study voluntarily,
- allow for the interviews to be recorded and used for the purpose of the research.

I understand:

- The purpose of the research,
- that all information provided will be held confidential and anonymously,
- that I will not be identifiable through information used in the final report.

Signed by participant: Date:

Signed by researcher: Date:

Contact Details: Lena Spreckelmeyer; lsprecke@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Interview transcript - Participant 1

Researcher: What's your current job title and how long have you been with this company?

Participant: So my job title is velocity account executive, so selling into companies under 100 employees in the UK. I've been working for the company for four years and six months.

Researcher: Do you have kids? Are you married?

Participant: I am married and I've got one child. He is 19 months old.

Researcher: What kind of work life balance benefits does your organisation offer?

Participant: The only sort of initiatives that I've used in relation to having children was the maternity leave. So four months paternity leave is the only type of official initiative I've used. Anything else? There is no initiatives around training or hobbies that I know of. Flexible working times. That's a tricky one, I do that. I will leave today at 4:00, maybe half four to collect my child.. So the way it works at my house is one of us will drop him to creche and then a person will collect him. So I don't know if that's an official initiative or something that just allowed. I don't know if that's an official initiative but it's acceptable. I use flexible time in terms of that I would arrive a little bit later or I leave a little bit earlier to facilitate creche.

Researcher: To what extent does your organization promote flexible working times? Do you think they are aware of the work life balance of their employees?

Participant: They are. I don't know if they are at a higher level. I've worked two manager who both had young children - so I think that is a major part of it. I don't know if that's an organizational thing. I don't know what it's like in other teams. Both have young children and face the same problems. It seems to be fine, so I don't know if that's my managers or the organisation. Because if I arrive at eight and I'm leaving early - my manager he's not here so he doesn't know if I came in early as he just sees me leave early as opposed to arriving early. But then I suppose the end of the month there it target to hit and if it hit no questions are asked. If it's not here then someone might say, Oh, you are leaving early lately. So I think the nature of the role helps to do flexi-time. Sometimes I'll take an hour and a half for lunch because I go to the gym and then come back and eat my lunch. But again, no one seems to mind. I think the organization in general promotes self- responsibility. So it's fine if you need to go the gym or you're leaving early to collect your kids. You get your job done and we treat you like an adult.

Researcher: Do you think there's anything stopping employees, so yourself or your colleagues from using work life balance initiatives?

Participant: I would say a little bit. When our son was born we had the option to take four months of paternity leave, four months is a long time and I was under tremendous pressure to not take it. It was internal. I can't leave sales for four months I would be so far behind. I initially wanted to take one month but my manager pushed me to take two months. But even at that time he did call me on maternity leave. He called me and asked me if I come into work, switch my leave because he had a target to hit and the team was quite junior at the time. I told them when he rang on the phone that I was back that month. There was pressure from the business side. I didn't take the full four months. And I don't know did I imagine the pressure or was it real? A colleague took the 4 months leave, which I think is a great move for him and that's kind of sets a precedent.

Researcher: Do you think there is a difference between offering those policies and taking them?

Participant: I believe I'm saying we really feel sometimes guilty for asking for a week of. Can I ask for it? I know it's a policy, but can I really take four months off? So I took two. I didn't feel comfortable taking the whole four months. Maybe next time it'll be different maybe. I don't know. Hopefully. The company moves so fast, I was worried that I'd come back and just wouldn't know what was going on. Here's a new product. There is a new team. He's new. This isn't new pricing structure. Like that's the fear. So I don't think there's anything in place to help people get back in to work. For a woman being off 9 months to a year I think you need it more, but I don't even remember being offered. There's initiative to get out but here's no real initiative to get back in.

Researcher: What do you think of your experience with working outside of office hours?

Participant: I don't. I'm acquitted that I properly shut down and evenings I never work. Maybe it'd be a rare occurrence. I mean anytime it's like I took a holiday what, two weeks ago? I did work. I took a call on the Monday, but it was an important customer I prearrange it as it was the only time suitable for both of us.

Researcher: If you could change something in your work conditions in order to improve your work life balance even more. If you had a magic wand, what would that be?

Participant: Well, it'd be nice to formalize the fact that I leave to go to Creche. We never actually discussed that I'm doing this or that my hours are built around creche. I come in early and leave early or come in late, leave early. If that could be formalized that'd be nice. So that I don't have to ask my manager on the day. He never knows in advance when I need to leave. And also I would like one work from home day a week. Again, you probably could do that but it's not a formalised thing. My wife has that as part of her contract. When she came back to work they offered her that. It would just help so much to remove the commute, just for one day a week to do home admin or do grocery shopping. So I'd like that as an incentive to improve

work-life balance. I've been here for 4 and a half years and I am not going anywhere, so I guess you could offer that as a perk.

Researcher: What do you think of the overall culture? Do you think they are supportive of work life balance?

Participant: I think so. So I think that's probably a cultural thing. When I went to take off the maternity for the first time I asked for one month of, my manager pushed me to take two because he wanted me to spend more time with my wife and our son. Well I think he was aware that it's a 4month policy so don't take just one. Manager get those emails toward the end of the year saying that they have all.

Researcher: And overall would you say that people are prioritising private life over work life?

Participant: Yeah, I think that's true to an extent so that work is not my top priority. Obviously it's a big priority. You need to make money. A lot of, a lot of things going on that are as important to me: family is important, I'm big into my health and health is not just training at the gym it is also eight hours sleep. I have a lot going on that is as important to me if not more important. Work is definitely not the main thing in my life, but I don't think that translates into staying in jobs for less time. Being here as long as I have a huge amount of security around that, which is very comforting to know that I can now pursue other things and not worry about this. It is taking care of itself so I can go out and do other things like go on holidays, travel etc. So, people have woken up to the fact that life is more than work. In general, people have bigger priorities on what their job is. It hasn't translated into me wanting to move jobs quickly, transferring skills. I would move quickly if I was in a bad space. That's the thing, like I wouldn't hang around in a bad company or a job I hated. I think once you find a good place, then hang on to it as long as you can.

Researcher: When do you think, of commitment levels, do you feel more committed to a company when you know it's a good work life balance?

Participant: Absolutely, I think the company and your managers and so on are important. They get to know who you are. So I would hate to have to explain that to somebody else. If I went to go work for a different company and they're like, where you going? I was like, oh, it's creche time; or where were you - at the gym. Like you wouldn't know how they'd react. So yes. Because they know who I am and they are comfortable with me taking an hour and a half for lunch if he's gone to gym and when he leaves early because then that's committed to that and they know all about me - it's definitely keeping me here.

Researcher: What makes a good work life balance initiative? What do you think employees value?

Participant: I think it's important that if they offer flexibility, that it's not just for one employee that it's for everyone.. So I think organization is important to

understand that work-life balance is not just important to people with children or people who maybe have to commute as they live far away. So I think it's important that work life balance is important to everyone. It doesn't matter if you have kids or if you're younger.

Researcher: What other factors lead to you being committed to a to a company?

Participant: Definitely, the life stage I am at. It helps because that paternity leave is staring me in the face. I would probably take it at some point. So that is a big, big one for me. I've seen other companies who do better than this - like this is Facebook who offers six months paternity leave? There's minimum time you have to be in the company to avail of these benefits but if you're older than me or younger than me or wherever you are in your life. Where I'm at I've got one kid is probably going to have our second one soon enough and that maternity leave definitely keeps me here. Stay here, work until her kids take the live, come back. That's massive for me. For me when I joined, I wasn't married. I didn't even think about it at that time. Now it's a big, big factor. So that's my life stage.

Researcher: When you joined, would that be like more the flexibility part that was interesting for you?

Participant: Actually when I joined, I didn't even ask about the kind of stuff they had. I was just excited by the whole start-up thing. The company was so small. I knew I can make a difference here and that kind of stuff. They didn't really have any policies or maternity leave until one of my colleagues got pregnant so they made one for her. When I joined I was at a completely different life stage. I didn't even care less about work life balances or anything of that, but it's a big part of why I'm still here and why I won't go anywhere else if someone was competing on that kind of battleground.

Researcher: One question, do you feel emotionally attached to your organization?

Participant: No. I think this is the best job I've ever had. It's best company I've ever worked for so like everything is good but emotionally committed to it - no. If things like that, go wrong or I didn't like it here I'd be gone very quickly. What are the important things - it's definitely the things that happen outside of this office in my real life that are probably more important, so I'm not emotionally committed. I get excited when I get watches or hoodies but it's hard to get emotionally attached.

Researcher: Are you satisfied with your work-life balance?

Participant: Absolutely. There is no need for over time. Take long lunches, leave early while getting the work done.

Researcher: Are you looking for a job in another like two or three years?

Participant: Hard to know. It's a long timeframe. I get emails from recruiters and I read them to see who's this company? I don't see anyone on the horizon that would

offer as a good position as here. So I would say no - 3 years is a long time. Definitely the next 24 months of my life I don't see myself leaving. But you never know.

Researcher: And if you change jobs, would work-life balance be something high up on the list.

Participant: But I think maybe it's just me, but I find it a difficult conversation to have if you're applying for a job, which would put me off applying for a job. So you can't walk into an interview and go so like what's the work life balance? No one likes to hear that. You have to earn that trust. That would put me off applying for a job.

Researcher: So anything else that you would like to say?

Participant: I am wondering if this is because of organisational policies or is it more because of managers who are in a similar situation with young children. I would be concerned if I get a new manager in their fifties or someone who maybe never had kids or where the kids are old enough and the manager had forgotten how difficult it can be. Would the balance be there or would I be forced into a different sort of position? I don't know if it's the culture or if I've been lucky to work for nice people on a managerial level. So, people join good companies, but they leave bad managers, they don't leave companies.

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Student number: 15043703

School: Business

Course: International Business

Degree to be awarded: MSc in International Business

Title of Thesis:

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