An investigation into Millennials' perception and experiences of work-life balance in the Irish Public Sector

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Abstract

'An investigation of Millennials' perception and experiences of work life balance in the Irish Public sector'.

This study explores Millennials' perception and experiences of work life balance in the Irish public sector. The Irish public sector is bracing itself for change as almost one third of public servants are due to retire between 2018 and 2028 (Walsh, 2018).

Projections estimate by 2028 85% of Principal officers, two thirds of Assistant Principals and just over 70% of Higher Executive Officers will retire from the civil service (DPER,2018). Simultaneously according to Deloitte (2019) in 2025 the Millennial generation will be the largest in the world, representing three quarters of the workforce. It can be argued that in the next few years Millennials are set to be the next generation of leaders, and so to ensure there is a talent pipeline, Generation X' will need to be cognisant of Millennials' attitudes to work so they can attract, engage, retain and develop these future leaders (Bolelli and Durmus, 2017). This study examines if generational differences exist and if literature represents Millennials' work ethic and characteristics accurately.

Work life balance is essential when it comes to the retention and performance of employees. Research exists on the importance of work life balance for employees within an organisation, and literature shows its importance to millennials in their careers. However, further research is needed to explore the field of work life balance within the context of an all-inclusive, non-family centred context. This study also explores, through the use of qualitative approach through the use of semi- structured interviews, if the public sector procedures and policies facilitate Millennials work life balance needs regardless of caring responsibilities or childcare needs. Given the context of 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic, this study, like its participants, had to adapt to the new working arrangements, such as working from home. This study compares the working arrangements pre and post Covid-19 and their impact on the Millennials' perception of WLB. It examines their experiences of working from home and how the evolving situation has changed their understanding of these working arrangements.

This dissertation recommends that the public sector in a post Covid-19 world, facilitates working from home options on a more consistent and regular basis across the entire sector. It also recommends that it changes its flex-bands and that it shows overall more trust in the modern employee.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
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(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Ailís Henry

Student Number: 18143300

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Title of Thesis: An investigation into Millennials' perception and experience of work-life balance in the Irish Public Service

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Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

AO – Administrative Officer

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

DPER – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

EO- Executive Officer

Gen X – Generation X

Gen Z – Generation Z

HEO- Higher Executive Officer

WFH – Working from Home

WLB – Work-life Balance

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Chapter One - Introduction
Introduction
A recent Deloitte (2018) study of Irish Millennials (born between January 1983 and December 1994) found that when considering an employer, financial rewards is their top priority (74%) followed closely by flexibility (64%). However, the findings showed that the key to engagement and retention of this generation is inclusion and flexibility. An organisation which puts processes in place to enable employees to be agile, collaborative and productive no matter where, when and how they are working will be sure to attract the Millennial employee. It has been proven that employers that demonstrate concern for WLB positively correlates to recruitment, motivation, job satisfaction and organisational commitment and ultimately the retention of employees (Chang and Cheng, 2014; Kim, 2014; Farivar and Cameron, 2015).

The Irish public sector is bracing itself for change as almost one third of public servants are due to retire between 2018 and 2028 (Walsh, 2018). Projections estimate by 2028 85% of Principal officers, two thirds of Assistant Principals and just over 70% of Higher Executive Officers will retire from the civil service (DPER,2018) which can be seen Appendix 1. Simultaneously according to Deloitte (2019) in 2025 the Millennial generation will be the largest in the world, representing three quarters of the workforce. It can be argued that in the next few years Millennials are set to be the next generation of leaders, and so to ensure there is a talent pipeline, Generation 'X' will need to be cognisant of Millennials' attitudes to work so they can attract, engage, retain and develop these future leaders (Bolelli and Durmus, 2017).

Studies have shown that flexibility and work life balance are key for Millennials, more so than previous generations. This research will build upon the exploratory study carried out by Darcy *et al.* (2012) to examine the feasibility of a 'one size fits all' approach to work life balance (WLB). The study used a mixed methods approach to examine on a large sample of employees in public and private sector organisations and found that WLB is important for employees at all stages of their careers and not solely those with children. Based on these findings this research will explore in depth the needs, opinions

and preferred WLB practises of Millennial public servants in their current life stage through qualitative research.

This year, 2020 will be remembered as the year of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has drastically impacted our lives; in how we work and socialise and also how we carry out daily tasks such as shopping. At the time of writing, 08 August, 2020, there has been over 19 million cases of Covid-19 resulting in over 700,000 deaths globally (WHO,2020). On 12 March 2020, the cases in Ireland began to rise and the Irish Government closed schools and universities and this marked the beginning of the pandemic response in Ireland (DPER, 2020 a). Social distancing measures were announced, and the Government imposed restrictions meaning that only work that was essential should remain open, and working from home was introduced. The public sector employees not on the front line have been working from home since and while this study is focusing on work life balance in the public sector the researcher's aim was to understand their experiences before restrictions were imposed and before working from home became the current norm.

Research Structure

Chapter Two: Chapter two will provide a review of the literature surrounding the generation millennials. It will explore the literature surrounding generational differences and stereotypes/characteristics of this cohort. This chapter will also examine the current literature surrounding WLB, its impact on the employee and current policy and literature regarding the public sector and WLB procedures available to millennials and the challenges and impacts of these policies.

Chapter Three: This chapter examines the research question and the sub objectives that this study is centred on.

Chapter Four: This chapter details the methodology chosen by the researcher in order to address and broach the research question and sub objectives.

Chapter Five: Findings and analysis: This chapter breaks down the findings collected from the study with reference to the literature.

Chapter Six: Critically analyses and discusses the findings and these are applied to the literature.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and recommendations and provided from this study and areas of future and further research are highlighted.

Chapter two – Literature review
Introduction
This literature review will first turn its attention to the generations currently in the workplace, and give an overview of their characteristics and it will then examine the debate whether generational differences exist (Lyons and Kuron, 2010; Madera *et al.,* 2011).

The literature will focus on the Millennial generation who are the focus of this study and outline why it is postulated they are different from other generations, why they are worthy of study, their characteristics, and stereotypes.

The third section of the review will look at defining work life balance, impact of WLB on people's wellbeing, evidence of working arrangements in the public aimed at achieving a healthy WLB. The literature will then further examine the variations of flexible working arrangements including working from home (WFH).

The literature review will conclude with examining current reports on the impact of Covid-19 on WLB.

Multigenerational workforces
Just over half the world's population consists of Millennials and Generation Z. At present there are four generations in the workforce, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z (Deloitte, 2019). According to a LinkedIn report (2020) 89% of talent professionals agreed that a company has more success if it has a multigenerational workforce. While it has been reported as achieving more success other research alludes that there are both challenges and opportunities to having a multigenerational workforce (Madera *et al.*, 2011).

Generations develop characteristics as a result of exposure to social, political and economic events throughout their lifetime (Madera *et al.*, 2011). With the different styles and expectations of the generations in the workplace it is evident that managers would benefit from understanding each generation in order to efficiently manage any challenging differences and create a harmonious, successful workforce (Naim and Lenka*,* 2018).

Generational differences are highly debated in literature. Some state that there are excessive inconsistencies in the stereotypes associated with generations (Lyons and Kuron, 2010) and Rudolph and Zacher (2018) argue that it is a management trend in the workplace that segregates employees based on the year they were born and not their individual capabilities. It is suggested by Stanton (2017) that organisations should examine the motivations of their employees individually instead of managing generations differently.

The value of studying generational differences has also been questioned by some academics due to the uncertainty of how generations are measured and the varying and debated years associated with generations (Madera *et al.*,2011; Weeks and Schaffert, 2019).

It is noteworthy that some literature recognises that at varying life stages different factors and priorities are categorised as important and can impact an individual's needs and attitudes in the workplace (Veiga, 1983; *Darcy et al.*, 2012*).* One particular example of this is a study by Sparrow (1996) that found that as individuals age they have different needs and preferences and that the employers that acknowledged and considered these changes in employment desires correlated to increased motivation and job satisfaction. This study will focus on the perceived work life balance experiences of Millennials and the findings will demonstrate and represent their WLB needs at present which may change at a later stage in their lives.

It is evident that stereotypes of generational cohorts are a general observation of people born in a certain era. While studying and examining these cohorts it should be acknowledged that not all characteristics of an individual will necessarily correlate to the assigned generational stereotype (Madera *et al.*, 2011). It can be argued that the generalisation of generations globally is inaccurate as the experiences of generations in one part of the world can vary significantly depending on country, in addition to cultural norms (Costanza *et al.*, 2012). It could therefore be argued that generational research would benefit from being country specific to avoid global generalisations and assumptions. This study will focus specifically on the Millennial generation

employed in the Irish public service with the intentions of getting an in depth understanding of Irish Millennial characteristics.

Baby Boomers

The term Baby Boomers is the name given to the generation born between 1946 – 1964, in the era of the American civil rights movement (Madera *et al.*, 2011). This generation is known to embrace the 'live to work' mentality and perceive working long hours and loyalty as opportunities for career advancement (Spiro, 2006).

Generation X

After the Baby Boomers is Gen X (Generation X) born between 1965 – 1980 (Hoole and Bomema, 2015). Experiencing unstable economies and witnessing their parents' job losses despite their loyalty and hard work ethic, influenced this generation greatly and created distrust between this generation and employers (Johnson and Lopes, 2008). Gen X dislike supervision at work, and they are known to prioritise their individual careers over loyalty to organisations. They would rather an employer that offers flexible work arrangements, skill development opportunities in addition to tangible rewards (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Miller and Yu, 2003; Shragay and Tziner, 2011).

Millennials

The Millennial generation are referred to in literature by other names such as Generation Y and Nexters (Ng and Gossett, 2013). For the purpose of this research they will be referred to as Millennials. There are varying year ranges emerging from literature labelling Millennials as the generation born between 1980 to 1995 and in some cases up to the year 2000 (Ng and Gossett,2013; Hoole, and Bonnema 2015; Naim and Lenka, 2018). For the purpose of this study the researcher is using the bracket of 1983 – 1994 as it covers the most used age range and it is the chosen time frame used in a recent study by Deloitte (2019). This generation is the focus of the study as by 2025 they will represent the biggest cohort of employees in the workplace and (*ibid*), an in-depth review of Millennials is discussed below in more detail.

Generation Z

The latest generation emerging into the workforce is Generation Z (Gen Z). Like every generation there are debates in literature over the classification by age, some argue Gen Z were born between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s (Deloitte,2019), however some argue that those born up to 2012 are also classified as Gen Z (Singh, 2014). They are the latest generation to join the workforce, they share similar characteristics to Millennials in that they strive to attain a career with a work life balance (Andrea, Gabriella, Tímea, 2016). They have grown up surrounded by technology so this plays an important role in their lives. They are agile and adapt to change easily (ibid).

Millennials

This section will look at the stereotypes, characteristics of this generation, how they are perceived in the workplace and what they value most in terms of their careers.

Stereotypes

Millennials have grown up in an era dominated by globalisation, digital and technical advancements and equality and diversity (Ng and Gossett,2013). From a review of literature, it emerges that this generation have grown up with a sense of entitlement and narcissism, with very involved parents in their childhood. As a result, they were coddled and highly protected by their parents (Twenge and Campbell, 2001; 2008; Byrne,2007). This generation have grown up surrounded by technology and consequently they rely on it their own personal lives and in their careers (Weber and Urick, 2017) Their upbringing has influenced this generation to be different from previous generations in terms of their working style, ethics and working values (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Naim and Lenka, 2017). On the other hand, Millennials appear across literature to be ambitious, socially conscious and place high value on diversity, ethics and corporate responsibility (Ng and Gossett 2013, Bolelli and Durmus, 2017).

Job Hopping

Literature suggests that Millennials pose serious retention challenges for organisations compared to previous generations (Waikar, Sweet and Morgan,

2016), as they have become known as the job-hopping generation with many proposed reasons for changing jobs. Millennials are more likely to resign should they find themselves dissatisfied with their work, and they tend to resign from their employments quicker than previous generations in order to seek an alternative (Campoine, 2015). A lack of factors such as flexibility, meaningful work and development opportunities are some of the most cited reasons for Millennials resigning from an organisation (Hoffman, 2018). Deloitte's Millennial Survey (p14, 2019) found that almost half of the Millennials surveyed said they 'would, if they had a choice, quit their current jobs in the next two years'. This stark finding demonstrates the issues organisations face in order to retain the Millennial cohort. However, Hoffman (2018) disputes the Millennial 'job hopping' stereotype suggesting that Millennials are likely to remain with their current employer just as much as Generation X when they were at the same stage in their careers. This argument relates back to the idea that generational needs are not static and depending on age, stage in their lives, or specific career paths, their employment priorities may change and evolve (Veiga, 1983; Sparrow,1996).

In the Workplace / Motivation

There are conflicting reports and research regarding whether Millennials tend to crave intrinsic rewards over extrinsic rewards. They are known to value training, development opportunities and role models. Some academics claim that they value job security and work life balance over higher salaries (Corporate Leadership, 2005; Spiro, 2006; Ng and Gossett 2013). However, industry reports show that Millennials' number one priority is remuneration with flexible working arrangements in terms of working hours, and location also featuring high in their employment priorities (Deloitte, 2018). It is clear that both remuneration and work-life balance (WLB) are highly regarded by this generation and as alluded to by Campoine (2015) and Spiro (2006) a high salary also plays a significant role in attracting Millennials. However, if there is a lack of flexibility and WLB in their organisation, employers could encounter difficulties engaging, motivating, and retaining this demographic of employees. Millennials witnessed their parents' generation, the Baby Boomers, being made redundant in the 1980s after working long hours and demonstrating

loyalty to an organisation and it is believed for this reason that Millennials favour a variety of jobs in their career and crave a WLB (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Spiro, 2006). This need for flexibility and WLB is in stark contrast to the perceived priorities of the Baby Boomers who are known to 'live to work' and believe working long hours will increase their career opportunities (Gursoy *et al.*,2008). It has been shown that despite being labelled by some as 'lazy', Millennials put their careers at the centre of their lives and incorporate their personal lives around it (Bolelli and Durmus, 2017).

It is evident through emerging literature that Millennials have contrasting traits compared to previous generations, and given that they will account for 75% (Deloitte, 2019) of the working population it is important that they are studied continuously as their characteristics and attitudes will change over time. Their tendency to move jobs is a concern for employers and this research aims to help employers understand this generational cohort. These findings can positively influence both employers and employees, in addition to adding to existing research in this field. As flexibility and work life balance have prevailed throughout literature concerning Millennials, the next section of this literature review will discuss WLB in more detail.

Millennials have been found to favour collaborative work, and place high importance on working in sociable environments (Lyons, 2003; Lowe *et al.*, 2008). This cohort are also known to want instant feedback from management (Stanton, 2017) in addition to regular contact with their manager either in person or through emails (Herbison and Boseman, 2009).

Work-life balance

 The term 'work-life balance' poses a challenge for academics to define as there are different interpretations of what 'balance' represents. Some describe it as 'a ratio of time' shared between work and family responsibilities (Soomro, Breitenecker and Syed, 2018, p.131), others similarly describe it as the distribution of time, energy, and commitment divided evenly between work and non-work responsibilities but not limited to just family, and include personal interests and social activities, that create minimum conflict in all roles (Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw, 2003). It has been argued that balance is not

necessarily a measured division of time between roles but as an individual's perception of balance relative to their own personal circumstances (Kalliath and Brough, 2008; Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva, 2019).

One of the prominent theories in WLB literature is spillover theory, which as the title suggests, is a person's experience and emotion either positive or negative arising from either work or life which can impact on the other (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Gyanchandani, 2017). This infers that if an employee is experiencing stress in their work they are likely to continue to have this emotion when outside of work, or if someone is satisfied in their non-work life this can transfer positively into their work life, meaning spillover works both ways and can positively and negatively impact employees and employers. This theory highlights the need for organisations to be cognisant of the implications of an employee's work life balance.

Most WLB studies have focused on family life; parents and individuals with children and how WLB impacts on their wellbeing and work-family conflict (Darcy *et al.*, 2012). This is unsurprising as WLB came about after World War II when women entered the workforce but were still predominantly responsible for childcare and therefore required a balance between their work role and family role (Roberts, 2007; Gattrell *et al.*, 2013; Dizaho, Sallen and Abdullah, 2017). The research that does exist on WLB among the working class; primarily focuses on working mothers and women in the workplace and neglects other aspects of life (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005).

Academia surrounding WLB is predominately centred around the equilibrium of work and family associated childcare or caring demands (Eikhof, *et al.*, 2007; Kelliher *et al.*, 2019). Consequentially this creates gaps in research in this field of WLB, as not all employees are included or represented in these studies it excludes the needs of employees without dependents who may want to balance their work and also pursue interests or activities (Wilkinson, Tomlinson, and Gardiner,2018; Kelliher *et al.*, 2019). The existing literature about WLB and families is based on a nuclear family consisting of heterosexual parents which ignores modern day family units such as LGTBQ parents and guardians (Languilaire and Carey, 2017). Kelliher *et al.* (p. 108,

2018) argue that academics and policy makers need "to develop a more holistic and nuanced understanding of contemporary life and contemporary work". Following on from the researcher's search, there appears to be a gap in literature focusing on WLB from a Millennial perspective, particularly in the Irish public sector, highlighting the need for a study in this area. It is recommended that organisations need to be conscious of the impact on employees arising from "the issues and complexities of modern day" Darcy *et al.*, (p118, 2012) and create bespoke initiatives to help them achieve a healthy work life balance.

Employers implement WLB programmes and initiatives to aid employees to manage the balance between their work and personal lives (Grady *et al.*, 2008). Examples of these programmes and initiatives include; job sharing, flexible working arrangements including flexi-time that allows employees to dictate their starting and finishing times while adhering to the core working hours; flexibility in location of work such as home/remote working (Darcy *et al.*, 2012).

Impacts of WLB

Implementing policies and practises to ensure employees can achieve WLB is an effective way for an employer to promote and enhance employee wellbeing. When an employee achieves a satisfactory WLB not only do they increase their overall wellbeing (Zheng *et al.,* 2016) but employers can expect an increase in organisational commitment and reduced absenteeism (van Steenbergen and Ellemers, 2009).

In the CIPD Good Work Index 2020 (CIPD,2020), a quarter of employees report that work demands can clash and interfere with their personal lives, but only 7% claim the reverse. Research has highlighted the influence management and the workplace can have over an individual's WLB. Leslie *et al.* (2019) allude that management negatively views employees who are seen to have a balanced work and personal life, believing they should be fully committed to their role. Therefore, it is unsurprising that professionals without children reported that they felt their need for WLB was perceived as less justifiable compared to colleagues with families because their organisations

viewed their non-work life commitments or activities as leisurely (Wilkinson, Tomlinson, and Gardiner, 2017),and it has been argued by Martin and Kendig (2012) that this cohort of employees can be subject to a long working hour culture as a result.

Literature shows that a lack of or poor WLB will result in negative consequences for employees, causing stress related health issues and impacting their overall wellbeing (Haworth and Lewis, 2005; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2013). These factors have a direct impact on employers including a reduction in productivity and quality of work, increased levels of absenteeism and ultimately turnover (Frone *et al.*, 1992; Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1996; Bloom and Van Reenen, 2006). Guest (2002) highlights that policy makers need to investigate the causes of employees' imbalances and be mindful of their values before creating and implementing WLB policies(Guest 2002; Törnquist, Bringsén and Andersson, 2017).

Policies and initiatives provide options for employees. However, trust and organisational culture are at the heart of flexible working arrangements and remote working and without the support of managers, employees will not avail of these work options (DBEI, 2019). It has been found that employees in the early stages of their careers fear that their career or promotional opportunities will be hindered by availing of WLB arrangements and the uptake and success of WLB initiatives are strongly influenced by the perceived support by line managers (Darcy *et al.*, 2012).

WLB in public service

The Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2017 (Government of Ireland, 2017) reported that 75% of employees rated their wellbeing highly and reported feeling supported in their workplace. However, it is noteworthy that employees at lower grades, it could be assumed these grades would largely consist of Millennials as these are entrant level grades (DPER, 2018) reported less positively than their more senior colleagues, due to the lack of autonomy and the hierarchical system that prevails in the public service. The Civil Service

Employee Engagement Survey 2017 does not make reference to if and how WLB contributes to the wellbeing statistics, highlighting the need for this study.

A new public service stability agreement 2018-2020 was agreed in 2017, its primary focus was on pay and pensions, however a WLB element was included focusing on continuing female participation in the workplace (WRC, 2018).

Flexible working

Flexible working is a term that is debated in literature with some defining it as flexibility in relation to working outside traditional or usual working hours (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011), while other academics have a broader definition of the term defining flexibility as not just encompassing work schedules but also including location such as remote working, working from home, flexi time, and flexibility in the role and the work itself (Ciarniene and Vienazindiene; 2018; CIPD,2019 a).

The public service is known for its flexible working hour policies. It enables some employee grades to arrange their working times within certain limits, for example (DPER,2020), all hours are logged and if excessive hours are accrued employees can avail of taking this 'flexi leave' later. Another flexible working arrangement available to public servants was traditionally known as 'term time' that enables parents to take time off to mind children during summer months. This has been updated to an arrangement known as the 'shorter working year scheme' which allows any employee to avail of this unpaid leave for any purpose they wish (DPER, 2020). This highlights a positive step forward for the public sector, moving away from traditional family orientated flexible work life balance arrangements and providing more opportunities for all employees regardless of family situation and allowing them to avail of the scheme should they so wish. Darcy *et al,.* (2012) in their study highlighted the need for employers to be more aware of the fact that it is not just female mothers who want or need a balance between their work and home roles.

Companies trialling a four-day working week have been hitting news headlines over the last five years (Laker and Roulet, 2019). A New Zealand company

which implemented this work initiative permanently after a trial reported an increase in productivity and employees rated their WLB 24% higher because of the four-day week (Four-Day Week, Year). In Ireland, the 'Four-Day Week Ireland' group called on the government to consider such a trial as it is one of the country's biggest employers (RTÉ, 2019). The estimated costs of rolling out this work pattern across the public service would cost €3.6 million according to Minister Paschal Donohoe (The Journal, 2020), but a review of studies has yielded no results on the opinions of public sector employees on determining how the change would impact them and if the four-day structure would work in theory across the various departments and state agencies.

Remote working

According to a CSO survey (CSO, 2018), working from home is slowly increasing, only 18% of those surveyed worked one or two days per week from home. This figure is higher than the findings in CIPD's survey, reporting that less than 10% of the workforce work from home (CIPD,2020). The survey also noted that this trend was more affiliated with private sector employees compared to the public sector. The public service trialled a pilot of teleworking in 2003 (DPER, 2003), however it was not rolled out across the public sector at the time. A recent survey found that most incidents of remote working in the public sector were on a sporadic basis (DBEI, 2019). HR professionals have reported increased requests for home working from employees (CIPD, 2020), who claim it would enable them to achieve a successful WLB by reducing their commuting time and childcare costs. The key to implementing remote working in an organisation depends on critical factors such as a formal policy and support from managers and supervisors who have been adequately trained in this area (Kowalski and Swanson, 2005)

Challenges of remote working

Remote working is being requested more often but despite its appeal there are also challenges when working remotely from the office. It can lead to some employees extending their working hours to make up for their physical absence from the office as a result of their personal work ethics or workloads from managers (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Richardson and McKenna, 2013; DBEI,2019) which means working hours will spill into non work life

potentially disrupting an employee's WLB (Richardson and Kelliher, 2015; ILO, 2017). Employees can also experience musculoskeletal issues if they do not have an adequate workspace in their remote environment and combined with working excessive hours, could have negative consequences for their wellbeing (Grant, Speogan and Wallace, 2012).

Academics posit that lack of social interaction because of remote working could create a sense of loneliness and negatively impact the wellbeing of employees (Eddleston and Mulki, 2017; Avis, 2018). Millennials are known to enjoy collaborative teamwork (Stanton, 2017) and so it could be argued that while this generation desires flexible working arrangements, the feeling of isolation due to lack of face to face interaction might deter this generation from working remotely on a full time basis.

Commuting

For some, not having to commute to work frees up a substantial amount of time for non-work activities (Richardson and Kelliher, 2015). The National Travel Survey 2016 saw the average duration of those commuting to work within Dublin was 28.2 minutes (CSO, 2016), while 200,000 or 11% of commuters spent an hour or more on their commute. The rental prices in Dublin average between €1,950-€2,227, while the cost of buying a house in Dublin averages between €321,802 - €402,506 (Daft, 2019 a; 2019 b). Given the high numbers of projected retirees at senior levels in the next decade (DBEI, 2019), it can be argued that a substantial percentage of Millennials are at the lower-middle management grades at this point in their careers, and due to the restrictive pay scales in the public sector it is unlikely that they would be able to afford to these prices (DPER, 2019) and would therefore have to commute further distances. It is no surprise that commute times accounted for 77% of the respondents' justification for requesting home working (CIPD, 2020 b) and it was found that it was the primary motivating factor for public servants (Government of Ireland, 2019).

A recent study on commuting in Dublin has found that various modes of transport for commutes can have different psychological effects on people (Lades *et al.*,2020). The report concluded that commuters using active modes

of transport such as walking or cycling have higher satisfaction than those using public transport or cars. The study also found that peak traffic in Dublin caused high levels of low satisfaction.

Technology

Advances in technology have contributed positively to WLB as it has enabled employees to work remotely. However, the boundary of home and work life can morph into each other leading to employees working excessive hours, and possibly cause tension or conflict in employees' personal lives (Carlson *et al.*, 2018). The ability to access work emails and be contactable by phone can create an 'always on' approach to work which will inevitably encroach on a person's WLB, and it has been suggested that employees feel compelled to answer work emails immediately due to fears that delayed responses would negatively impact their career potential (Marcum, Cameron and Versweyveld; 2018).

Covid-19 impact on work

The fast spread of the Covid-19 outbreak meant that organisations had to close their office buildings and work from home with very little notice when restrictions were put in place in March 2020 (DPER,2020a;CIPD,2020b). Many organisations had not operated in this way before and it was and continues to be a large learning curve (McCarthy *et al*, 2020). As of August 2020, the Irish Government are still asking its citizens to work from home where possible in order to combat this deadly virus (Government of Ireland,2020)

While the long term impact on the future of work in not yet clear, there are early studies indicating that the 9-5 office life will be different when restrictions allow the return to work as 70% of respondents in the 'Remote working during COVID-19: Ireland's national survey initial report' (McCarthy *et al.*, 2020) indicated they would enable employees to avail of remote working post Covid-19 (CIPD,2020; McCarthy *et* al.,2020). The report surveyed 7,241 employees across a variety of sectors of which 17% were public and civil service administrative employees, interestingly of which almost half indicated they would like to work from home a couple of days per week after the pandemic.

Working from home has been the popular term during the pandemic but as some home are not conducive to replicating an office environment it is unsurprising that 36% of the respondents reported "would like to work a mix of from home/hub or work-sharing space and onsite" (McCarthy et al, 2020, p.16).

The findings of the survey highlighted the three most reported issues with the current remote working situation are, difficulty to switch off from work, communication and teamwork is challenging and inadequate workspaces at home (McCarthy *et al.*,2020). The findings also indicated that employees missed social interactions with colleagues and found that workloads increased. On the other hand the positive implications of working from home were reported to be: No commute, reductions in daily expenses associated with work and more autonomy and flexibility to structure working day.

This research was undertaken in May 2020 when there were tighter imposed restrictions compared to the stage of the restrictions in August 2020, and highlights the need for further research in this nascent area of remote working in the public sector.

Conclusion of literature review

Millennials are soon to be the largest generation in the workforce and given that academics highlight their uniqueness compared with other generations, the desires of this cohort beg further exploration. Industry and academic studies have yielded conflicting results on whether monetary rewards or WLB is their priority in their careers, highlighting a need for more investigation.

The Irish public sector is one of the biggest employers in Ireland. Previous studies have examined a mixture of private and public sector employees (Darcy *et al.*, 2012) or have focused solely on civil servants (Government of Ireland,2017).There are ample flexible working arrangements available to public sector employees (DPER, 2020 b) but there have been no studies to date examining if these working arrangements aid employees to achieve (or perceive to achieve) a healthy or desired WLB.

There is considerable literature surrounding WLB, however there is less concerning those without family or childcare responsibilities. Darcy *et al.*,(2012) found that employees have different WLB needs at the various stages of their careers and given that Millennials favour a healthy WLB, this highlights the need for further investigation.

The factors identified in literature that impact WLB are flexible working arrangements, commuting, technology, organisational culture, and support. These factors have been shown to both positively and negatively impact on employees, depending on how they are used and perceived.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shaken the world and initial reports and literature is emerging in this new field. The pandemic is likely to be one of the historical events that shape the generations' attitudes. At present it is likely the way we do work is going to change even when restrictions ease, with remote working being top of the agenda for employees.

Chapter Three research objectives

Overall research objective

"*An investigation into Millennials' perception and experiences of work-life balance in the Irish Public Sector***"**

Based on the literature reviewed Millennials consist of significant segment of the workforce. Millennials emerge as unique compared to previous generations and organisations need to adapt to ensure they can attract and retain this generation of employees. Studies have shown that Millennials rate WLB highly when considering employment and so this is an area that needs further investigation.

Gaps in literature have been identified in the area of WLB, with studies traditionally focusing on WLB from a work-family perspective there is scant studies of individuals without children or caring responsibilities achieve WLB for their own personal hobbies and interests. A search of literature has yielded no results of previous studies of Millennials' perception and experience of WLB in the Irish public service.

Literature examines how WLB can be perceived to be achieved and as a result there is a need to understand what WLB means to Millennials, how they propose they achieve or could achieve or improve their WLB to employers. By ensuring Millennials achieve a satisfactory WLB, public sector organisations will have a better chance of retaining this generation.

Working from home was forced upon public servants as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although initial studies have been conducted in May of 2020, there is still a need for new data to help inform policy makers on how best to approach the future of work in the public sector. This study aims to investigate Millennials' experiences of WLB before and during Covid-19 to establish what WLB practises if any are needed in the public sector.

Research sub objectives

In order to explore Millennials' perceptions and experiences WLB in the public sector the following objectives will also be explored:

Research objective 2

"To assess how Millennials understand their generation and if they are cognisant of multigenerational differences in the workplace."

Research objective 3

"To understand the Millennials' perception of work life balance."

Research objective 4

"To evaluate the importance of work life balance for Millennials in the public sector."

Research objective 5

"What public sector policies and arrangements are available to Millennials to aid them to achieve a healthy WLB?"

Research objective 6

"To examine what external factors influence the equilibrium of WLB."

Research objective 7

"To investigate if the Irish public sector needs to adapt or update WLB policies to meet the needs of Millennials."

Chapter 4 Methodology

Introduction

'An investigation of Millennials' experiences and perception of work life balance in the Irish public sector'

This study seeks to explore Millennials experiences of WLB in the public sector. While the study's objective is to understand what WLB arrangements are available to Millennials, their experiences of WLB in the Irish public sector, it is also to investigate to what extent do Millennials rate WLB in their careers and if they avail of WLB arrangements.

A review of the literature has shown that Millennials are disloyal job hoppers that are lazy with reports varying that financial rewards are more important to them than WLB (Ng and Gossett 2013; Deloitte, 2017). This study will be assessed to determine if the results support the findings in the literature by exploring how important WLB is to Millennials, if they feel supported to avail of WLB arrangements and their WLB could be improved.

Research Philosophy

When undertaking research there several considerations to take into account as outlined in the research onion devised by Saunders *et al.,* (2012) demonstrated in Appendix 2. Research philosophy is the first stage, which consists of the belief, nature and development of knowledge which signals the direction of methods for research (Saunders *et al.*,2009; Collis and Hussey, 2014). The researcher first considered three research assumptions; ontology, epistemology and axiology (Saunders *et al.,* 2016).

Ontology

Ontology is concerned with reality and existence and is divided into two views; objectivism and subjectivism (Quinlan, 2011; Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Objectivism suggests that the existence of social phenomena is similar to that of physical existence in that regardless of the cognisance or opinions of social actors it exists (Collis and Hussey, 2014; Saunders *et al.*,2016). On the other hand, the ontological perception of subjectivism, also known as constructivism, considers 'that social phenomena develop in social contexts' (Quinlan, 2011, p.96) and incorporates 'perceptions and consequent actions

of social actors (people)' (Saunders *et al.*,2016, p 30). The research would not be able to achieve the aims of the study if an objectivist approach was taken, this research required the opinions, perceptions and actions of the participants which evidently requires a subjectivist philosophical approach.

Epistemology

According to Sullivan (2010), epistemology is a branch of philosophy which seeks to discern beliefs from knowledge. This type of philosophy is suited to this type of research, as this research concentrates on the employees' beliefs on existing WLB practices. Due to idiosyncratic nature of employees' views, this epistemological approach is best suited in the analysis of assumptions about knowledge over the more abstract ontological approach (Saunders *et al,* 2016). These beliefs shape the effectiveness of these strategies, in terms of how to best interpret the insight gained from these opinions (Sullivan, 2010).

Upon deciding on this area to investigate the researcher turned focus to Saunders *et al.*, (2012) research onion as per Appendix 2 and considered the four research philosophies: positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism.

The objective of this study is to explore the participants' experiences and perception of WLB within the Irish public sector and to explore their opinions on the future of WLB. The researcher therefore established that the philosophical underpinnings of this research is an interpretivist, epistemological approach combined with a subjectivist (constructivist) ontological approach, as the aim of the study is to understand interviewees' experiences, perceptions and opinions (Saunders *et al.,* 2009; Quinlan, 2011).

Research Approach

There are two theory approaches to research, deductive and inductive (Saunders *et al.*,2009). The researcher studied both approaches before deciding what was most appropriate for this research. A deductive approach to research involves a theoretical structure being used as a basis to develop a hypothesis or an assumption to formulate a research plan and statistical tests to verify the validity of the researcher's hypothesis or assumption

(Silverman, 2013). A deductive approach is commonly associated with quantitative research as it tends to focus on statistical data (Saunders *et al.*,2009). The researcher eliminated the deductive approach as the aim of the study is to investigate participants feelings, experiences, and opinions. An inductive approach is focused on getting an understanding of humans and how they perceive events and is more commonly associated with qualitative research (*Saunders et al.*, 2009). This study sets out to examine the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of the participants with the aim of being able to identify and extract reoccurring themes from the data provided to the researcher. An inductive approach was selected for this study as the researchers' aim is together and analyse data to be able to contribute to and develop theories associated with Millennials and WLB practises in the public sector.

It was noted that the research strategy taken by Darcy *et al.*, (2012) was a mixed methods approach consisting of questionnaires with employees and in addition face to face interviews with middle and senior management. However, due to time constraints the researcher concluded that a mono method was more effective. Because, the researcher wanted to get the opinions of the participants the semi-structured interviews were used.

Sample/participants

The researcher selected a sample of interviewees through a process of purposive sampling to ensure they were Millennials (born between 1983 – 1994) and employed in the public sector. The researcher emailed public servants in six different public sector organisations; in the civil service and non-commercial state agencies, in some organisations more than one participant took part. The education, defence, health and justice sectors fall into the public sector but their roles are so varied and also given the pressures on these particular sectors during Covid-19 the researcher decided to focus on administrative office based public servant Millennials. The researcher acknowledges that the study is not a full representation of all public servant Millennials but given the time constraints the researcher decided to do interview nine respondents from six different organisations.

Table 1. below has been anonymised participants by number which will be refenced in Findings Chapter and demonstrates the gender, age, grade position in the public service, their place of work anonymised and their tenure in their current employment.

Participant number	Gender	Age	Grade	Workplace	Tenure
Participant 1	Male	35	HEO	Department 'A'	3 years
Participant 2	Male	31	AO	Department 'B'	2 years
Participant 3	Female	28	HEO	Department 'C'	5 and a half years
Participant 4	Female	32	HEO	Department 'D'	3 months
Participant 5	Female	31	EO	Department 'E'	3 years
Participant 6	Male	28	HEO	Department 'A'	4 years
Participant 7	Male	27	AO	Department 'F'	1 month.Prior - 5 years in the Department 'D'.
Participant 8	Female	29	EO	Department 'G'	11 months
Participant 9	Female	28	EO	Department 'A'	18 months

Table 1. Table of Participants

Data collection tool

Interviews were conducted with nine millennial participants currently employed in the public sector. Due to governmental guidelines rising from the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place over Zoom and Microsoft teams. The researcher conducted semi structured interviews with the participants as this allowed the researcher to explore interesting responses further.

Process

All sample members that were contacted to take part in the study agreed to take part, prior to the interview they were sent via email (Appendix 3) containing an information sheet as per Appendix 4. They confirmed they were a Millennial and currently employed in the Irish public sector and agreed to the interview consent form as per Appendix 5. Interviews were conducted on the Zoom video calling platform and Microsoft Teams, whichever suited the attendees. Face to face interviews were not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Interviews took place between 17 July and 8 August 2020, and the durations varied between 17 minutes to 41 minutes. The researcher transcribed

interviews within 48 hours of conducting it. Once transcribed the interviews were encrypted and saved to the researcher's external hard drive to store in line with the University's requirements, they were deleted off the researcher's personal mobile.

Pilot interview

A pilot interview was held on Microsoft Teams on 17 July which lasted 30 minutes. This afforded the researcher with an opportunity to test the quality of the video conferencing app, and the reliability of using the Voice Recorder app on Android to record the audio from a laptop. The researcher noted that some questions overlapped but when the participant answered they expanded more when asked a different way, the researcher decided not to amend these questions to ensure participants expanded on their experiences and answers.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the nine interviews and thematically analysed the data in line with Braun and Clarke's six step process (2006). A thematic analysis is an accessible and flexible process of examining qualitative data concerned with extracting emerging themes or patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017)

The process of applying Braun and Clarke's (2006 p87) six phases analysis to this research is detailed below

 1. <u>Becoming familiar with the data</u>

The researcher conscientiously transcribed the interview audio recordings. To ensure familiarity with the information the recordings were listened to several times, enabling the researcher to take note of initial thoughts and ideas.

 2. <u>Generating initial codes</u>

The nine interview transcripts were reread then were then objectively and systematically coded all the data that had been divulged in the interviews into an Excel spreadsheet. The coded data was input in a way that enabled the researcher to easily refer to the participant that provided the data. This allowed

for similarities and differences across the data, in addition to identifying unexpected or unusual insights.

3. Searching for themes

Initial themes and patterns were identified via cross referencing the collated codes the researcher identified twenty-eight initial themes. However, on further analysis there were overlapping themes leading to the emergence of sub-themes.

4. Reviewing themes

The review process involved further analysis of the twenty-eight themes and re-examining the transcripts and identified codes to ensure there were no oversights or omissions during the process. As a result, five prominent themes emerged, each containing sub- themes.

5. Defining and naming themes

The five themes were reviewed, and an appropriate name was assigned to each theme ensuring they accurately portrayed the data contained within them.

6. Producing the report

The researcher extracted the themes, subthemes, and direct quotes from participants from the Excel tables created during the analysis process. The findings from this study are discussed in the next chapter, i.e. the report.

Ethical Considerations

Consent

Participants were contacted via email and informed participation in this research was voluntary and they could withdraw their consent before, during or up to two weeks after the interview. The emailed issued to participants contained the interview consent form as per Appendix 5 and the Participant Information sheet as per Appendix 4. The researcher made themselves available for any queries from the participants and ensured that all consent forms were signed and returned in advance of the interview. Given the covid-

19 restrictions and all interviews took place via video calls, the researcher accepted typed signatures on the forms and access to printing was limited during restrictions. The researcher was cognisant of the potential impact of the global pandemic on participants and ensured minimal risk of touching on distressing topics. However the researcher reminded participants at the start of the interview they could skip any questions they didn't feel comfortable answering and if they wanted to pause or withdraw from the study they could without consequence. In such a scenario any personal data and audio recording would be deleted immediately. The participant was informed when the audio recording commenced and concluded.

<u>Confidentiality</u>

Participants were guaranteed anonymity in the reporting of this research, the researcher assigned a number to each participant and referred to them in the findings this way. Their place of work was also anonymised, and participants were assured their place of work would not be identifiable.

The personal data obtained such as consent form was saved down from the email on to the researchers external hard drive and encrypted similarly after the interviews the audio recordings were saved to the same location labelled by the participants' assigned number. This data will be held for the timeframe required by the National College of Ireland.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the limitations to the overall research. The first limitation is the sample size in which three separate limitations have been identified. The researcher attempted to get a variety of perspectives from 7 different public sector organisations there are 17 government departments which have state agencies under these departments and over 300,000 employees (Public Jobs, 2020). Therefore while this study attempts to give an insight into WLB in the public sector and is focusing on a small number of people the public service for the most part follow the same circulars and guidelines so while generalisations emerging might not capture every public servant.

The researcher also notes that this cohort of participants are all involved in office based administrative roles like the sample used by McCarthy *et al*. (2020). The public service includes medical professions, Gardaí, and teachers but they are not represented in this study as their work are not comparable with other public servants. The researcher spoke to public servants who are based in Dublin, and allowed for commuting comparisons to be made, WLB of Irish public servants working elsewhere in the country may differ because of their commute, so the findings from this study is potentially limited in making generalisations about the rest of public servant population (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

The obvious limitation to this qualitative study is that it is capturing the perceptions and opinions of people in a moment of time. The research was undertaken in an unprecedented global pandemic with restrictions on movements not only out of the country but within radii from dwelling places. The researcher made attempts to capture experiences and opinions pre Covid-19 and during the pandemic however findings from his research may change over time depending on the fate of the virus.

It should be noted that the researcher took steps to limit bias when conducting interviews. To ensure the validity of the study the researcher took careful consideration into their approach to the interview, the researcher also prepared for the interview, made sure to limit their opinions when exploring answers further. These were all in line with the guidelines to limiting qualitative research bias when conducting interviews as noted by (Saunders *et al.,* 2003).

Chapter 5 Results and Findings

The five overarching themes that emerged from the twenty-eight codes are as follows:

1. Generations in the workplace.
2. Millennials' need for WLB in their careers.
3. Flexible working arrangements in the Public sector.
4. The implications of Covid-19 on WLB.
5. The need for review of 'flexible' working arrangements.

1. Generations in the workplace.

Participants provided an insight into characteristics they associate with the Millennial generation, the participants' tenure, and reasons for leaving their last employment providing further insights and the experiences within workplaces with other generations was also divulged.

Millennials defined

The seven out of the nine participants felt the Millennial generation consisted of those born between 1980's – 1990's and currently aged between 25 -35 years old, this perception in line with the age range that dominated literature (Ng and Gossett,2013; Deloitte, 2018) The other two participants were found to believe that Millennials were "*born any time after 90's onwards*" (Participant 6) and "*who grew up during the new millennium*" (Participant 8), this age range features less prominently in literature (Naim and Lenka,2018). Interestingly participant 3 and 4 had not previously considered themselves as Millennials with Participant 3 stating "*I wouldn't consider myself a typical Millennial*".

Millennial characteristics

The participants provided insights into the characteristics they associate with their generations, over half of the participants (six) claim that Millennials are driven and ambitious. It was cited by the six that this ambition and career driven attitudes have fuelled a lack of loyalty to organisations, Participant 2 claimed "*they are more focused on their career progression over loyalty to an organisation*" similarly Participant 9 stated that "*we won't settle for something*

we don't like". These characteristics echo the findings in literature that Millennials will move on if they are not satisfied (Campoine, 2015). It was also suggested that this cohort *"tend to be more comfortable having that more portfolio career"* (Participant 4) and the focus is "to climb the ladder or progress quickly" (Participant 2). While discussing the characteristics of this generation it is noteworthy that Participant 7 thinks the generation are "*misunderstood*".

The duration of participants' tenure in their current organisation is broken down in the diagram below. It shows that one third of the respondents had joined a new organisation within the last 12 months which in line with the Deloitte (2018) survey findings that Millennials tend to commitment no longer than two years to an organisation. On further examination of the tenure statistics, five out of the nine have remained with their public sector employer over 3 years, this statistic resonate with Hoffman's (2018) argument that this generation are just as likely commit to their employer as Generation 'X'.

Participants' tenure in current organisation

Legend:
- 0-1 years
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
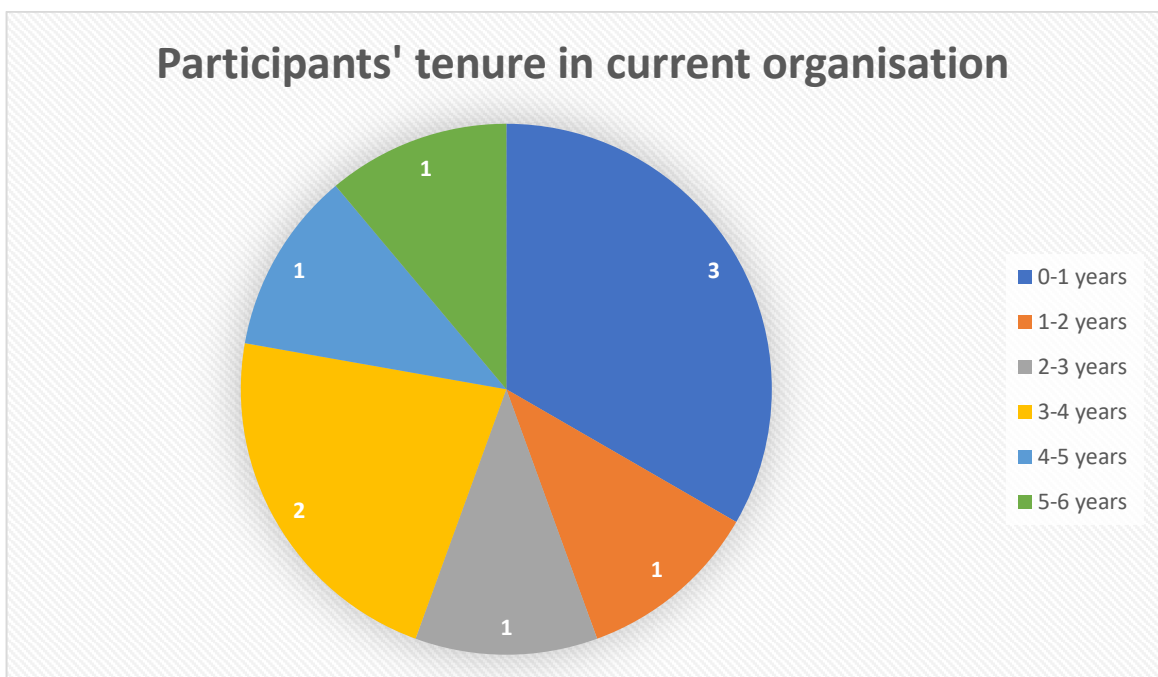- 3-4 years
- 4-5 years
- 5-6 years

Figure 2. Participants' tenure in current organisation

The findings indicate that this generation feel they are "*better at technology*" (Participant 5) and "*tech savvy*" (Participant 3) which is not usual as the Millennial generation are the first in the workplace to grow up in a technological advancing environment (Ng et al 2013; Weber and Urick 2013).

Only one participant acknowledged the negative perception of this cohort "*I think the characteristics associated with Millennials can be negative a lot of the time. I suppose ambition can be seen as both a positive and a negative*" (Participant 3). Some literature have portrayed Millennials negatively claiming they are lazy (Bolelli and Durmus, 2017).

<u>Millennials' perception of other generations</u>

When asked about other generations it was claimed *"There is a definite difference to older generations" (Participant 4),* 8 out of the 9 respondents had similar feelings. This supports the findings in the literature, that generational differences in the workplace do exist (Naim and Lenka, 2018). The data does not indicate what older generation they are referring to, the Baby Boomers or Generation X. Literature postulates that Baby Boomers have different work ethics and characteristics compared to Millennials (Sprio,2006; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008), on the other hand Generation X have been more closely linked to Millennials as they also enjoy flexible work arrangements (Smola and Sutton,2002).

The views of participants were that older generations in the workplace were "*kind of stuck in their ways*" Participant 3. While Participant 2 observed that they believe in "*doing your time*" at certain grades to lead to promotion.

Participant 4 observed:

> *"There is a different kind of resilience sort of compared to younger generations or it could be loyalty in terms of their job and they may throw their hat in the ring for a promotion, and if it doesn't happen it doesn't mean they will leave".*

Contrastingly one respondent (Participant 6) felt there were no differences between generations within their organisation "*At first when I joined at 24/25 thought I was different but when I grew up a bit more realised, we are all the same.*" This claim feeds into extant literature that people's needs change as they grow older (Veiga,1983; Sparrow, 1996; Darcy et al.,2012) and also adds justification to academic's doubts whether generational difference actual exist (Rudolph and Zacher,2018).

2. Millennials' need for WLB in their careers

<u>Defining WLB</u>

To investigate Millennials' needs for WLB in the Irish public sector it was imperative to first understand their perception and definition of WLB. The findings show several of the participants share a similar understanding of WLB:

> "*it's when your work doesn't encroach on your private life. It's when work doesn't grow too big that you don't have a life."* (Participant 1)

> "*I do my job hard while I'm there and I don't want work impacting on my personal life when I get home.*" (Participant 2)

> "*That you don't feel overwhelmed in work and can still enjoy life outside of work and that you have time to do so and you can leave your work behind once you clock out and focus more on your personal life outside of work.*" **(**Participant 3)

> **"***It's exactly what it says on the tin. It is being able to sort of separate work from your life and have enough time to do both well and enjoy both well. The way I would see WLB is being able to have enough hours in the day to get your job to the standard you want to have it done but still leave enough hours remaining so you can wind down, do whatever hobbies you might have, spend time with your family and friends. That would be a really healthy work life balance in my opinion.*" (Participant 4)

> "*being able to shut off when you leave work and having enough time to devote to your hobbies or your family or whatever you have outside of work.*" (Participant 5)

The WLB definitions captured from the data do not mention juggling work with caring duties, highlighting that WLB is in present day understood to be a balance between work and non-work and has revolutionised since its origins as 'work – family balance' to assist females to enter the workplace (Greenhaus *et al*.,2003; Darcy *et al*.,2012 Kelliher *et al*.,2019).

Interestingly there was only one respondent (Participant 6) *who stated that "spending your time doing what you like whether that is your work or when you leave work. Work can be part of WLB as it's what you enjoy.*" The idea of work being a positive and enjoyed aspect of WLB has not been an aspect discussed in the literature review.

<u>WLB vs Financial Rewards</u>

The participants were asked how important WLB is to them in terms of priorities from an employer and if they would rank it higher than financial rewards. Despite the conflicting reports in literature of Millennials' priorities (Campoine, 2015; Deloitte, 2018) all respondents highly rated WLB and

acknowledged that salary was also significant, which does not provide concrete data to confirm which of the conflicting reports are more accurate.

> *"Salary is important, but I would rather be on a lower wage and more time for me."* (Participant 6)

> *"From my experience, Work Life Balance is definitely more important than salary as long as you can live off what you are earning"* (Participant 2)

> *"money is important up until a stage where you are comfortable, but after that work life balance take precedence."* (Participant 7)

Two participants have demonstrated they took action to achieve a better WLB over financial rewards; Participant (9) have an insight into their motivations to joining the public sector:

> *"one of my reasons to move to the public sector, I did take a pay cut, but, I felt there would be an opportunity for progression, and a much better opportunity for some sort of work life balance. just feel it's very important for your health, mental, physically, everything. So, I feel money wise I would weigh up work life balance more than the money that I earn."*

Similarly, Participant 2 passed up potential financial rewards and believed if they remained in their previous role, they *"would have ended up on a lot more money a bit quicker through career progression"*.

The study is the focus of public servants and it was highlighted by one participant (4) that public servants were for the most part not motivated by financial rewards due to the pay scales (DPER, 2019) *"because, most public servants probably do the same jobs that they are doing in the private sector but for maybe more money"*.

WLB pre Covid-19

Commuting

The duration of commute undertaken by the participants of this study is demonstrated in the diagram below. The average commuting time from this sample is 58.8 minutes each way, this is a staggering 30.6-minute difference to the report 28.2 minutes reported in the National Travel Survey (CSO, 2016). The distance in commuting could also indicate the rise in housing market for both buying and renting property (Daft, 2019 a; 2019b), alluding that this generation are being priced out of the market and forced to lived further away from their jobs. The data shows that only two out of the nine interviewees had less than a 30-minute commute. It emerged in the interviews that these shorter commutes consisted of walking or cycling to work.
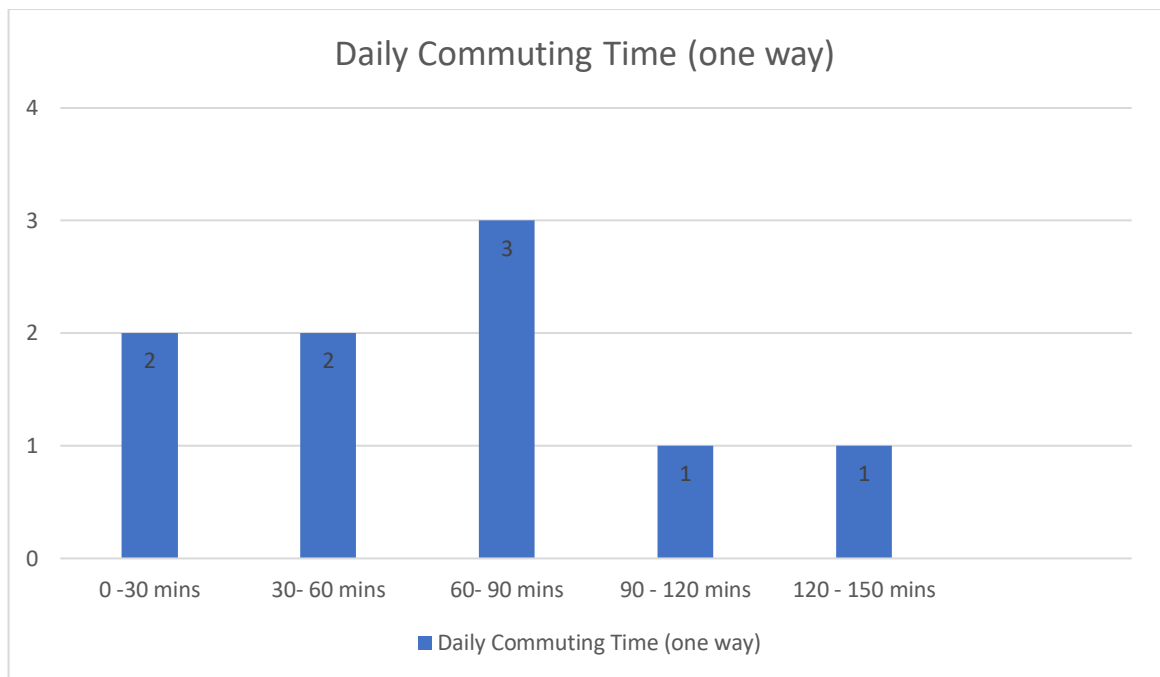
Figure 3. Daily commuting time

Participant 8 described "*being able to walk makes me a lot happier when I get into the office*". The other walking participant felt similar to this and thought it had a positive impact on their WLB but noted that as a result of Covid-19 and working from home; they realised the benefit of having that extra one hour (round trip) for their own personal use. It appears that these findings correlate to a recent study of commuting in Dublin (Lades et al., 2020) that found non-motorised modes of transports create greater satisfaction compared to cars and public transport. Participant 6: "*However, I, even with my short commute, I have noticed a difference in terms of time with work life balance. Mentally I feel like a weight lifted off of me that I can use that time anyway I want to*." Despite the claims that walking to work is good for your wellbeing and WLB this data highlights that even a walking commute can impact people negatively.

The data shows that public servants in Dublin find commuting to negatively impact their WLB. Two participants described how they perceive it to prolong their working day, Participant 4: "*my working day is not over until I put my key in the door and come in at the end of the day. I don't feel my time is my own until I do that*"; while for Participant 2 the working day commenced on the morning commute: "*I do think of the commute as part of my working day. I would consider it because I think of work when I am on the way in.*"

A third of the respondents reported to feel that commuting consumed their personal time, for example Participant 6 commented: *"I feel like I am wasting two and a half hours of my day"*. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 3: *"It does eat into the '8 hours sleep, 8 hours work, 8 hours play'. That 8 hours gets cut down because you are on a bus."* and they also highlighted the negative implications of losing out of this personal time *"I didn't feel like I actually did anything positively in my personal life"* Participant 3. These findings indicate a poor WLB, which is a concern, if a balance is not restored it has the potential to create stress and impact negatively on wellbeing (Haworth and Lewis,2005)

The study found that the actual journey commuting can also create negative feelings that creep into work and non-work life. Participant 9 explained that *I feel getting into work can sometimes be stressful, or if its busy, it can be stressful."* Likewise, Participant 7 remarked *"if you have a bad commute in, you have a bad day at work. If you have a bad commute home, you have a bad work life balance, you go home angry and upset. It affects the work life balance just as much as your day at work. [It] hinders outside of work activities".* This is evidence of the WLB 'spillover theory' whereby experiences in one aspect of life transfer and impact other aspects (Edwards and Rothbaard,2000; Gyanchandani; 2017).

The cost of commuting was raised by Participant 1, adding: *"When I lived in France, your job was responsible for paying for half your commuting costs,"* and the participant suggested that this expense should be subsidised to ease the financial burden of commuting.

The participants presented significant evidence of how commuting impacts on their WLB, and literature advises that employers and policy makers should be cognisant of factors causing poor WLB when considering WLB policies (Guest,2002).

3. **Flexible working arrangements in the Public sector**

Working from home (WFH)

Participants were asked if they had the facility or the option to WFH regularly pre- Covid-19 and as the data in *figure 3* demonstrates in the table only two out of nine had availed of it.
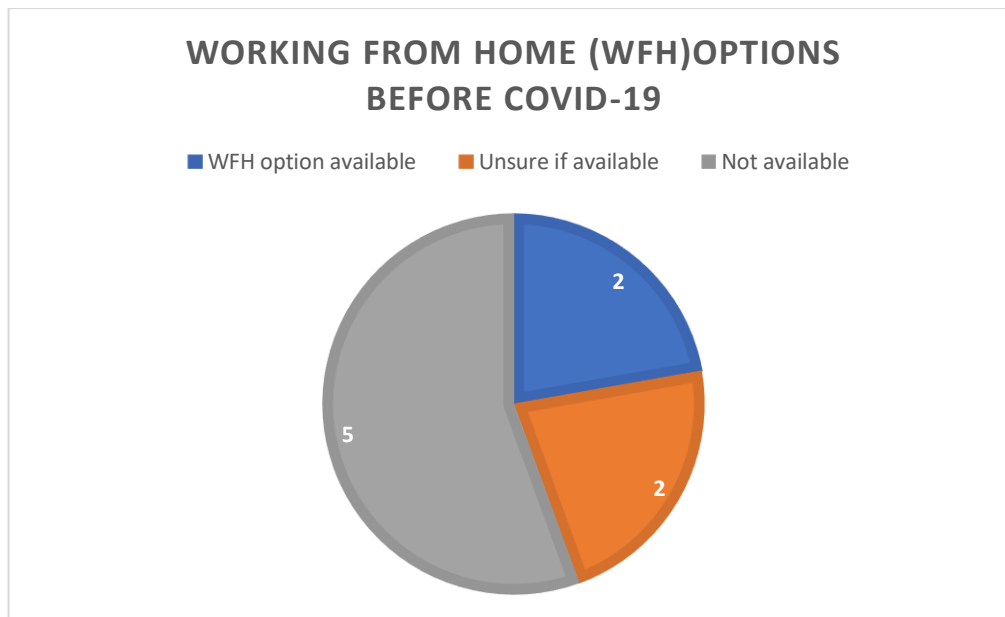

Figure 4. Working from home (WFH) options before Covid-19

It is noteworthy that the two participants that availed of WFH disclosed that it was not on a regular basis, Participant 4 explained "*I had the option whenever I asked to work from home but it wasn't really the custom or practice for that to be a regular thing. It was very much task driven*. Participant 5 before Covid-19 had "*trialled one day a week working from home*" and shared how they felt "*there was more of a stigma with working from home but now that is gone*" as now everyone has been forced to WFH and can see its productive. These findings mirror the statistics in the Future Jobs of Ireland report (DBEI, 2019), which reported that the incidents of remote working in the public sector was sporadically and not on a regular basis.

Flexibility

Flexible working options

The respondents were asked what flexible working options were available to them in their organisation, 8 out of the 9 respondents all stated 'flexi time' as the first option. It is noteworthy that Participant 5 was the only respondent that does not have access to the traditional clock-in 'flexi time' that is available to

all other public servants in the study, but claimed they still have a form of "*flexible working hours*".

The data shows that the respondents appreciate the flexi-clock but 4 out of 9 respondents show that an increase in the existing flexi time band (8am – 7pm) would be beneficial, especially for those commuting on busier routes to busy destinations. The experience of the participants are as follows:

> Participant 1*: "When I was commuting, they could have been a little bit more flexible (the flexi bands). I used to see it with someone that would come in quite early and stay quite late to avoid the traffic"*

> Participant 3*: "because the flexi starts at 8am some people are in the office from 7 or half 7. Just sitting there not building up time or anything like that. I think the organisation can be more flexible when it comes to those bands. Increase them so people can start earlier to avoid traffic and build time."*

Another reason for the need for **"flexibility when you can clock in and clock out"** Participant 9, is to attend medical appointments. This is similar to the data from Participant 4 who claims that "*Sometimes flexi time implies that there is loads of flexibility there whereas without flexi there might be more flexibility."*

Of the 8 participants who have flexi-time available to them only Participant 4 stated that flexi working might lead to "*presenteeism and people logging on for the sake of getting the day and a half"* and stated that the public sector adopts a different approach similar to the private sector that is "*flexible working is more trust based and it's about productivity and output not about time you are clocked in for".* The data indicates the significant impact flexi-time has on employees.

The data also showed the other WLB arrangements available to public servants, Participant 2 mentioned: "*Time in lieu, shorter working year, annual leave, work share pattern. I could work 80 percent of my current time and take the salary sacrifice on the other side.*" Participant 7 cited "*career breaks and*

force majeure leave". The reported data is in line with the arrangements cited by the Irish Government's HR Division (DPER,2020 a).

<u>Manager support</u>

After establishing the WLB or flexible working arrangements available to participants the study then looked to explore to what extent the respondents were encouraged or supported to avail of such arrangements. Conflicting data was reported in relation to the support provided by managers.

> Participant 1: "*if there is too much work I can talk to one of my supervisors and say this is taking too much of my time and can you take some of it off me or can you restructure this so this job is spread across the team. I also feel if I did need time off or needed to take leave that is an option*".

> Participant 8 reported flexibility*: "when you are in work and are dealing with something difficult there is an understanding between the staff that you can go off and take your break*".

> Participant 7 stated that despite flexible working arrangement policies that it can be dependent as "*most of the flexibility you get is mostly based on who your manager is and whether or not they are going to give that to you. I have some managers that will and some that won't. I once had a manager who would not sign off on leave unless it was there a month in advance, and I've had managers who would allow you to make up the time at another stage*".

This is echoed by Participant 3 stating:

> **"***They [the manager] wouldn't encourage anything other than annual or flexi-leave, if you needed to apply for the others than maybe more than half the time they would be approved.*" And also cited that it is very much manager dependent "*I think it is more of a manager approach than an organisation approach*".

This research in addition to previous literature has shown how high Millennials regard WLB. If a different approach is taken in the approval of leave it is possible to suggest that this would create dissatisfaction and depending on the individual it could lead to demotivation or even resignation (Campoine,2015; Hoffman,2018).

WLB during Covid-19

Perception of WLB

The data shows a mixture of experiences of WLB since the pandemic and working from home. Some claiming feel they have a better balance due to flexibility "*as long as the work gets done, no one is checking in on you*" (Participant 1) and higher productivity "*I can get more done, [I'm] happier,*" (Participant 7). On the other hand, the working arrangements as a result of Covid-19 restrictions have negatively impacted others due to work infringing in the home sphere:

> Participant 1: *"There is the fact that I wake up in the morning I turn around and my computer is facing me."*

> Participant 8: *"WLB a bit more challenging, when you have the ability to log in, sometimes something will come into your head and you'll go to the computer at 11.30 at night to check something, or make sure you did something right."*

Working from home (WFH)

Data on WFH pre-pandemic restrictions showed only 2 respondents had access to this arrangement previously but since restrictions all respondents had been working from home since March 2020. Both advantages and disadvantages were identified to this temporary way of working.

Advantages

The most common benefit of WFH was the elimination of the daily commute, cited by 5 out of 9 participants. The lack of commuting gave people more time to spend on themselves.

Participant 5: *"you don't have your commute you can start at 9.30, go for a walk, do your bits and bobs before work".*

Participant 9: *"I use that time to get out for a walk in the morning instead, of fast walking through town, pushing through crowds, whereas this is more of a morning walk where I can choose a route that I go".*

Participant 4 and 6 reported they felt more productive working from home due to lack of distractions and therefore improved their WLB as they felt positive about their working day achievements. This data echoes the findings of the Remote National Working Survey (McCarthy *et al.*, 2020) that the lack of commute emerged as the most cited advantage to working from home.

All eight respondents that previously had access to 'flexi- time' commented that it was temporary unavailable while current WFH arrangements were in place, interestingly two reported that not having the flexi clock gave them more flexibility.

Participant 5*: "if you have an appointment, that would ordinarily be during core hours, you can pop out and come back and still make sure that you are doing your full working day. So, there is flexibility there"*

Participant 9: "*Flexibility to be able to clock off for nearly an hour and a half during the day and then coming back, whereas in the office you might not have been able to do that as easy. If you were on the clock."*

Disadvantages

It emerged in the data that some aspects of work have negatively impacted on WLB as result of WFH arrangements. Half of the participants reported that they are working more as they are taking less breaks and find it difficult to shut off and the end of the day.

Participant 3: *"you don't take as many breaks as you would usually do. If you were going to a meeting you would have a little*

time to go to and from the meeting room, that is a bit of decompression from being at the desk as well. You don't have that as you will find you are always at the computer all the time."

Participant 6: *"you have to be disciplined not only in being able to stay motivated but also to have the discipline to walk away and keep to certain hours."*

Participant 8*: "I don't take my lunch breaks at a set time with WFH. I take it depending on what work is coming in, whether in an office I would stop I would do something sociable with some friends and then I would come back."*

Participant 4: "*You don't feel as hard done by because you are already sitting in your house. You are almost ok with giving the extra 2 hours or an hour half because you are not commuting or travelling.*"

After previously stating commuting negatively impacted their WLB Participant 3 discovered that they are in work mode longer when WFH and the commute enables them to have "*some down time to switch from your work mode to you home mode".*

The other disadvantage that reoccurred in the data was the lack of communication, social interaction with colleagues and feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Participant 9: "*Not being able to have that chat in the canteen where you are grabbing a coffee. has been hard to adapt to constantly being in the same room by yourself the whole day."*

Participant 7: "*One disadvantage would be the lack of interaction with colleagues. The amount of 10-15-minute chats I've had with my boss in work, has saved hours and hours of doing work. I think the lack of personal interaction affects this too".*

Participant 3: "*You are on calls constantly and you don't get the opportunity to walk to the coffee shop or have a chat with you colleagues that sort of thing*".

Participant 1: *"I think the human aspect of work is missing, you miss the chats in work, the face to face lunch times and chats, those interactions, it is a bit solitary."*

The evidence from the experiences of working from home are in line with the rest of the country at this moment in time, people are finding it difficult to switch off and find work can be productive in some respects but for the most part is it met with challenges in addition to the feelings of loneliness due to the lack of face to face interactions (McCarthy et al.,2020).

The future of work and WLB

The data shows that while the research sample appeared relatively happy with the flexible working arrangements suggestions of future ways of working in the public sector emerged.

Four-day week

Respondents had mixed views on the idea of implementing a four-day working week that has been trialled and rolled out in other countries. The data demonstrates the interest in this approach to working.
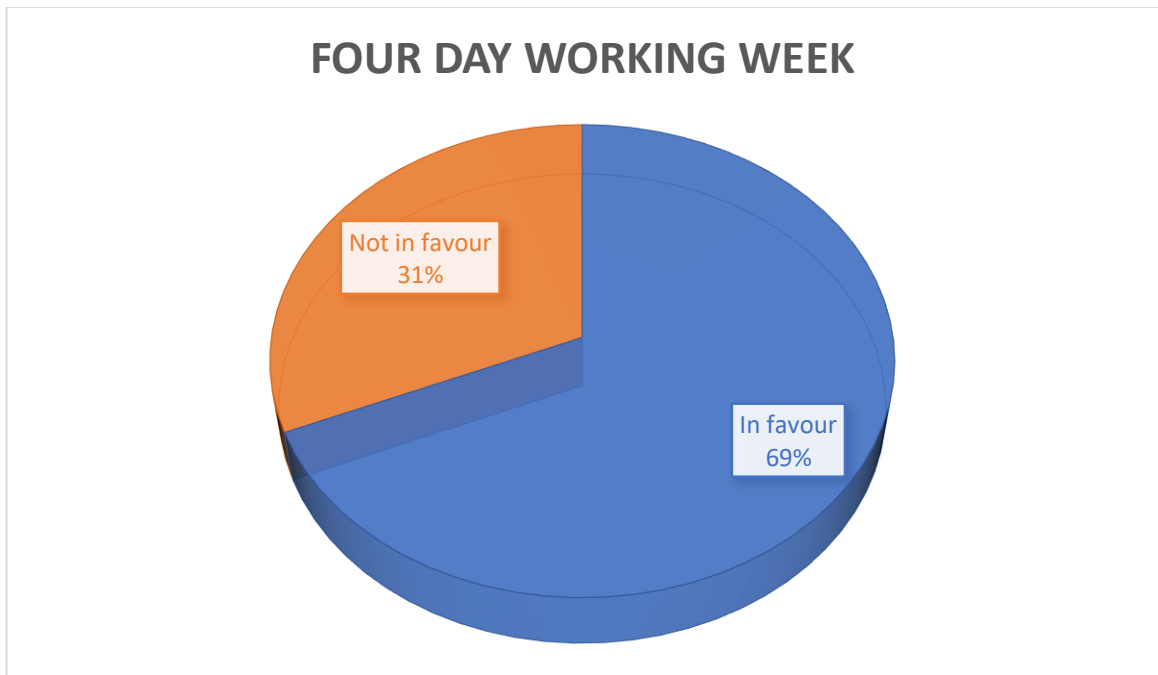
Figure 5. Four day working week

One participant (5) commented that work should not be based on time but productivity "it should come down to output, it shouldn't come down to hours you are clocked in for" and in if this approach was taken on board "*If somebody feels that they can complete their work in 4 days and give themselves that three-day weekend and give themselves that little bit of flexibility*".

The data shows that of a four-day working week could improve WLB, Participant 6: "[it] *Would go a long way with other employees in the organisation in terms of wellbeing and morale.*" Participant 9 cited that a two day weekend can feel like one day as on the Sunday you begin to prepare for the week and reflected on long weekend "*whereas having the full days, you do really feel it benefits you, you feel rested. You can do more, I think.*".

The complications of successfully rolling this out was observed and four participants suggested that they would like to try it on a trial basis. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform claimed it would be too costly (The Journal, 2020) but there does not appear to be any further consultation with public sector employees.

Office vs WFH

The future of working from home in unclear at present in the public sector as it previously was uncommon practise, however the data shows that the public sector organisations are adhering to Government guidelines and continue to WFH. The data shows that the preferred option would to be work remotely partially and the office the rest of the time.

> Particpant 1: "*I think it would be unfair to go back in 5 days a week, because, we don't have to operate that way anymore.*"

> Participant 4: "*I definitely would prefer not to return to the office full time, because of the commute, and if it was offered, I would avail of it or apply for it at least. I would prefer to work in the office possible 2-3 days a week, I would find it difficult to go back into the office full time.*"

> Participant 9: "*I'd like 3-4 days in the office and 1-2 days at home*". "*I feel yeah, the office environment is more for me.*"

> Participant 5: "*If allowed to work from home post COVID 3-4 days a week, it would for me allow me in my current situation to look at living further outside Dublin. I couldn't commit to living an hour and a half commute away and run the risk of having 3 hours of commuting 5 days* a week.*"*

The data indicated that the reason for not wanting to work in the office was due to commuting, and suggestions of working in remote offices and hubs emerged in the data as a work around to achieve a separation between work and study.

> Participant 3: "*If there were offices available closer to people living outside of Dublin region that they could hot desk and work remotely from there. Like a hub or satellite office*". This idea was also suggested by

> Participant 5: "*if their broadband or their living arrangement isn't conducive to working from home but they don't want to do a 2-hour commute to wherever they are working, that they can go to a local but maybe 10-15 minutes down the road and work from*

there." This participant also added that being able to work 3-4 times from home per week would enable them to consider their housing options to outside of Dublin.

Participant 6: "*I think working remotely not just at home, if you work from a different location I think it would be interesting to work from like my family home in America rather than using leave.*"

The findings are similar to those findings of McCarthy et al.'s report (2020), that some employees would like to work from hubs or a blended approach to remote working going forward.

The evidence provided highlights that should WFH become a more permanent arrangement, employees do not have sufficient workspace or equipment to work from home, which is detrimental to WLB.

Participant one: "*I think they have to give people the proper equipment to work from home.*"

Participant three: "*Provide everyone with a work laptop and work materials*".

Not having the adequate equipment to create a workspace at home could lead to serious wellbeing issues for employees (Grant *et al,* 2012), the data provided suggests that not all public sector employees have been equipped to carry out their roles at home, which could lead to long term health issues if WFH continues.

Chapter 6 Discussion

Introduction to discussion

This chapter will reflect on the findings and analysis of the study in addition to existing literature found in chapter 2 and 5. Through analysing the data presented in chapter 5 and the literature review in chapter 2 the objectives and sub objectives of this study were achieved as discussed below under each heading.

Overall research objective

"*An investigation into Millennials' perception and experiences of work-life balance in the Irish Public sector*"

The primary objective of this research was to investigate Millennials' experiences and perceptions of WLB in the Irish Public Sector. This was accomplished by conducting nine semi-structured interviews with Millennials employed in the Irish Public Sector. As a result of the global pandemic, Covid-19 it was not possible to conduct research without acknowledging the drastic impact it has had on people, WLB and the future of work. As the situation is evolving there has only been initial research on working from home which is recognised as limited in terms of future work they were conducted in the midst of restrictive measures or 'lockdown' (CIPD, 2020; McCarthy *et al.*,2020).

Research objective 2

"*To assess how Millennials', understand their generation and if they are cognisant of multigenerational differences in the workplace.*"

The findings of this study indicate that in the Irish public sector, the Millennial cohort associate themselves as being 'ambitious' and 'career driven' which correlates to the existing literature about this generation (Ng and Gossett, 2013; Campoine, 2015). Significantly, literature suggests this generation can be job hoppers and less loyal, however the findings of this research do not indicate that this stereotype is evident in the public sector. The participants with less than one-year tenure had moved from a different public sector organisation. A review of extant literature within academia does not yield any results of Millennials in the Irish Public Sector and their retention rates, this is a consideration for future research.

Despite the much debated topic of generational differences between academics with some citing it as a 'management fad'(Rudolph and Zacher, 2018), it has been shown that organisations would benefit from appreciating and adapting to multigenerational approaches (Naim and Lenka, 2018). In this study the perceptions indicate there is a difference between Millennials and older generations. One such example emerged from the findings when a participant claimed the millennial generation were 'mis understood'. While another participant felt the older generation were "*stuck in their ways*". One participant in the study felt there was no difference between them and the older generations in the workplace however this statistic is low. If the public service is to work optimally it is vital for all the generations to work collectively and they respect and understand each other. Generational perceptions in the Irish Public Service is another avenue for research.

Research objective 3

"To understand the Millennials' perception of work life balance."

The basis of literature for this study stems from the conclusion of Darcy *et al.*'s (2012) research that organisations should tailor WLB initiatives to different cohorts and acknowledging that their needs will vary as they age. At present there is a 'one size fits all' approach (Darcy *et al.*'s, 2012) to WLB in the public sector. The evidence from this study empathises how some of the flexible arrangements such as flexi time and the lack of availability to remotely need to be reviewed and updated in line with the needs of this generation soon to dominate the workplace The data from this study shows that the public sector Millennials in Ireland echo the definition of modern WLB definitions that focuses on life being for family or hobbies or whatever one wants to do in their own time.

Research objective 4

"To evaluate the importance of work life balance for Millennials in the public sector."

Firstly, it is suggested in literature that generations globally should be studied by location as local events will form their general attitudes and customs (Costanza et al., 2012). This is particularly true as WLB might be more

significant for Irish public servants compared globally. Taking this idea from literature provides consideration for future studies to repeat a similar study to this but to examine it nationwide.

In terms of WLB there are varying reports in literature on how highly they rate WLB over financial rewards in their overall career priorities (Campoine, 2015; Deloitte, 2018), however, this study has shown that WLB is the top priority for millennials with particular examples of participants citing they quit previous careers and took pay cuts in order to achieve a better WLB. This alone highlights how significant WLB is for this cohort. Given it is highly rated it is advisable for policy makers and managers to ensure that WLB opportunities are provided to Millennials as it was claimed in this study that some of the jobs Millennials do are paid less than those doing like for like jobs in the private sector. Previous reports and this study have shown then WLB is highly valued but a liveable salary is just as important, if WLB cannot be achieved it is likely financial rewards will become the priority.

Research objective 5

"What public sector policies and arrangements are available to Millennials to aid them to achieve a healthy WLB?"

The available flexible working options available to public servants was readily available online and corresponded to the data from the participants. Flexi time emerged as the most availed of WLB arrangement, despite the enthusiasm of participants to divulge how it works in practise, on reflection several participants claimed the band times for clocking in and out were not broad enough to facilitate the modern commute. It was suggested by one participant that the flexi clock actual allows for less flexibility. In addition, the findings show that WFH was not in any way a regular arrangement available to employees pre Covid-19. Now everyone has found themselves working from their own homes for the last five months and despite some disadvantages they want to continue to have this option.

Research objective 6

"To examine what external factors influence the equilibrium of WLB."

Commuting emerged to be the biggest factor that negatively impacted WLB for this cohort of employees. The average commuting time of this sample is 30 minutes each way, longer than the reported Dublin average in (CSO,2016). This highlights the transport and commuting issues employees have and gives an insight into how this daily routine can eat into employees' personal lives. Since Covid-19 this study and published reports show that the biggest advantage of WFM is the lack of commute (McCarthy et al., 2020). This imbalance should be a concern for managers and as Guest (2002) suggests, they should examine the issues negatively impacting their employees' WLB. Despite a recent survey of motorised and non-motorised commuting (Lades *et al.*, 2020), there needs to be further evaluation of the transport system, the last CSO survey took place in 2016 and this study shows the average time has increased by 30 minutes, a significant amount of time for a one way journey. The findings in this study and in Mc Carthy *et al.*'s (2020) highlight how the lack of commute during current Covid-19 working arrangements has positively impacted respondents.

Previous literature has suggested that technology plays a role in facility a healthy WLB but also a significant role in poor WLB if not used correctly (Carlson *et al.*, 2018) resulting in employees falling into the 'always on' trap, over working and barriers divided between home and work life. This study has shown evidence that people during the pandemic have been over working and looking at emails outside of their working hours. It also highlighted they felt they had to be accessible and respond to emails around the clock which is in line with existing literature (Marcum *et al.*,2018).

Research objective 7
"To investigate if the Irish public sector needs to adapt or update WLB policies to meet the needs of Millennials."
Pandemic aside, the review of literature would suggest that the Irish Public Sector has ample arrangements for its employees to achieve a good WLB. This research confirms there are options but also highlights some areas that need to update or modernised to meet the needs of Millennials'. it is evident

from this study that a relatively simple expansion of the flexi time bands would benefit all of those who are required to travel in congested areas in Dublin.

The Covid-19 pandemic looks like it will not be going away soon and working from home looks appears it will be in place for some time to come, the findings from this study in addition to the study carried out by (McCarthy *et al.,* 2020) would indicate that a structured approach to WFH needs to be in place to ensure the WLB of employees is kept as healthy as possible especially during such a stressful era. This study also demonstrates the eagerness of Millennials to maintain some level of remote working in the future whether that's from home or a hub, and it was cited that improved WLB, and productivity would be just some of the long term benefits. It is important to note that the public service had only trialled WFH (DPER, 2003) and only some employees had facility to WFH on an ad hoc basis so this is a significant shift in the approach to work and the future of working in the Public Sector. For this to be rolled out appropriately a policy is required in terms of the hours people are working and the current suspension of flexi time.

The study also highlights inconsistencies with managers and their approach to approving leave requests. Having said that there was evidence of participants wanting more flexibility in terms of how they manage their hours.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations
Conclusion

This research adds to the discourse on multigenerational workplaces and in particular the Millennial generation. The study adds to the existing debate on what Millennials value the most; salary or WLB, demonstrating that WLB is a top priority for this generation working in the Irish Public Sector. In addition, they break the stereotype of being 'job hoppers' as even though there were respondents with less than two years tenure, they had previously worked in other public sector organisations. This raises a topic for further investigation, to explore the retention rates within public sector organisations and the cost of Millennial turnover in the Irish Public Service.

Millennials' perception of WLB was explored and it emerged for the most part as a successful division between work and non-work activities such as hobbies, friends and family. The WLB of Millennials' is heavily impacted by the long commute they endure in Dublin. A relatively simple solution to this issue emerged in the study, to expand the start and end times of the flexi bands. A rigorous analysis of flex time would be recommended to take place at present while it has been temporarily taken away from public servants, now would be the ideal time to review it and make and implement changes when it is reintroduced. Before making such a policy change a quantitative study into commuting times of public servants would reach a wider audience and produce a better overview of the commuting times experienced daily.

Working from home was a prominent feature in this study partially because it has never been fully rolled out before and it is much desired by Millennials who face long commutes and housing crisis. Despite being a temporary measure during the pandemic, participants have now been working from home for five months. This has acted and should be treated like a WFH trial or pilot. The challenges of WFH that emerged in this study were over working, not being able to switch off and feelings of isolation and frustration due to lack of face to face communication with colleagues. These challenges also emerged in McCarthy *et al.*'s study (2020) but now that there appears to be another slowdown of the roadmap for lifting restrictions so it is likely this WFH arrangement will remain in place. The public service would benefit from doing

a consultation with the proposed future of working, to iron out the practicalities of people working partially remotely and in the office. Another area to explore would be benefits and costs benefits of having hubs located throughout the country to enable employees to work closer to home.

Recommendations
Based on the findings and analysis of the data in addition to becoming familiar with existing studies and literature about Millennials and WLB, the researcher proposes the following recommendations.

1. **Training for line managers**

   The new experience of WFH adapting to WFH has brought about advantages but also many challenges. Managers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills in how to deal with managing their teams and delegating work during this unusual period. It is recommended that a managing teams remotely session is provided via an online platform, the skills acquired in this course should help improve the employees WLB while in the current WFH situation. The time scale for such a course could be rolled out quickly once a provider is sourced and given its an online platform, the ideal time to roll this out is as soon as possible Cost: Webinars range between €40-€100 but given the large scale of employees it is possible that a consultant or specialist could carry out these sessions for a daily rate of €1,400 which would be more cost beneficial due to economies of scale

2. **Time management for employees**
   Employees need to be reminded of time management techniques especially when they have more autonomy and flexibility in how they work. This issue is a pressing one and should be prioritised by managers straight away to avoid employee burnout.

   Cost: This could be given by an outside provider for a rate of approximately €1,400. However, it might be more beneficial for managers to do a brief presentation or online workshop about time management and fleshing out the key issues prevalent in the employees' day to day work. This would not have a price implication

per say but if a manager hosts it, their time would be costs and it could take up to two days to research, prep and design a workshop.

3. **Review of policy, consultations, and implementation**
   Policy makers in the public sector and senior management teams need to review flexitime band policy, work from home during Covid-19 and in the future and conduct research into the feasibility of remote working hubs. These ideally would be set up for review and investigation within a working group followed by a project charter and plan. The time frame for this would take from 6-12 months depending on resources available.

   Costs: If people are in the office longer there might be more electricity consumed. Remote working hubs will cost the employer, but research will determine if it is more cost beneficial than the rent in the current office base.

Chapter 8 Personal Learning Statement for CIPD

I found the overall undertaking of this study to be both very challenging and very rewarding. While this is an individual piece of work, when planning and brainstorming for this research, I underestimated the importance of reaching out to colleagues across the public sector. Speaking with fellow public sector colleagues opened new research avenues to explore and exposure to reports I had not come across before. This has emphasised the importance of networking with HR colleagues in the public sector and I will endeavour to make the most of networking opportunities at conferences and events in the future to expand my HR contacts. I found this entire process vital in the formulation and completion of this study.

Time management skills were crucial to being able to juggle a full-time demanding job especially during the Covid-19 pandemic in addition to conducting this research. I had to prioritise and efficiently use my time. This was the most challenging part of the study I felt and if I was to do something similar in the future I would ensure to use the knowledge of time management I have learnt on this course and apply it to that.

I found the entire interviewing process highly rewarding, from conducting the pilot interview to finishing the final interview, I saw vast improvement in my confidence and in my communication skills.

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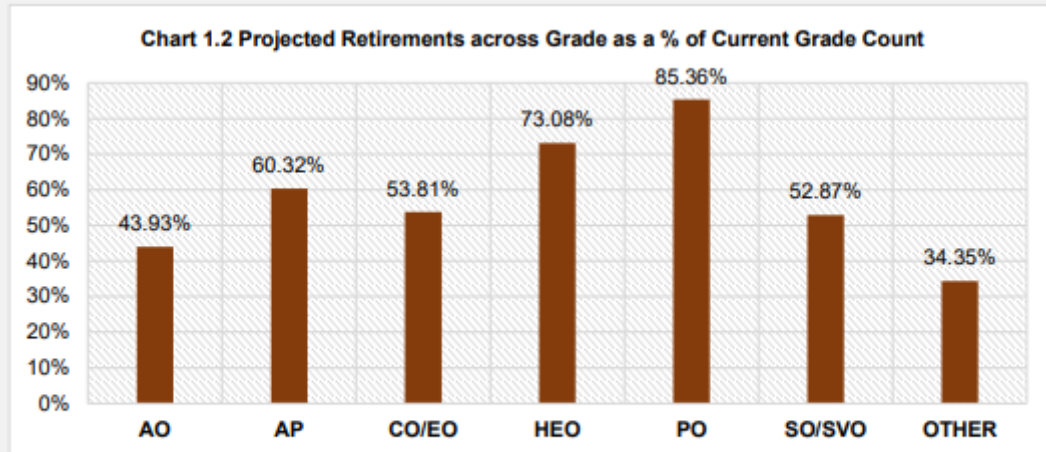
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Retirement projections

. A breakdown of retirements in each grade, as a % of current workforce, is presented in Chart 1.2.

Chart 1.2 Projected Retirements across Grade as a % of Current Grade Count

Grade	%
AO	43.93%
AP	60.32%
CO/EO	53.81%
HEO	73.08%
PO	85.36%
SO/SVO	52.87%
OTHER	34.35%

Note: The AO grade classification includes employees other than those on the standard AO scale. The most common AO employee categories in our sample who are expected to retire over the projection period are Probation & Welfare officers, Supervisory Agricultural Officers, HEO inspectors, Assistant Agricultural Officers and Statisticians.

Source: Department of Expenditure and Reform (DPER) (2018) *Spending Review 2018 Projected Retirements from the Civil Service from 2019 to 2028*. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/7324/1a7f3253c77743aeacb648228c3afc5f.pdf [Accessed on 06 July 2020].

Appendix 2 - Research onion diagram
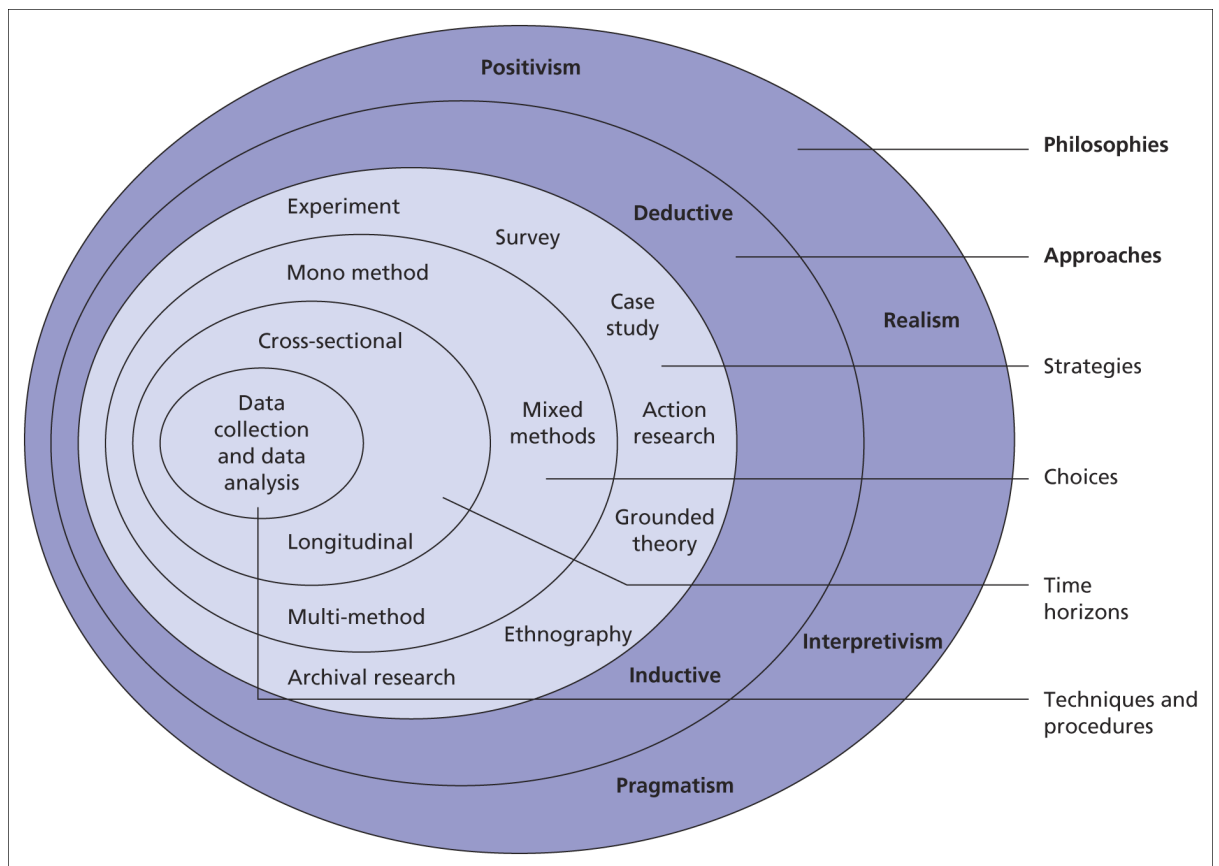
Source - Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) "Research Methods for Business Students" 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited

Appendix 3 Email to prospective interviewees

Dear public sector colleague,

My name is Ailís Henry and I am currently completing my dissertation for my Masters in Human Resource Management in the National College of Ireland.

As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a qualitative research study which involves semi-structured interviews and I am looking for participants to take part in this study.

The title of my dissertation is 'An investigation of Millennials' perception and experiences of work life balance in the Irish Public sector'.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Before deciding to take part, you need to understand the purpose of the research what your involvement would entail.

Please take time to read the attached participant information document attached. If anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information please contact me.

If you are agreeable to taking part in this study please complete and return the consent form attached.

Kind regards,

Ailís Henry

Appendix 4: Participant Information sheet

Who I am and what this study is about.

My name is Ailís Henry, am a public servant and a Masters student in the National College of Ireland. This research forms part of my final assessment for the Masters in Human Resource Management.

The aim of my research is to;

- understand Millennials' perception and experiences of work life balance.

- investigate its importance to Millennials' in their overall career.

- what work life balance practices are available in the public sector before and during covid-19

- if the public sector needs adapt or update its practises and policies to meet Millennials' desired work life balance.

- If and how covid -19 has impacted WLB

What will taking part involve?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to engage in a one-to-one semi structured interview. During this interview, you will be asked a number of questions related to your experiences and opinions about work-life balance and how your organisation supports you to achieve a work life balance. This interview will take place on Mircosoft Teams (videocall) or Zoom and will approximately 35-40 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and saved safely. The recording will enable me to transcribe and analyse data from the interview. All of the information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential and each interview will be anonymised.

Why have you been invited to take part

To carry out this research I need to interview public sector employees born between 1983 – 1994. To be a participant you must be born between these years and be in employment in the Irish public service in an administrative / office based role. This excludes healthcare professionals, Gardaí, member of the defence forces, fire brigade and teachers.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Having considered this information sheet you have the right to refuse participation in this study, refuse to answer any question and/or withdraw at any time without any consequence. If you participate in this study you can choose to withdraw your data (interview) within two weeks from the day of the interview.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

There are no risks associated with participating in this study, your name and organisation will not be identifiable in the study. Any personal data, opinions and comments about your organisation will not be shared with your employer. There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, your participation can contribute towards the discourse of work life balance and Millennials. The findings of this research may help public sector organisations evaluate their work life balance practices and policies which in the current covid-19 pandemic is a high priority.

Will participation be confidential?

As mentioned above taking part in this research is entirely confidential. All names or identifying information (that could reveal your identity or your employer) will not be in included in the dissertation. When writing up the findings from the interviews, some quotes from interviews may be included but these will not contain any identifying information. While the research will ensure anonymity please note that non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings will be collected and stored as part of this study. All data will be stored securely with access limited to the researcher.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

Signed consent forms audio recordings will be saved on to the researcher's private computer where they will be stored in an encrypted folder until after my degree has been conferred. Once audio recordings have been transferred to the researcher's computer and backed up, they will be deleted from the recording device. The recorded interviews and signed consent forms will be stored for two years. This procedure is in line with National College of Ireland's

data retention policy. Under the freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

This research will be used for submission for my masters. A report of the overall findings may also be shared with HR departments in the public sector. Individual participant data will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

Who should you contact for further information?

You can contact the researcher by emailx 18143300@ncirl.ie

Alternatively, you can contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Caitriona Hughes, at Caitriona.hughes@ncirl.ie

Appendix 5 – Interview consent form

Consent to take part in research

- I…………………………………………. voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves a interview via video call, the questions will be in relation to work life balance and my experience of this in the public sector.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in an encrypted file on the researchers personal computer device until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

• I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher: Ailís Henry

Supervisor: Dr.Caitríona Hughes

_____   _____

Signature of participant   **Date**

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix 6 - Interview schedule

1. How long have you been working in your organisation?
2. Have you worked with another organisations previously? Private or public? Were the motivation factors the reasons for switching the job?
3. How would you define the Millennial generation? Prompts
4. Do you think your generation is different to other generations in your organisation and if so why?
5. How would you define work life balance?
6. How satisfied are you with WLB in your current role /organisation?
7. Do you think WLB is a major influence your overall job satisfaction?
8. How important is WLB to you in your career? Would you rate it higher or more important than salary?
9. Do you think the public sector organisation you work for caters better than most in terms of WLB? Why/Why not?
10. Can you tell me about the flexible working arrangements available to you?
11. To what extent does your organisation promote flexible working arrangements?
12. In your opinion are employees with families are given enough WLB opportunities in your organisation? How so?
13. Do you feel employees without families are given enough WLB opportunities in your organisation? How so?
14. How far from your office do you reside? How does your commute impact on your WLB?
15. How do you feel your organisation could be more flexible towards your commute in relation to WLB?
16. Do you feel your organisation works around your needs as an employee in terms of your commitments?
17. Do you feel there is a balance struck between your work and your outside commitments? Why/Why not?
18. Do you feel workload has ever negatively affected your outside commitments?
19. Do you have access to work emails outside of work? If so, do ever feel compelled to answer work queries remotely/out of office hours?
20. If you have previous private sector employment experience, how do you feel your current organisation compares in terms of your WLB?
21. Do you think the use of technology has impeded or improved peoples WLB?
22. Do you feel work interfers with life or does life interfere with work?
23. Have you ever been reluctant to avail of WLB opportunities such as WFH,SWY or Flexible working hours because you felt it would hinder your career?
24. How do you think the organisation you work for could offer any further (or improve) WLB policies or practises?
25. Before the Covid-19 pandemic were you able to avail of Working from Home arrangements? If so how did this impact your WLB?

26. In your opinion what are the advantages and disadvantages to your WLB while working from home?
27. WFH looks like it will be a big part working life going forward, and while WLB may have been different during restrictions in your opinion how will WFH impact on your WLB in the future?
28. Do you consider your commute as part of your working day?
29. Do you feel your commute impacts on your outside of work activities?