Investigating the Impact of Employee Work-Life Balance on Employee Productivity
A Study of Small to Medium Sized Manufacturing Businesses within the Agri-Food Sector in Ireland

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Abstract

As organisations become more vulnerable to the forces of globalisation, the pressure to increase competitiveness, and thus the demands on people to serve their businesses with zeal and commitment, grows stronger. Due to this, organisations must be competent in striking a balance between hard business objectives and softer human concerns.

Although, the focus on work life balance is continuously evolving, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it appears that there is a knowledge gap on how it genuinely influences employee productivity levels in an Irish context. Due to the demands on the Irish agri-food sector and the type of work involved, the work-life balance of workers can often be compromised which sequentially could have detrimental effects on employee productivity levels. Over the following ten years, Ireland will rise to become a global leader in Sustainable Food Systems (SFS). Therefore, the agri-food sector has and will continue to bring substantial advantages to the Irish agri-food industry, to Irish society and to the environment. As a result, social considerations such as employee work-life balance are considered as being significantly vital (Department of Agriculture, Food and The Marine, 2023). Through adopting an extensive qualitative thematic research methodology by means of individual consultations, this research sought to explore the effects of work-life balance on employee productivity. Available literature and secondary data sources were used in conjunction with qualitative data gained from consultations with employees of small to medium enterprises employed at various levels within the food manufacturing sector of the Irish agri-food industry. Work-life balance has been identified by all parties as being a crucial criterion of workplace productivity levels. When research concerning work-life balance was correlated to the research findings, it became clear that employee productivity is strongly influenced by the work-life balance of the employees working in this sector of the Irish workforce.

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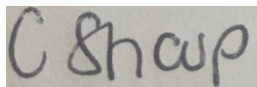
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For my dearest Dad,

A large part of my academic accomplishments are dedicated to you for the immense love and support which you always showed. Although you are no longer with me, I am very much aware of how immensely proud you would be that I finally reached this personal goal. You are and will forever be in my thoughts and mind.

My husband Tim,

For being my emotional support and for always showing the deepest compassion and love. For always being there to encourage me to carry on with my academic studies no matter what. For being the perfect partner in life.

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For encouraging me to begin my academic journey and for always assuring me that I will succeed. For loving me unconditionally and always being there with your advice and words of support. You have and always will be my proudest achievements in life.

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List of Abbreviations

EU – European Union

HR – Human Resources

SME – Small to Medium Size Enterprises

SSI – Semi-structured Interview

UK – United Kingdom

WLB – Work Life Balance

Chapter One – Introduction

The production of food and drink goods is Ireland's largest indigenous industry, with a €27.5 billion annual revenue, €13 billion in exports, and over 163,000 jobs supported by the sector. It is intricately woven into the larger economy, spending €18 billion annually on intermediate consumption in other industries and an additional €2.1 billion on employee remuneration. The sector is heavily internationalised and exports to 180 nations in addition to serving the domestic supermarket and food service markets (IBEC, 2022). A ten-year strategy for the Irish agri-food sector was laid out in 2015 by the Irish Government's Food Wise 2025 project. It described the sectors' particular function in the Irish economy and its potential for growth (Teagasc, 2017). Since producing, processing and distributing food and drink requires the work and expertise of numerous people in a variety of professions, the industry is very much labour-intensive (McConalogue, 2021).

WLB is regarded as critical in both business practice and academic research. According to literature, WLB is said to be a central issue affecting human wellbeing due to family and work being the most important aspects of life (Gautam & Jain, 2018). Kirchmeyer (2000) described WLB as having fulfilling experiences in all areas of one's life, which calls for a thoughtful allocation of one's own resources including time, energy and dedication. Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) stated that WLB is "the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family duties are compatible with the individuals' life role priorities at a given point in time". According to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, a poor WLB reduces employees' quality of life (Wallace, et al., 2007). Similarly, the Commission on Social Determinants of Health and the World Health Organisation have stressed that health equity necessitates a healthy WLB for all (World Health Organization, 2009). Productivity can be thought of as the efficiency with which organisations, along with the people that work within, create value using the resources at hand. For many organisations increasing employee productivity is one of their main priorities. Higher employee productivity is said to result in favourable economic growth, significant profitability and improved social advancement (Sharma & Sharma, 2014). For the purpose of connecting

WLB, it is said that happier and healthier workers are the key to higher productivity, increased innovation, hence improved customer experiences (Litchfield, 2021). Employees who are happy and healthy are said to live better lives, are less likely to be sick and are more likely to be more productive at work (Tapas, et al., 2017).

1.1 Rationale for this Study

In this time of great transition, leaders must be purposeful and explicit about availability expectations in addition to defining exactly what "business hours" means to their organisation. Leaders have the opportunity to significantly improve company culture in terms of supporting employees' WLB.   It is worthy to note that this study has been completed in the post Covid-19 era, where employee wellbeing is at the forefront of the business agenda in Ireland. Despite the various studies undertaken by academics and the efforts made by organisations around "work-life integration" and "work-life blending" prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global crisis demonstrated that WLB is now more important than ever (Thomas, 2021). It is also important to highlight that the researcher's observations in their workplace served as the basis for this research.

The study concentrates on crucial aspects of how WLB impacts productivity in the manufacturing sector of Ireland's agri-food industry.   A critical review of research in the area of employee WLB is required to evaluate and measure the level of importance which it has on worker productivity and inevitably organisational success. Work-life balance is a two-pronged problem in Ireland. Irish people traditionally valued the institution of family, which can often overshadow company loyalty. In many cases, especially in private family businesses, the company and the family become inextricably linked. As a result, the Irish are seen to prefer working arrangements which allow for a WLB which still allows for adequate family time. However, as a result of today's faced lifestyles, there has recently been a strong movement to improve WLB. Nevertheless, this is often not the case in many SMEs, where there has historically been a culture of working long hours (Passport to Trade, 2023).   Manufacturing jobs are seen to be less creative and challenging in nature; they are simple and do not require a high level of

mental effort. This industry faces issues such as poor rule and regulation enforcement and a lack of corporate cultures. Such issues result in employee dissatisfaction, which has an impact on the employees' WLB (Satpathy, et al., 2019).

Whilst this study was being conducted, Minister Roderic O'Gorman welcomed the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2022 passing all stages in the Oireachtas. The President of Ireland will now be tasked with signing the bill into law.   In the efforts to encourage a better balance between family and work life, the bill calls for the creation of new rights for employees. Minister O'Gorman announced -

> The Work Life Balance Bill represents a significant advance in workers' rights in Ireland. It recognises the importance of family life and an improved quality of life for all workers, by supporting employees to achieve a better balance between their home lives and work lives. (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth , 2023)

There are surprisingly few SME business owners within Ireland's agri-food industry who are aware of the repercussions and advantages of managing the connection between the WLB of their employees and the organisational benefits of it to their business (Government of Ireland, 2021). How significant these advantages are in the chosen sector is to be investigated in this research.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is:

(1) to identify and investigate the fundamental concepts and theories surrounding the impact of WLB on productivity levels within the workplace

(2) to ascertain the extent to which these concepts impact productivity levels within the workplace.

These concepts will be assessed from the viewpoint of workers from the manufacturing sector of the Irish agri-food industry through individual consultations. Studies with a special focus on the Irish, SME and agri-food

industry contexts were found to have limitations in the literature. The purpose of the study was to examine a representative sample from this industry and to gain a general sense of the degree to which employee wellbeing directly effects productivity levels. It was believed that the current research could promote the recognition of the importance of WLB and its subsequent effects, specifically on productivity levels.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following tripartite framework illustrates the critical components of WLB impacting productivity. The primary objective of this research is to understand more about these elements and to present findings and suggestions which emerge from the investigation.

The Impact of Work-Balance on Workplace Productivity by Examining:-
1. The Perspective of Company Directors/Business Owners
2. The Perspective of Managers
3. The Perspective of Employees

Figure 1: Tripartite Framework

The three components of this framework serve as the primary focus for the data collection and research method. The framework is used to establish the insights of the various employee categories/levels participating in this study. The results are then compared to well-established theories and associated with the major factors which affect employee productivity.

It is important to note that the implementation of an organisational approach to WLB entails certain obligations for specific employee categories/levels. Owners, Directors, and Senior managers have the capacity and influence to make sure that the WLB of employees is a strategic objective which is ingrained in the daily activities and culture of their organisation. Whilst line managers are largely in charge of overseeing the daily management of employee's work schedules which in turn impacts their WLB. Employees are also responsible for their own WLB. Due to these factors the following study objectives can be indicated:

1. To gain workers understanding of WLB.
2. To obtain insightful perspectives on how employees working in the selected sector feel about their current WLB situation.
3. To consider the importance of the qualitative results of this research.

1.4 Research Assumptions

The methodology and research are underpinned by two working assumptions:

1. A healthy WLB creates successful individual outcomes, such as job dedication, happiness, satisfaction, engagement, and ultimately, discretionary effort, are all linked to positive company outcomes including decreased intents to leave, less absenteeism and increased performance and productivity. Increased profitability and productivity are the direct results of these favourable outcomes.
2. There is value-creation as a result of a healthy WLB. Reduced rates of absenteeism, employee illness, and enhanced employee morale, can enhance service levels which all assist in a positive response to shifting market conditions. Flexibility from organisations and their employees can have positive effects in the fulfilling of client expectations; examples are, shift work, part-time employment and flexitime which can all allow for a business to have longer production hours with minimal overtime costs. WLB initiatives can also assist in meeting the peaks and troughs of business's seasonality, encourage a more dedicated and optimistic attitude among employees, lower staff turnover which in turn minimise recruitment costs.

1.5 Research Question and Objectives

The objective of the research will be to examine the influence which WLB and has on employee productivity within the manufacturing sector of SME's who are part of the agri-food environment in Ireland. The primary areas of attention for this study are outlined in the tripartite structure which is presented earlier in part 1.4. The components of this framework constitute the foundation of the data collection and research technique.

The following questions will be addressed by the study while keeping the above framework in focus:

1. How imperative is a healthy WLB to employees working in manufacturing's businesses within the Irish Agri-Food sector?
2. What is the prominence of WLB on employee productivity within this sector?

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 An Overview of Agri- Food Manufacturing Industry

The agri-food manufacturing sector is an industry which is said to be seeing one of the largest repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to research by The Food Industry Executive, the pandemic has exacerbated problems which were already present in the industry, particularly those involving working safety and productivity (OECD, 2020). Moreover, the challenges faced by food and drink producers frequently revolve around meeting shifting consumer demands.

Ireland is seeing a major problem of a labour scarcity in the area of food and drink production and processing. This is exacerbated by a lack of the availability of competent personnel and the cost pressures of inescapable wage rises to retain or attract staff. The industry is also seeing significant issues with rising energy and commodity prices. However, due to many Irish food enterprises switching their supply chains from British to EU suppliers, the negative effects of Brexit were less severe than initially anticipated in this sector. The Irish food sector has also succeeded in boosting year on year sales in the EU (IFAC, 2022). The majority of manufacturing roles require no formal education or training; many can be mastered in a few days. Food and drink processing facilities can often be noisy with few possibilities for employee engagement due to the industry's high level of mechanisation (College Grad, 2018). However, it must be noted that in some organisations, investment in computers and factory automation have taken the place of "hands-on" manual labour, eliminating waste and boosting productivity (Lui, et al., 2022).

2.2 Productivity: An Overview

Productivity can be defined as the efficiency with which organisations and their employees create value from both individual and group efforts (CIPD, 2022). An employee's output during a given time period can be used to measure productivity. A worker's productivity will often be judged in comparison to the average output of workers performing similar tasks. It can also be measured in terms of how many units of a good or service an employee uses in a certain period of time (Piana, 2004). For most organisations, increasing employee productivity is of paramount priority. Increased productivity is seen to result in favourable economic growth, significant profitability and improved social advancement (Sharma & Sharma, 2014). The desire to increase staff productivity is one of the major difficulties which many organisations are currently facing. Productivity is a factor which has a direct impact on the revenue of the business (Sels, et al., 2006). Rojas (2021) declared that high workplace productivity is a symptom of a thriving company culture. Rojas also declared that it is simpler to build organisational growth and establish a positive work environment the more productive a company is and that each company that wishes to boost productivity needs content and engaged personnel. Whilst Malcolm (2021) announced that team members are naturally more productive when they feel valued and respected at work.

2.3 Work-Life Balance: An Overview

Guest (2002) advised that WLB is an aspect of HR management which involves the welfare of employees. Guest also affirms that employees are the key assets of any organisation and that the overall quality of an employee's life in relation to their work life is critical to the achievement of organisational goals. WLB is currently a topic of great discussion throughout literature. It is said to be a broad field in which people combine their work lives, which include promotions, deadlines, and their overall future career. As a result of the increasing emphasis on employee health and wellbeing, researchers and practitioners are paying close attention to WLB as a strategy for fostering employees' well-being (Jones *et al.,* 2013; Kinnunen *et*

al., 2014). Friends, family, work, self and health are five factors mentioned by Byrne (2005) as being related to WLB and are said to be aspects which most individuals will have to juggle at some point in their lives. Comprehensively, WLB is a choice between work and life, and with demands in personal and work life differing from person to person, the drive within each person can be significantly different, as can each individual's behaviour (Chandra, 2012).

According to Groysberg & Abrahams (2014), when it comes to achieving a personal and fulfilling WLB, each individual has a unique approach and response to the concept. Certain people let work dictate their lives and work long hours, whereas others work for the sake of working and never get stressed or let work dictate their lives. New and improved technologies, and changes in management styles and approaches have created new and significant challenges around WLB. Employees are now working longer hours, which presents new challenges in terms of productivity and recruitment. Living standards and responsibilities are rising, and attitudes at work are changing as a result of external pressures.

The "work-to-family interference" or "family-to-work interference" refers to the tremendous impact that an employee's employment or workplace conditions can have on their non-work-related living circumstances (Mache, et al., 2016). The relationship between these two domains has been shown to have both beneficial and detrimental implications on a person's wellbeing. In the last two decades, the distinction between a person's working life and nonwork life has become increasingly blurry (Kinnunen *et al*., 2014). This is largely due to alterations in family patterns, rising employment rates for women and technical advancements (such as the use of mobile phones and portable computers), which have caused the nature of work to shift with the advent of remote working practices. Employees increasingly place a higher value on downtime or social engagement with friends, family and their community as a result of this environment (Peeters, et al., 2005).

The term 'balance' implies a search for equilibrium between work and life; perhaps a settled point where work and the rest of life's activities can coexist comfortably. Part of the issue with the concept of striking a balance or equilibrium is that, for many people, work and non-work aspects of life are

becoming increasingly inextricably entwined and overlapped (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).   There are arguably compelling business reasons for employers to provide employees with options for better integrating work and non-work aspects of their lives. According to Clutterbuck (2004), creating an enabling culture in which employees can amend and re-allocate the time and attention they pay to work to meet their specific needs and circumstances can be a source of long-term competitive advantage. However, finding the right blend of organisational interventions to help individuals is complex; WLB is a movable target which different people have different ideas of what constitutes it as satisfactory.

WLB has also emerged as a critical issue for employers, owing to changes in the workplace associated with 24/7 societies and increased customer expectations. These changes increase the pressures on employees to work unsociable hours while also caring for children or adults. Retaining talented employees may also necessitate employers recognizing that employees, even those with no caring responsibilities, may wish to pursue interests outside of the workplace and thus have a good WLB. It should be noted that WLB issues are not only concerned with legal compliance, but also with the added-value dimension of attracting and retaining talented employees who put forth discretionary effort (Sánchez-Hernández,, et al., 2019).

All of the issues mentioned affect the food and drink manufacturing industry just as much as they do any other. Due to the nature of the industry, WLB for employees in this sector can be extremely difficult to implement. The primary issues confronting HR Managers within this sector are working hours and conditions, management, workplace interactions and low wages.

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2.4 Theories of Work-Life Balance

WLB knowledge has assisted organisations over the years in understanding their human capital needs and in finding ways to provide enabling environments that improve work relations and, as a result, productivity, resulting in the achievement of set goals (Guest, 2002). According to research, border theory and inter-role theory are two major theories on which WLB studies are based (Kumar & Janakiram, 2017).

2.4.1 Border Theory

According to Guest (2002), Border Theory opens up a rich vein of analysis focusing on the nature of work and family domains, as well as the borders between these two domains and the ease with which these borders can be managed or moved so that individuals can achieve WLB. The Border Theory approaches WLB from a new perspective. This theory assumes that people's roles occur within the confines of specific life domains that are separated by temporal, bodily or emotional divides known as borders (Clark, 2000). The theory addresses issues such as border crossing, particularly between work and home domains. According to the theory, the ease and limitation with which people switch between family and work lives can affect the degree of synthesis and regulate the ease of conversions between the two domains. Furthermore, the domains are closely related in terms of the degree of conflict. According to Bellavia & Frone (2005), this is because when the domains are separated, conversion becomes more difficult, whereas work-family conflict is less likely. Common conversion becomes easier when domains are reasonably synthesised; however, work-family conflict may arise.

In contrast to Border Theory, Karassvidou and Glaveli (2015) assert that, while employees are central participants in the organisation, they lack the power to negotiate and change the work setting and its borders. The main burden can be attributed to organisational culture components such as: spoiling the customer, ideal worker norm, human-centrality, teamwork, innovation and trust/security. These cultural elements provide a common ideological foundation, communicate values, objectives, and means of

achievement, facilitate employee osmosis and socialisation, and, most importantly, impose concerted control over employees' behaviours.

2.4.2 Inter-role Theory

The Inter-role Theory is also known as the incompatibility or opposition theory. It refers to challenges in meeting the requirements of one field as a result of occurrences of adhering to the requirements of the other field, according to Greenhaus & Beutell (1985). Inter-role conflict occurs when a person's ability to meet the requirements of one role interferes with their ability to meet the requirements of another. These suggestions have been used to explain situations where variables conflict in relation to behaviour, role strain and time: Identifying with roles is necessary; external support is related to conflict; pressures must come from family and work; source of conflict determines direction; level of conflict correlates positively with role salience, which moderates relationships; conflict is related to stage and career success; conflict is significant in situations where negatives are associated with nonconformity (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Inter-role conflict occurs when people play multiple roles at the same time and are unable to fulfil the responsibilities that come with each one (Kremer, 2016). "Once resources are exhausted in one role, they are not available for other roles," write Hecht and McCarthy (2010). Furthermore, attitudes and behaviours in one role may spill over into another (Cheng & McCarthy, 2013). Eventually, high levels of inter-role conflict result in low levels of general well-being and overall life satisfaction (Kohler Giancola , et al., 2009). Individuals who play multiple roles (such as school, family and work) are becoming more common. Working adult students with family responsibilities must deal with the inevitable conflicts which arise from their multiple roles (Kremer, 2016). According to studies, the highest degree of conflict is associated with school-family conflict, but the highest stressor is associated with work-family conflict (Kohler Giancola, *et al.,* 2009; Kremer, 2016). It is suggested that seeking help and encouragement from informal support systems such as family or friends is critical to relieving stress caused by inter-role conflict (Kohler Giancola , et al., 2009).

2.5 The Importance of Work-Life Balance

According to IHREC (2023), WLB benefits both the workplace and the employees. It is said to provide the greatest benefits when the relevant options available meet the needs of the organisation and its employees. Work-life integration employer supports, also known as family-friendly practices or flexible working arrangements, are widely thought to enable employees to better juggle the demands of domestic and other responsibilities, and possibly reduce job demands (Wood, 2018).

2.6 Value-Based Indictors of a Healthy Work Life Balance

Value-based indicators resulting from a healthy WLB on employee productivity levels are considered as follows:

Figure 2 - WLB: Organisational Advantages (Yadav & Rani, 2015)

Less instances of sickness and absenteeism

Increased odds of self-reported sickness absence and greater health issues are linked to a poor work-life balance (Antai , et al., 2015). Covering absent employees is said to result in decreased productivity. In hopes of maintaining workflows, managers spend hours each week dealing with absenteeism and planning for/adjusting procedures. Colleagues' increased workload as a result of absent employees is one of absenteeism's most detrimental effects (Bermingham, 2013).

A happier, less stressed workforce

When workers are happy in their jobs, work will resemble a second home rather than simply a place to earn money (Kohll, 2018). An employee's mental health can be significantly impacted by stress, which can ultimately have an influence on their productivity. Productivity demands focus, but being stressed can make it very difficult to concentrate on the task at hand. Stress can also have a detrimental effect on a person's personality. Teamwork is frequently required in the manufacturing industry, being stressed, and irritable and unpleasant with co-workers not only can have an impact on personal productivity but also on the productivity of co-workers (Goetzel , et al., 2018).

Employees feel valued and they feel that their personal and/or family life is important

Employees are said to work hard, aim for new goals and become invested in the company's successes if they feel that management value and appreciate the work they do. An organisational led healthy WLB can be seen as detrimental in assuring employees feel valued and that they feel that their employer places importance in their family life. Employees are more likely to be able to concentrate on their work when they are less bothered about their personal lives and responsibilities. Organisations are seen to be supportive of WLB when they are supportive of flexible work arrangements and are seen to implement family-friendly policies. A favourable and enhanced workplace culture is ultimately the consequence of benefits and rules that enable employees to strike a balance between work and family (Meyer , et al., 2004).

Improvements in employee general mental health and well-being
Buckley *et al*., (2015) acknowledged that a strong connection exists between productivity and well-being. According to research, employees who are in good physical, mental, and emotional health are more likely than those who are not to perform at their best at work. Employees who are happy and healthy live better lives, are less likely to be sick and contribute more at work.

More engaged employees

Anitha (2014) revealed a close connection between WLB and employee engagement. Employee engagement is an essential HR priority and a crucial element of high-performance work practices (Attridge, 2009). Schaufeli (2013) views employee engagement as a desirable situation for workers and a vital component of successful firms operating in a competitive industry. The majority of contemporary businesses competing for a competitive edge concur that benefits of an engaged workforce include employee retention, excellent performance, greater productivity and first-rate service   High employee turnover rates, poor performance and ineffectiveness are all consequences of low engagement (Purcell, 2014).

Greater employee loyalty, commitment and motivation

Bagis & Adawiyah (2022) claimed that establishing and maintaining a supportive, productive workplace which enables employees to balance their personal and professional duties is the aim of WLB. This boosts productivity and loyalty. In an organisation, employee performance is significantly influenced by personal loyalty, commitment and motivation levels. In order to improve their lives in terms of security and fulfilment, employees place a premium on job satisfaction. This leads to commitment, loyalty and timeliness from workers, which over time lowers labour turnover. Employer satisfaction ensures employee loyalty, a stable workforce, and labour productivity to lower hiring and training costs and the enhancement of organisational performance (Frempong, et al., 2018).

Higher staff retention rates

Employers can reduce turnover by offering employees emotional support and a work-life balance. Work-life balance plays a big part in whether or not employees decide to remain with their current organisation (Karatepe, 2013). It is advantageous for organisations as a whole to have high employee retention, also known as employees, that stay with the company for a long time. Long-term employees possess a plethora of knowledge which cannot be imparted during onboarding or training, such as subtleties about clients or procedures that can only be learned over years of working for the company (Sheridan, 1992).

A positive employer brand

Organisations can be more successful at attracting new talent in a competitive market by recognising the benefit of work/life employee incentives (Foster Thompson & Aspinwall, 2009). Employer branding is an essential component of hiring which may have a significant impact on a business and its workforce. Employer branding is sometimes disregarded; however, it is crucial for all organisations to attract the finest candidates and retain current employees. A business will become the employer of choice for top prospects if one can portray themselves as a desirable place to work (Adams, 2022).

2.7 The Impact of Work-Life Imbalance

Fayyazi & Aslani (2013) stated that work-life imbalance has a number of detrimental effects on employees' attitudes and behaviours, which in turn affects how well organisations perform and function. A professional who is unable to stabilise their activities in order to simultaneously pursue their personal and professional goals is said to have a work-life imbalance. Fayyazi & Aslani advised that a work-life imbalance can have the following effects on a persons general well-being and level of productivity:

Burnout

Burnout can result from working long hours every day and can have detrimental mental effects. Burnout can impair drive and concentration, lead to fuzziness, raise the risk of making mistakes on the job and lower overall productivity. Burnout can have a negative impact on human health over time.

Reduction of Free Time

If a person works too much or too hard, they could miss crucial family occasions like anniversaries, birthdays, or memorable family gatherings. Connections with family and friends may suffer if one continuously manages onerous professional responsibilities and strict deadlines.

Increased Stress Levels

An unbalanced work-life schedule can make a person stressed.   Health may suffer if stress is experienced on a regular basis. Also, when stress is suffered it can be difficult to regulate your emotions.

Decreased Activity

Unbalance in a person's professional and personal live can hinder their capacity to stay active if they work in a non-physical occupation, such as an office.

Missed Work

Burnout which results from having unbalances in life might cause persistent exhaustion. It's even possible that prolonged stress at work or a lack of leisure time will force a person to miss work or miss deadlines. An employee's professional reputation may also be harmed by poor attendance and performance.

2.8 Work Life Balance Initiatives

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2023) defines WLB Initiatives as ones which promote a better balance between the demands of work and the healthy management (and enjoyment) of life outside of work. Kossek *et al*., (2010) examined the viewpoints on work-life initiatives as potential organisational transformation phenomena. Flexitime, job-sharing, reduced working hours, transitioning from full-time to part-time employment, working from home, working only during school term times, and paid leave for emergency childcare are just a few of the work-life initiatives offered by organisations (Wood, 2018). WLB efforts are said to address structural (flexible work design, human resource policies) and cultural (supportive supervisors, climate) issues, which are two key organisational difficulties. It is stressed that despite the need for organisational adaptation to changing interactions between work, family, and personal life, work-life initiatives serve a useful purpose. While they may make it possible for workers to balance work and caregiving, they can also lead to increased workloads and the maintenance of ideal worker stereotypes (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2023).

2.9 The Influence of Organisational Culture on Work Life Balance

The organisational culture of a company can has a significant impact on how a person experiences WLB. Beliefs, values, attitudes, and traditions which have their roots in a common experience form the foundation of organisational culture. The idea that workplace cultures can hinder, or support employees' WLB is where the relationship between organisational culture and WLB first emerged (Kirchmeyer, 2000). Research contends that current workplace structures are supporting patterns of long working hours and cultivating cultures which encourage and embrace overwork as the hallmark of contemporary success (Paton, 2001). These frameworks, it is said, lead to "work intensification" as opposed to a "settled accommodation" or harmony between work and personal obligations. The idea that changing company culture can be a successful instrument in achieving WLB has been contested in the literature from a number of angles. It is said to be impossible to achieve the political perspective on WLB and the idea of "win-win" which refers to successful outcomes for the employee and employer in the workplace through a cultural change to support WLB (Brannen, 2005). Research has shown that company cultures do affect how each employee perceives their WLB, with the majority of studies showing this to be a constraining factor (Clouston, 2012).

2.10 Managers: A Step Towards an Improved Work Life Balance?

It is commonly known in the literature on WLB that line manager support is a significant element influencing employee WLB results (Lapierre *et al.,* 2008; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 2004). Employees who have line supervisors who are more understanding of their WLB requirements are likely to be happier at work, have less work-life conflicts and have lower intentions to quit. Despite the significance of line managers in WLB management, little theoretical and empirical study has been undertaken on how line managers implement and oversee work-life policies and practices for their staff (Eby *et al.,* 2005). It is important to comprehend how line managers, who are a critical meso-level factor affecting organisational functioning in general, affect and influence WLB policy and practice given that they play an increasingly active role in HRM decision-making, including

WLB decisions (Bach, 1994; Hales, 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Storey, 1994). Reduced working hours may result from numerous WLB initiatives and programs, such as job sharing, part-time employment and term-time employment. Line managers who are caught between competing demands of maintaining or growing productivity and yet allowing for flexibility or decreasing working hours may find these initiatives to be a genuine problem   Line managers may have a negative attitude toward WLB efforts if they have to deal with more administration and complexity in how work is organised as a result of these initiatives (McCarthy , et al., 2010).

2.11 Organisational Culture and its Correlation with Work Life Balance

Some scholars consider organisational culture to be an important organisational factor in WLB (Santos, et al., 2013). Employees who perceive the desired culture will be expected to remain in the group because the feeling of the desired culture forms a social bond and helps them stick together (Ismail, et al., 2018). This organisational culture could be described as a work culture which stems from the organisation's strategic intent and values (Padhi, 2017). According to Clark (2001), many organisations change their culture in order to become more "family friendly" workplaces.

The majority of employers argue that flexible scheduling boosts productivity by reducing employee stress and absenteeism while also increasing individual job autonomy and efficiency (Clarke & Holdsworth, 2017). Organisations with integrated operational flexibility are said to have more productive and satisfied employees, allowing them to manage their personal affairs and avoid conflicts between work and family (Rastogi , et al., 2016). Team members who perceive management as aiming to support WLB report less stress at work and a greater sense of family balance (Humayon, et al., 2018).

2.12 Striking a Balance

Historically, it has been observed that employees in certain organisations are more satisfied with their work and contribute significantly to the organisation's success, as opposed to those who fail to perform as a result of

dissatisfaction with their work. There are many factors which influence employee satisfaction such as salary, opportunities for advancement, adequate training and development, fair policies and practices, lower levels of job stress and a clear communication system. However, one of the important underlying factors which many organisations fail to recognise is the WLB which employees obtain while working for them (Abuhashesh , et al., 2019).

The business environment is seeing intensifying competitiveness among organisations across diverse industries, particularly in the private sector, as a result of the rising tendency toward achievement. Several studies have found that this ever-increasing desire to achieve more leads organisations to make extra efforts which increase the workload of their employees and result in a loss of WLB. However, these extraordinary efforts may fail to produce the desired results if employees ultimately suffer from a decrease in job satisfaction as a result of a substandard WLB (Beehr & Newman, 1978). Since integrating WLB into employees' lives is the current need of the hour, it is deemed necessary for companies to develop WLB policies and programs for employees (Mukhtar, 2012). However, too much flexibility makes it difficult for management to ensure that desired performances and goals are met, so the appropriate controlling mechanisms are required to prevent workplace irregularities (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). According to Downes and Koekemoer (2011), unavailability of colleagues due to WLB programs is a major issue, due to some employees abusing the flexibility given to them. As a result, flexitime should be allowed with caution only after ensuring that employees have ingrained the necessary professional maturity to perform their duties (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008).

2.13 Conclusion to the Literature Review

The literature review uncovered key themes and concepts relating to the impact of WLB on organisational productivity levels. It demonstrated how these themes and concepts are applied in practice and day to day working lives. It also declared the challenges and outcomes in terms of value on productivity levels. The tripartite relationship of Directors, Managers and

Employees is seen to be critical to the impact and outcomes of WLB on productivity levels.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

3.1 Researcher Statement

During this research the author was working as a HR Manager within Ireland's agri-food manufacturing sector. During their time in this position, the researcher's concerns around WLB gradually increased. The researcher became more and more aware that employers and employees' conceptions of what constitutes a healthy WLB are wildly divergent and that even the same individual can modify their conceptions of WLB over time as personal and work priorities change. The researcher believes that the focus on employee WLB is seen as a crucial component of the daily HR strategy within an organisation. Unfortunately, the researcher was at the time of this study finding it difficult in obtaining support around WLB initiatives from the owners and directors of their employer. Making a case for employee WLB initiatives to one's superiors was justification for the subject of this dissertation. The outcome of which, will hopefully result in a commitment from leadership in WLB policies and initiatives going forward. The researcher strongly believes that fostering a workplace culture where employee ELB is prioritised, is imperative to organisational success.

3.2 Profile of Participants

In qualitative research, participants are purposefully chosen; those who can best contribute to the formulation of the research questions and advance comprehension of the phenomenon being studied are chosen as subjects. Finding qualified volunteers is thus one of the phase's most crucial jobs in study design (Sargeant, 2012)

At the time of this study, all participants were employed in various roles and at various levels within a SME in the Irish agri-food manufacturing sector. The organisation manufactures food products which are supplied to customers throughout U.K, Ireland and wider Europe. The company being

100+ years old, is family owned and in recent years has seen considerable year on year growth in revenue. The Board of four Directors are responsible for the overall Management of the company on behalf of the three major shareholders. The Managing Director is one of these major shareholders. A team of Managers are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the site. Each Manager has one or two Supervisors and a team of people who report into them. The 12 participants in this research work in a spectrum of departments namely Finance, Production, Quality, Transport and The Board of Directors.   These twelve individuals consisted of 6 males and 6 females where 6 of these were married, 5 were single and 1 was divorced. The age range of the participants was 50's with 4 of the participants have children under the age of 18.

3.3 Framework of the Study

The primary goal of this research was to gather meaningful insight into the chosen theme. In the particular area on which this study focused a qualitative method was thought to be the most advantageous way to ensure that the phenomena surrounding WLB and the impact it has on productivity are studied as extensively as possible (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Qualitative analysis is said to aid in the understanding of how people perceive their surroundings and therefore it guarantees higher-quality outcomes for this type of study (Myers, 2000).

Qualitative research rarely adheres to a rigid and regular schedule. Instead, it encourages meticulous attention to detail and in-depth research on a chosen topics and provides researchers the freedom to collect and analyse data however they see fit (Eriksen, 2001). The study's methodology and approach were specifically constructed with an interpretivist methodological research design with the goal of capturing each participant's subjective experience and personal significance in daily life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). A further agreement with Eriksen (2001) can be found in the selection and appropriateness of the qualitative research method as the methodological design for this study. They contend that since they want to understand the world around them, researchers are drawn to study questions that fit that description. They also contend that because of their prior experience,

researchers are more likely to choose and support a certain research approach.

Non-probability sampling was also used for this research. This sampling technique is frequently used in qualitative research, where the participants aren't typically viewed as being representative of a larger community in the same way that they are in quantitative studies. The solutions provided, however extremely individualised and tailored to the particular circumstance and social setting, are still viewed in terms of their demographic membership (Ward, 2009).

Through this study, the researcher also sought to gain employees understanding of WLB and to obtain insightful perspectives on how employees working in the selected sector felt about their current WLB. As a result, the researcher used a phenomenological approach to investigate the significance and concentrate on the situation's description. As acknowledged by Winpenny and Glass (2000), the researcher was a key player in the research design in this study and actively participated in the data collection process. This necessitated that the researcher developed a questioning strategy throughout the interviews in order to comprehend and pinpoint the sense of meaning (Yardley & Smith, 2008). To further validate this, Larkin *et al.,* (2021) advised that the goal of questioning in the context of the phenomenological interest in personal experience is not to judge, challenge, or investigate points of suspicion but rather to subtly inquire and clarify in order to facilitate "expansive, honest and reflective accounts" in order to explore greater depth and meaning (Pringle, et al., 2011).

Phenomenology differs from other forms of qualitative research since it emphasises the idea of lived experience. Phenomenologists are dedicated to comprehending participants' experiences in the world and believe that this should be done on their terms (Larkin, et al., 2021). When using a phenomenology technique, participants' experiences are typically described or interpreted along with "the characteristics and structure of the phenomenon" being studied (Tesch, 1990). As a result, when conducting this qualitative research, the researcher found themselves becoming the research tool (Janesick, 2015).

During the interview sessions for this study, the researcher assumed the position of an interpretive observer who had the important responsibility of converting the data supplied by participants as they explained their thoughts around the phenomena being explored. To fully appreciate the subtleties of being a person experiencing the phenomenon in a particular context, the researched immersed themselves into the setting of the participant's "real" world by using the strategies of observing, questioning and listening (Yanow, 2017). The researcher was able to interact with the participants and make them feel comfortable which aided in the collection of rich, insightful data. When describing or interpreting what they saw and heard, the researcher was sensitive to the specific beliefs, values and ways of thinking of the participants in the workplace culture as well as the physical surroundings of their working environment (Streubert Speziale & Rinaldi Carpenter, 2003).

3.4 Research Approach

Due to the nature of this study, the researcher felt that a case study approach sufficed. There are various definitions of case studies which place emphasis on the quantity of observations, the method (qualitative), the depth of the research (a thorough examination of a phenomenon and its context), and the naturalism (the study of a "real-life context").   Scholars generally concur that a case study should not just comprise one observation but may also include a number of observations both inside and across different cases. Case studies are helpful for developing concepts, which are crucial for building theories. Case studies are said to enrich the descriptive content and have a higher degree of internal validity than quantitative studies. Comparatively to quantitative methodologies, case studies are better adapted to explain outcomes in specific circumstances (Rowley, 2002). The case study undertaken for this research involved 12 employees who worked in a single organisation.

3.5 Data Collection Method

For this study, the researcher chose to conduct SSI's with a range of employees who currently work in the manufacturing sector of Irish agri-food sector. SSI's are regarded as an efficient and practical research technique (Adams, 2015). Given their flexibility as a type of social interaction and their ability to take place in both natural settings and interview rooms, SSI's are one of the most popular methods used in qualitative research (Kuhn, 2006). SSI's call for discussion between the responder and interviewer as a method, which necessitates a certain amount of social contact and communication abilities (Fontana & Frey, 2003). In addition, because interviews are dialogic in nature, questions can be answered, and topics can be debated to provide detailed and in-depth data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Although there are many other interviewing methods which can be used to obtain data, SSI's are the preferred approach in phenomenological investigations (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). A focus on "depth, detail, vividness, nuance, and richness" in data collecting is necessary for phenomenological investigations, according to most of the literature which discusses the benefits of SSI's Crucial assets in the process of SSI's include a nonjudgmental attitude, strong listening abilities and the ability to observe nonverbal cues from both the interviewee and the interviewer. Validity is a key component of SSI's since this method of data collecting aims to elicit responses that are as close to the respondents' actual opinions as possible (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

SSI's have the benefit of enabling more thorough data gathering and a thorough comprehension of the body language and facial expressions displayed throughout the interview. To clarify any ambiguous responses and aid the participant in understanding the question, the interviewer can additionally ask for an explanation. Additionally, because the participant has a greater commitment to participating and can go into as much depth as they like while answering the questions, interviews might go a great deal longer. This approach of gathering data also allows for flexibility, allowing the interviewer to modify the inquiries and alter the course of the conversation as it progresses while still maintaining control over the interview's. In-depth SSI's are frequently utilised in qualitative research. Using a flexible interview

methodology and additional follow-up questions, probes, and remarks, this method often entails a conversation between the researcher and participant. With this approach, the researcher can gather unstructured data, delve deeply into delicate and occasionally intimate topics, and study participant thoughts, feelings, and views about a certain subject. When compared to employing a questionnaire or survey, SSI's offer the advantage of being more objective while yet allowing for a deeper knowledge of the respondent's perspectives and the factors which contributed to them. SSI's are appropriate for a variety of meaningful objectives, especially when several open-ended questions may call for follow-up questions. SSI's were also seen as the most suitable for this study's purposes since the researcher wished to study the opinions of each respondent in a private, confidential setting where they would feel free to be as honest as possible. The SSI method was used to delve deeply into the perceptions surrounding the impact of WLB on employee productivity and to obtain the most correct data to address the study topic. With the help of this technique, the researcher was able to delve deeper where elaboration was needed from a response. "Please elaborate on this" and "Are there other reasons why you feel that way?" are examples of probing questions which were used to elicit responses (Gall , et al., 1996). SSI's are useful for having lengthy conversations. Using this method, the researcher could draw nuanced findings by thoroughly examining the talks and various, initially superficial replies which took place during the interviews. This approach also allowed the researcher to observe each participant's body language to gather data that might be relevant to the several themes which emerged from the interviews (Ritchie, et al., 2013).

3.6 Sampling Technique

The SSI participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique. Certain criteria must be used to choose who or what is included in the sample when using purposive sampling because the nature of the research questions demands it. To identify and choose cases with the most information possible while making the best use of the limited resources available, the technique of purposeful sampling is frequently utilised in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). . The technique entails locating and

choosing individuals or groups of individuals who have expertise in or experience with an interest phenomenon (Cresswall & Plano Clark, 2011). When working with small sample sizes, such as with case study research like this, purposeful sampling is frequently performed. The main goal of this technique of sampling is to select a particular group of people from the population to study, analyse and estimate certain population patterns and characteristics. A sample of such data is needed because it is practically impossible to collect data from a complete population. In the instance of this report, the populations were made up of workers in the agri-food manufacturing industry, with workers in Ireland making up the subgroup of respondents. A non-probability sampling technique has been selected for this study as this is the most appropriate method for examining a situation which seems to be representative of personal experience, as is the case with this research (Yin, 2003).

3.7 Procedure

The participants in this study worked across different departments within the manufacturing sector of the agri-food industry. The participants were invited to take part in the research via a phone call from the researcher. Subsequent to the researcher confirming the list of participants who had agreed to partake on the research study, each participant was sent a participant information sheet by email (see Appendix A). This sheet detailed the research topic and outlined the confidentiality of each participant. Prior to the commencement of the interviews each participant was sent a consent form by email, to review, sign and return to the researcher (see Appendix B). Each participant was informed at the beginning of each interview that they were not required to answer any questions if they did not want to. Additionally, the researcher reiterated to each participant that they would remain anonymous.   The researcher meticulously documented every interview in a hand-written form. The interviews lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes.

Since the interviews were scheduled for working hours, they were all undertaken in the Boardroom within the workplace of the researcher and the respective participants.   Prior to the interviews taking place, the researcher

created an interview schedule (see Appendix C) as a tool to guide and prompt their thoughts and also to give the dialogic process a framework and maintain the attention on the individual. The interviews were digitally recorded with their consent using a voice recorder, which allowed the researcher to pay closer attention to what each participant had to say and how each conversation flowed. This also allowed for thorough analysis of the data.

Each participant gave their consent for the interview sessions to be recorded. The goal of the first interview step was to establish a relaxed and natural environment. This was accomplished through establishing a connection and feeling of security by asking respondents for biographical information and bringing up their personal, family and employment situations during the discussion of work-life balance. The researcher began each interview by asking the participant to describe their typical daily routines to begin the session.   To contextualise the data in terms of any links or patterns that have emerged in these categories, important information such as age, working hours, number of children, family responsibilities, and interests were also gathered during the interview.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an important step in the research process, and, for a phenomenological investigation, it is the point where the essence of the phenomenon of interest may be comprehended and expressed (Priest, 2002). Re-listening to the interview recordings several times helped the researcher focus on the participants' experiences (Grbich, 2007). Once the researcher was confident with their understanding of every single section of each interview, they then began the transcribing process. This involved the researcher re-listening again to each interview (section by section) and transferring the interview information onto a Microsoft Word document. This process was prolonged as the researcher wanted to assure that the detail taken from each interview was 100% correct.

The next step involved separating meaning units that from the literature review, had been chosen as emerging themes and were thought to be essential to study. In a phenomenological study, data analysis is the stage

where the essence of the phenomenon of interest may be understood and represented (Priest, 2002).

3.9 Thematic Analysis

The researcher used a thematic analysis technique to locate and examine meaningful patterns in the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2014, 2021). According to Braun and Clark (2006) and King (2004), thematic analysis is a valuable technique because it looks at the perspectives of various research participants, draws attention to similarities and differences, and produces unexpected insights into the data.

Given that it emphasises the subject's subjective perceptions, feelings, and experiences, thematic analysis is pertinent to phenomenology (Guest, et al., 2012). Thematic analysis can be applied in post-positivist, constructivist, or critical realist research methodologies; it is not constrained by any one paradigmatic viewpoint. Thematic analysis was chosen by the author as it is seen to highlight the social, cultural, and structural contexts which influence individual experiences in many interpretivist orientations, enabling the development of knowledge which is constructed through interactions between the researcher and the research participants, and revealing the socially constructed meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Boyatzis (1998) proposed thematic analysis as a technique that can bridge the gap between many social scientists' more interpretive research goals and the post-positivist pursuit of comprehending a trustworthy, objective, fact-based world. The interaction between interpretivist and post-positivist paradigms in thematic analysis is said to lead to a symbiotic relationship in which interpretive findings can lead to new hypotheses which can be tested using post-positivist methods, and post-positivist hypothesis testing can lead to new themes that can be explored through an interpretive lens (Boyatzis, 1998).

Data on lived experiences, such as interviews or narratives, were a requirement for the analysis. Data-driven themes are derived from the analysis (grounded in data and the experience of the participants). The analysis begins with a seeking significance phase and progresses to the identification and relation between numerous interpretations. Instead of

attempting to quantify their frequency, the analysis aims to attempted to comprehend the complexity of the meanings in the data. The analysis involves searching for patterns in the further exploration of meanings and figuring out how to group such patterns into themes. Additionally, the analysis needs to be open-minded. Consequently, the analysis included a reflective process intended to provide light on meaning. The thematic analysis in this work focused on how to organise patterns of meaning into themes. Themes which are focused on meaning are said strengthen the conclusions of qualitative research. However, it was crucial that the findings alternate between concrete statements and narratives which explain the significance of actual lived experiences (Guest, et al., 2012).

The textual data was used as the starting point for the analysis, which sought to group meanings into patterns and then themes. The author aimed to comprehend the meanings that are ingrained in experiences and to textually convey these meanings while completing the analysis. Details and dimensions of meaning were addressed through the analysis. This necessitated extensive reading and reflective writing. The author also had to assure that each interview was also be read as a whole, with each portion being comprehended in relation to the others.

The researcher had to assure that they were familiar with the data through objective reading before beginning the analysis. They often found it necessary to read the answers aloud multiple times to assure of this familiarity. While reading, the researcher began to investigate the experiences that were depicted in the data, looking at things like how things are described and how meanings might be deciphered. Whilst always keeping the study's objective in mind, the aim was to shed light on new facts rather than validate what is already known.

3.10 The Coding Process

The researcher then established "codes" for words or phrases that contain meanings and concepts that were pertinent to the research question. As this coding process was the foundation for all subsequent analysis, the coding stage was seen as crucial to the whole of the study. Also, since the procedure is extremely subjective, validity was required to minimise

researcher bias. This validity was assured through thorough notes which explain why certain words were chosen or rejected. By assembling related codes into groups, themes and categories were created. The themes were then compared to determine whether they were comprehensive and whether they may be combined or further divided. The analysis's key themes were sense-checked against fresh raw data which influenced the ongoing data collection. Themes that emerged from the coded data were used to create a theoretical model, which was then validated against both old and new data in the analysis's concluding stage. The themes were primarily descriptive, which meant they described data patterns related to the research question. This process was extensive and sub-themes and sub-sub-themes were created to drill down to the most useful data and significant data gained from the research. The researcher then attached headings to each theme to enable them to present the results (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012). .

3.11 Pilot Study

The author conducted a pilot study before commencing the final set of SSI's. The goal of the pilot study was to prepare and test the interview questions and technique to identify any issues that the author and participants might encounter. Also, to thoroughly prepare the author for the recording and analysis of the collected data. The validity and dependability of the interviews might be investigated in a pilot study. A full evaluation of the representativeness and applicability of the WLB questions for people working in the selected industry was provided. The pilot study participants provided suggestions on how to enhance the interviews, and this enabled changes to be made for the benefit of the author participants and the research (Junyong, 2017).

3.12 Data-Collection Material

When developing the interview guide the researcher was required to think extensively about the members of their workforce who would provide rich, descriptive accounts of the chosen topic. Due to the interviews being the only data gathering method in the study, it was important to identify people who could provide in-depth descriptions about the topic, and who were also

willing to take the time to talk to the researcher about those topics (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Consideration of the relationship between the researcher and the participants assisted the researcher to make informed decisions about the kinds of interview strategies which it would be necessary to take with particular colleagues. The researcher used gaps which emerged during the research process and the writing of the literature review to design the interview questions. This researcher was confident this approach could assist with address the gaps in the existing research (Nowell, et al., 2017). The interview guide was piloted prior to commencing the final set of SSI' s (see section 3.9).

An audio recorder was used to record each interview as a means to create full records, to control bias and to produce reliable data for analysis. The researcher was interested not just in what the participants said but also how they said it. By audio-recording each interview, the researcher was able to concentrate more fully during each interview to assure they retrieved as much relevant information as possible during the short period of time. Permission to record the interview was gained from each participant prior to recording beginning (Saunders, et al., 2009).

3.13 Ethical Considerations

The study conducted to meet the requirements of this dissertation complied with The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (Allea, 2017). Although ethical issues are crucial in any study field, they are more relevant in qualitative research. The researcher will be required to guarantee that participants have the freedom to decide whether to participate in the study, safeguard participants' identities throughout the recruitment and dissemination processes and to encourage transparent and truthful research reporting which is free from misleading readers (Arifin, 2018). To gain full assurance around the ethical considerations of this research, the researcher at the same time as submitting their initial research proposal, submitted an Ethics Review Application Form to National College of Ireland.

For the researcher, communication regarding the confidentiality declarations was crucial. The researcher tried to collect as much direct, unbiased, and honest comments as possible. Participants were given the assurance that

the research would only be used for academic purposes only, that no participant names would be included in the analysis, that all participants' identities would be secured, and that all information acquired would be kept completely confidential. All research participants received an information sheet outlining the study's objectives, participant requirements and research confidentiality (see Appendix A). This gave them the opportunity to assess their readiness to approve their participation in the study. The interviews took place in a private Boardroom. The participants engaged voluntarily and fully, having understood the ethical considerations of the research. Prior to the interviews, the researcher had determined that the participants might not feel comfortable sharing their ideas or responding to questions about their workplace. To get around this, the researcher promised participants in the disclosure form up front that all information acquired during the interviews would be verifiable. All participants were also made aware that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and were offered the chance to withdraw at any time.

3.14 Research Design Feasibility

There were no issues obtaining access to the study participants to collect the data. The researcher, who is currently employed in the HR division of an Irish agri-food manufacturer, was able to recruit coworkers to participate in the study. However, because these participants were full-time workers who worked a variety of hours and shifts, there was a time restriction on the interviews to ensure that they did not conflict with their obligations at work. The study involved a total of 12 participants, and the interviews were conducted over a two-week period in the Boardroom of the organization's main manufacturing facility.

The researcher was aware to apply an impartial and unbiased approach, maintaining professionally and emotionally separated from discussions, context, and thoughts presented by the participants because she was a coworker of the participants. To guarantee that the most accurate and useful information was gleaned from each repository, the focus was maintained in accordance with the tripartite framework.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Five main themes emerged from the data collection. These are shown in the table below: -

Theme	Discussions Points
1. Work Life Balance: Harmony between Work and Personal Life	Flexible working hours; personal life is seen as being important; enough sleep; hobbies and interests; time to relax and unwind from a busy day at work.
2. Company Culture: Sense of Belonging/Being Part of the Family	Being a key employee; feeling of appreciation; sense of belonging; being respected; healthy and happy work environment; employee benefits.
3. Transition between Work Time and Personal Time	Having a routine; boundary management; priorities.
4. Differences between Managers and Employees Perceptions of Work Life Balance	Work commitments; importance of family time; introduction of work-life balance polices.
5. Motivating Employees: Requirement for Organisational Support to Promote Work-Life Balance	Managers will need to play a supportive role; introduction of policies and initiatives; change to culture.

Table 1: Main Themes Taken from Data Analysis

Theme 1: Work-Life Balance: Harmony between Work and Personal Life

Directors and Business Owners were found to have a clear understanding of the context of WLB. However, it was advised that it has not been treated as a priority within the business historically. It also became clear that this level of the company's hierarchy was aware that their personal WLB is not healthy and that they often find the balancing of work extremely challenging. One Director advised:

I know the call on my staff's WLB stops with me.

A senior level employee further commented that they know that their WLB is not ideal and said:

I am conscious that I should really try to take a step back and reflect on the big picture of what I am losing out on" and "it would be great to have time at the end of the day to unwind and relax instead of taking work phone calls.

Weekly working hours can often add up to 50+, with early start times and late finishes. Work often does not stop when at home either, as emails and calls are often answered/replied too after. Due to stresses and demands of the business, sleepless nights are often experienced. It was commented that wives of this sector of employees quite often take the brunt of requirements of family life such as teacher parents' evenings, children's out of school activities. A director admitted to being a "workaholic" and advised that they are aware that they have an inability to delegate work tasks to others and that they are "controlling" and a "perfectionist". Increased sales appear to be the primary motivation from the Company Director level. It was advised that productivity from this level of the hierarchy could be improved with more spare time and more rest away from the workplace, but this is not happening at the moment due to business demands.

Departmental Managers did not appear to have a clear understanding of WLB, with one commenting that:

Training should be provided by the company so Managers understand what benefits it can bring.

Another commented abruptly:

I understand the concept, but work life balance does not exist in this place.

When asked to elucidate on this, they went on to advise that:

> All this place sees are loss of profits, staff are not important, and neither is sleep.

General employees appeared to be clear understanding of the concepts of WLB, one advising that they understand it to be:

> Harmony between working time and personal time.

The remaining employees commented on their understanding as:

> ………its where life is not all about work, work, work and money, money, money.

> Where you have time to do things that you enjoy.

Theme 2: Company Culture: Sense of Belonging/Being Part of the Family

Most participants who held Management and general roles made it clear that they were unhappy with the organisational culture. However, the most Senior participants did not think there was an issue, with one commenting:

> People love working here, we are like one big happy family.

General workers commented significantly regarding culture with them advising:

> It would be great if we were treated with respect, decency, and dignity, and our opinions were valued.

> We have no benefits of work here, just our basic pay. Why would we do extra if we are not appreciated for it?

> We are never informed of changes; we get to know about them at the last minute.

> Most people are just here for the money.

Contrastingly, one employee did comment:

> The culture is good here, I enjoy coming to work as I live alone. My manager is great, he is always helping me with jobs, answering questions, addressing my needs, and generally keeping an eye on me.

Employees within a management role explained that they find the culture challenging and often feel torn between their superiors and the people on their team.   Managers within the organisation feel that they must always be available to take calls regarding work. With one Manager advising that they do not mind being always accessible at the moment because he likes his job and is looking for promotion over the next few months. He continued by pointing out:

> I need to keep on their good side.

It was suggested that the company culture can often be "challenging" and that:

> This is something that definitely needs to be improved upon.

The company culture is very tradition focused.   Quite frequently, there is a mindset that says:

> This is how we've always done things, and this is how we will continue to do it.

Managers advised that they were unhappy with their current level of WLB and that the company culture required improvement. It was also advised that they often felt pressured into forcing members of their team to work increased hours due to the continuous growth in sales.   One Manager advised that he is currently in discussions with the HR department regarding employee WLB within the company. This Manager also advised that he has approached the Managing Director on several occasions and raised his concerns about his personal WLB and that of members of his team. Managers frequently compliment their staff members for putting in extra time however burnout at work is a common problem for workers who put in more hours which in turn results to employees being away sick. This sector of the hierarchy appears to be extremely loyal to the company with 20+ years of

service being normal.   However, this loyalty seems to be seen as pressure which affects WLB.

Theme 3: Transition between Work Time and Personal Time

"Routine", "boundaries", and "priorities" were the key words which arose constantly around this theme**.** At this point in the interviews most participants felt comfortable speaking freely and being open with their feelings.   They were also fully aware of the focus of this study.

The comments below followed on from Question 5 – Please can you talk me through your typical day?

> If am unable to finish my work at the office, I put the unfinished items on my "To Do" list for the following day.

> Now and again, when my manager asks me to remain late at 4:45 p.m., I say "no." I must put my family first; they are very young, and my wife needs my help at home.

> I always leave the office on time so I can buy food or go to the post office before it shuts.

> I must be careful in the evening to not look at my work emails on my phone. It's so easy to return to work mode. So, when I am home, I try my best to put my mobile phone aside.

> I love the evenings, even though I spend most of my spare time being a taxi to my teenage children. I love to go home and prepare a lovely dinner and the time spent at the table is our "family time" where we all catch up on the day's events.

Theme 4: Differences between Managers and Employees Perceptions of Work-Life Balance

The perception of WLB was clear and true from a general employee's point of view. This section of the workforce understood the importance of a healthy WLB and the benefits which it can bring.   Managers only seemed to want to address their work commitments and not their personal commitments and do not truly assist their teams in finding a balance between their work and personal lives due to the demands of the business. All managers came across as anxious during this part of the interview.   A comment made was:

> I must keep the place running and to do that I need people to be here.

The organisation does not appear to have a culture which supports WLB for its employees. Whilst the Senior Team often feel pressure from HR and their employees to offer them, they do not want their workforce to benefit from such favorable treatment. The cause of this seems to be that there are concerns about how this will impact the profitability of the business. In most cases, the Senior Team assume that the personal lives of employees are secondary to their work life. The following comment confirmed this thinking:

> Some people seem to think that the business would not survive without them. People must remember that they wouldn't have jobs if it wasn't for business.

Theme 5: Motivating Employees: Requirement for Organisational Support to Promote Work-Life Balance

A Manager advised that due to their loyalty, they often receive an incentive from the company in the form of a bonus. It was advised that this provides motivation to get the job done to the highest possible standard. However, it was also advised that more time off work would be preferred and that a healthier work life balance would improve the effects of tiredness and increase their productivity levels.

All but one general employee advised that they would be happier with more time away from work, however due to the cost of living rise it is detrimental to

work increased hours to received increased pay at the moment. Another employee advised that as they live alone, they attend work "for companionship" and they "do not have much of a life outside of work".   All employees advised that they would first approach their Manager regarding any concerns about their WLB and then secondly the HR Manager.

All employees felt that the company culture has improved over the past years, but that with further "Buy in" from the Board of Directors further improvements could be made.   It was advised that overtime is quite often expected of people at "the drop of a hat" and that it if often still felt that life outside of work is not as important as company profits.   One employee advised that they were away from work sick for three weeks in mid-2022, due to burnout as an effect of work demands in the previous three months. Another employee advised that he was aware that "some people like to work here because they love the overtime" whereas "others have left because of the demands of the job".

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Recommendations

The objective of this qualitative research project was to investigate how employee work-life balance impacts employees' productivity, specifically in small to medium-sized manufacturing businesses in Ireland's agri-food sector. By undertaking a qualitative analysis, it was hoped the findings would identify and investigate the fundamental concepts and theories surrounding the impact of WLB on productivity levels within the workplace, and ascertain the extent to which these concepts impact productivity levels within the workplace.

As anticipated, the findings showed that a healthy WLB produces successful individual outcomes, including job commitment, happiness, satisfaction, engagement, and ultimately, discretionary effort. These outcomes are all linked to positive company outcomes, including decreased intent to leave, less absenteeism, and increased performance and productivity. These positive outcomes have the immediate effect of increasing profitability and productivity. Additionally, a good WLB results in value creation. Improved employee morale decreased absenteeism rates, and staff health can all improve service levels and help an organisation adapt favourably to

changing market conditions. Flexibility on the part of businesses and their staff can help them meet client expectations.

The four themes yielded from participant responses emphasised the level of impact which a healthy WLB has on organisational productivity levels, and the benefits of implementation and organisational support in the introduction of relevant WLB initiatives and HR policies.

Improving Company Culture

The results of this study highlighted the significant effect which a negative workplace cultures have on WLB and so motivational/productivity levels. The research study made it abundantly evident that various people interpret WLB differently (Lockwood, 2007). According to Choi & Scott (2008), an organisation's culture can be described as a "deep and complex part of an organization that can strongly influence organisational members". It may also be seen as the partnership between an employer and an employee, which is shaped by customs and rules at work (Sackman, 2006). According to Schein (2010), an organisation's culture represents generally held ideals and presumptions that are firmly ingrained in the organization and which individuals gradually come to understand as they work through issues.

As a result, maintaining a positive workplace culture and striking a balance between employees' obligations outside of work are crucial. The importance of both official and informal support in achieving WLB is frequently emphasised in literature. According to academics (Ayman and Antani, 2008; Maxwell & McDougall, 2004; Ferguson *et al.,* 2012), management, supervisor, and co-worker support are also crucial for WLB. According to Mubeen and Rashidi (2014), an organisation's dedication to its culture is thought to be a requirement for lengthy workdays. The organisation in this study appears to have adopted this culture.   Rather than "WLB", it is recommended that such organisations should adopt a "work-family" culture which is seen as "the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values on the extent to which an organisation supports and values integrating employees' work and family lives" (Thompson, et al., 1999). When employees receive organizational support for handling their work-life duties, a work-life culture is

created (Wu, et al., 2011). Overall, the character of an organisation's dominant culture affects the success of WLB activities.

Implementation of Work-Life Balance Initiatives

The results yielded the necessity for the introduction of WLB initiatives to enable enhancement of motivations and so to improve productivity. WLB policies aim to balance employees' paid employment and other non-work-related obligations by adjusting their work schedules (Pillinger, 2004). According to Mubeen and Rashidi (2014), working hours play a big role in achieving and controlling WLB. This is due to the possibility that long work hours may lead to imbalances that have a negative impact on employees' social and personal lives (Bielby, 1992). According to growing evidence extended work weeks without flexibility lead to a subpar WLB. These rigid work schedules upend families and put employees at a high risk of making subsequent errors (Dembe, et al., 2009). WLB initiatives, according to the literature, will only improve motivational and productivity levels (Vandeweyer & Glorieux, 2008),

The Requirement of Training on Work-Life Balance

On occasions during the SSI's, WLB training was mentioned and outlined as a requirement. If the benefits of investing in WLB are to be realised properly, it is recommended that WLB training for both managers and employees is undertaken. WLB training assists the company and its employees in designing, implementing and managing WLB arrangements. It would help to foster a work environment that fosters WLB. It is advised that WLB training be targeted at all staff to increase awareness of the organisation's policies and practices in relation to WLB, equality legislation, and legislation on maternity, parental, carers', and adoptive leave, the benefits of WLB arrangements and work practices for individuals, organisations, and society, and the repercussions for employees who take advantage of these arrangements. The greatest method to realise the organisational benefits of WLB is to educate top management about the argument for WLB. The development of skills in employees will require needs assessments regarding WLB. Effective design and execution of WLB arrangements and managing

workers on flexible working arrangements should be targeted at line management and the HR department. Developing the ability of the specific trainers to provide training on WLB would be of benefit (IHREC, 2023).

Employee Motivation results in Organisational Productivity

Motivation is essentially a concoction of variables that differ from person to person and a concoction of strategies. Ayoudele & Baba (2022) contend that a company's workers determine how successful it is. This implies that if workers are motivated, their morale will be strong and their performance and efficiency levels will be markedly raised, raising the level of performance and productivity of the organisation. Therefore, managers must continually seek for ways to both ensure that their staff members continue to produce at high levels and to raise the organization's productivity or efficiency. According to Reio and Callahan (2004), intrinsic incentives are employed to motivate workers to accomplish more. According to Lawler's (2003) analysis, an organisation's productivity is influenced by how motivated its workforce is. The inner rewards are elusive in nature. Such as gratitude, employer attitudes, and job rotation, we can only sense them rather than physically touch them. Internal rewards are incentives found inside the work itself, such as satisfaction with how a task was completed or the employer's appreciation (Ayodele & Baba, 2022). The results of this study indicate that the quality of the work is driven by employee motivation, which increases performance within a business. Results seen in the literature review advised how employee motivation is increased because of a healthy WLB. Production can continue unhindered when employers maintain employee motivation. As a result, organisations obtain excellent workflow harmony, which positively affects productivity.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This study will add to the body of knowledge on WLB and the impact which it as on the productivity levels in Irish organisations, namely in the agri-food manufacturing industry. The study identified a clear association between employee productivity levels and a healthy WLB. The research results demonstrated that WLB practices had the anticipated effect on employees'

productivity levels at work. The review of the literature has also further demonstrated this. WLB of employees does have a major impact on the organisational productivity levels of the companies for which they work. The findings of this study are crucial in gaining an improved understanding of the effects of WLB on organisational productivity and performance.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study needs to draw attention to a few shortcomings to improve the validity of subsequent research findings. First and foremost, the study's extremely constrained time schedule placed limits on how many surveys could be sent. Therefore, if future research could be conducted over a longer period, more SSI's could be taken to increase the sample size and gain further understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, because the authors' employers were the sole focus of this investigation, other organisations were overlooked. Future research could therefore be undertaken in a number of organisations to further the body of knowledge. Finally, the difficulty around the researcher's choice of the agri-food sector and of a family-owned business as the study population is that they are often seen to operate differently from other entities in terms of business execution. To increase generalisability, it is advised that future research examines organisational commitment in various industries or types of organisations. According to Grady et al. (2008), the phrase "work-life balance" is more inclusive and considers "family, community, recreation, and personal time." The current study ignored elements of recreation, communities, and society and mainly focused on people's family lives and places of employment. Future studies should consider WLB in a broader sense, considering features of community membership and leisure.

Chapter 7 – Personal Learning Statement

Gaining a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management has been a personal goal for many years. Studying as a mature student together with studying remotely and on a part time basis has brought its challenges. However, overall, the experience of completing a dissertation to master's level was very enjoyable. My personal WLB on times was challenged during this period also, due to me also being in an extremely demanding work role. However due to gaining a Post Graduate Diploma in HR and continuing to study for a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management, at the end of this study I gained and began a new role as a HR Manager within international logistics company where my WLB has now improved dramatically.

At times studying remotely can be challenging, as there is no face-to-face communication with peers. However, the support which I have received from Lecturers and the rest of the team at National College of Ireland has been excellent. Studying part-time whilst working can be extremely challenging, however I found that working and studying in the same areas was numerous times of great benefit to me. I have many times during the past two years of this course brought ideas from work to my studies and ideas from studies to my workplace.

One of my greatest accomplishments in life is without a doubt completing a master's degree, and after careful consideration, I am happy that I chose the subject of human resource management. I can see myself succeeding in this field as I am a "people person", and I eagerly await the possibilities which will present themselves and look forward to applying the knowledge I have acquired via my studies and the completion of this dissertation. Due to the completion of this master's degree alongside my work experience in HR, I now feel more than ready to be a HR Manager. One that is a pathfinder, problem solver, guide, philosopher, leader, friend, identifier, and competence maker for all the employees within the organization in which I work.

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Appendices
Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Title of the Study: *Investigating the Impact of Employee Work-Life Balance on Employee Productivity: A Study of Small to Medium Sized Manufacturing Businesses within the Agri-Food Sector in Ireland*

I would like you to invite take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask questions if anything you read is not clear of if you would like further information regarding any aspect. Please take time to decide whether to take part.

Who am I and What is this Study About?
I am Catrina Sharp, and I am the organizations Human Resources Manager. I am currently in the final stages of studying for a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management at National College of Ireland. The final requirement of this program is the completion of a dissertation for which I have chosen to undertake research on work-life balance (the division of one's time and focus between working and family or leisure activities) and its impact on employee productivity levels.

What will taking part involve?
If you decide to take part, you would be asked to participate in a one-to one interview which will take no more than 30 minutes. This interview will take place in the Boardroom on site at our place of work.
You will be asked a series of questions around the following subjects:

- Your understanding of work-life balance.
- Your personal work-life balance.
- Company culture.
- Your working day.
- Your time away from work (sleep and activities).

- The motivational aspects of your job and your feelings around your personal productivity.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part, as due to the nature of your role I feel that you could contribute greatly to this study.

Do you have to take part?

No, participation in the study is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question/withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

Are there any possible risks/benefits of taking part?

I do not foresee any risks at all to the participants of this study. However, I would like to highlight that the completed dissertation will be presented to the Company Owners/Directors once completed. I am hoping that it will be taken as a serious business case to enable work-life balance initiatives to be introduced in our workplace.

Will my personal details be kept confidential?

Your personal details such as name, position, age and answers to the questions will be kept strictly confidential before, during and after the interviews take place.   All non-anonymised data which is collected such as the consent form which you are required to produce will be retained as part of the research process.

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

As the researcher, I will be voice recording and taking written notes during the interview. Signed consent forms and interview notes will be retained in a secure folder within a cabinet situated in my home at Cormeen, Castlerahan, Co. Cavan until after my qualification has been conferred and for a further 2 years after this. Identifying information will be removed from these interview

notes. Under freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information which you provide at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will only be submitted in my dissertation to the National College of Ireland as part of my degree.

Who should you contact if you require any further information?

Should you require any further information regarding participation in this study, please do not hesitate to contact my Dissertation Supervisor, Dr. Amanda Kracen. Amanda's email address is Amanda.Kracen@ncirl.ie .

Thankyou,

Catrina Sharp

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

Name of Researcher: Catrina Sharp

Title of the Study: *Investigating the Impact of Employee Work-Life Balance on Employee Productivity: A Study of Small to Medium Sized Manufacturing Businesses within the Agri-Food Sector in Ireland*

Consent to take part in the above research.

- I _____ (insert name) voluntarily agree to participate in the above research.

- I understand that even if I do agree to participate at this moment in time, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any ramifications of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within 2 weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I understand that my personal information and the information which I provide as part of this study will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality at all times.

- I understand that when reporting on the results of this research within the final dissertation, my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by replacing any names with a numeric number and discussing any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I may mention.

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

- I understand that thorough written notes will be taken and voice recording will take place throughout my interview. This will be kept in a secure location until results of the dissertation are confirmed by the Examination Board and for a further 2 years after this.

- In understand that signed consent forms will be retained in a secure location until results of the dissertation are confirmed by the Examination Board.

- I understand under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information which I have provided at any time whilst it is being stored as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher of this study, Catrina Sharp to seek further clarification and information if required.

Signature of Research Participant   **Date**

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   **Date**

_____   _____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Question 1

What is your understanding of WLB?

Question 2

How satisfied are you with your current work life balance?   Why is this?

Questions 3

Would you feel confident enough to ask for help if you felt that you were having issues developing a healthy WLB? Who would you feel you were able to approach if you did/do require assistance?

Question 4

Can you tell me about the company culture here?

Question 5

Please can you talk me through your typical day?

Question 6

Who many hours sleep do you get on a typical work night?

Question 7

Which of these comments relate to you most?
    a. I prioritise my job over my personal life.
    b. I prioritise my family over my work.
    c. I sacrifice sleep to spend time with my family.

Questions 8

Have you ever suffered from burn out, work related stress or any other work-related illness?

Question 9

Do you feel that your superiors respect your WLB, and if so/if not why?

Questions 10

Have you missed a personal event in the past 12 months due to work restrictions? If so, please elucidate.

Question 11

What motivates you to get your job done?

Question 12

What do you feel are the most ideal working conditions for you to be the most productive?

Appendix D : National College of Ireland – Completed Thesis Submission Form

Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Catrina Sharp   Student number: x21133492

School: School of Business   Course: MA in Human Resource Management

Degree to be awarded: Level 9 – Master of Arts in Human Resource Management (CIPD Accredited)
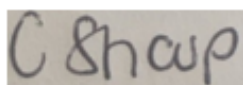
Title of Thesis:

Investigating the Impact of Employee Work-Life Balance on Employee Productivity: A Study of Small to

Medium Sized Manufacturing Businesses within the Agri-Food Sector in Ireland

An electronic copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. This electronic copy will be accessible in NORMA norma.ncirl.ie the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (NORMA) are made available on open access.

I agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being available for consultation within the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository NORMA.

Signature of Candidate: C Sharp

For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by

Date:

This signed form must be appended to all copies of your thesis submitted to your school.