
THE BALANCE BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE IN THE " WORK FROM HOME " ERA

Luiza-Maria DRAGOMIR

Assist. univ. PhD. "Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu Jiu

Abstract: *IMPROVING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF EMPLOYEES CONTRIBUTES GREATLY TO INCREASING THEIR EFFICIENCY. THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING A FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULE, A WORK ENVIRONMENT FAVORABLE TO PARENT EMPLOYEES ARE JUST TWO OF THE SOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY MULTINATIONALS TO INCREASE THEIR PRODUCTIVITY. THE MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING THE TOPIC IS THE ISSUE OF ENSURING THE BALANCE OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE - FAMILY LIFE AND THE EVOLUTION OF THIS BALANCE OVER TIME. THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELD OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND THAT OF PERSONAL LIFE, MORE PRECISELY, OF THE FAMILY, HAS BEEN A CONSTANT CONCERN OF RESEARCHERS, THE STUDIES IN THIS AREA HAVE BEEN INTENSIFIED ESPECIALLY IN THE LAST DECADE. PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY LIFE IS BASED ON A SERIES OF HUMAN NEEDS. THERE ARE MANY CLASSIFICATIONS AND THEORIZATIONS OF HUMAN NEEDS. THE GREAT THEORETICAL VARIETY GENERATED BY THE INTEREST OF RESEARCHERS SIGNIFIES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEED OF EMPLOYEES TO ENSURE A HARMONY BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE. THE WAY OF SOCIALIZING, BEING A PARENT, WORK-FAMILY BALANCE, ALL THESE WERE SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED BY THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC . THE HEALTH CRISIS IS A CHALLENGE FOR PEOPLE WHO STARTED WORKING FROM HOME BECAUSE THE LINE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE BECOMES INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO TRACE. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE BENEFITS IN WHAT RESPECTS WORKING FROM HOME, THE TRANSITION CAN BE DIFFICULT AND FINDING THE BALANCE CAN BECOME MORE COMPLICATED. COVID-19 CAN LEAD TO OVERWORK, STRESS, BECAUSE MANY EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE WORKED ALL THE TIME IN A FORMAL ENVIRONMENT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN WORK AND LEISURE IN THE CONDITIONS OF "WORKING FROM HOME". THIS ARTICLE AIMS TO ANALYZE A NUMBER OF WAYS IN WHICH THE WORK-FAMILY BALANCE CAN BE MAINTAINED IN GENERAL, BUT ESPECIALLY IN THE COVID-19 ERA.*

Keywords: *WORK. FAMILY. BALANCE. CHILDREN. PARENTS. CORONAVIRUS*

**Contact details
of the
author(s):** Email: dragomirluiza96@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In order to contribute to a better work-life balance, it would be appropriate for most companies to commit to creating a change in managerial practices. It is necessary to have a favorable environment for employees who are parents and to ensure non-discriminatory conditions for pregnant women.

Viewed individually, the balance between professional and personal life is the optimal and personal way to harmonize the requirements of the two areas in order to gain a sense of fulfillment and personal satisfaction which, in turn, improves the quality of life and work alike. And even if at first sight it seems a problem of time management, for most researchers the essence of the balance between professional and personal life is not how much time we allocate to the two areas, but especially how we achieve this allocation.

This article aims to explain and highlight the negative effects of family life on work and each other, but also the particularities of these interdependencies in the current period marked by the health crisis. Professional life can have negative implications on family harmony and balance or the family can affect, at certain moments, professional satisfaction and implicitly performance at work. Isolation, social distancing can be negative factors in ensuring this balance, in view of the pressure placed on employees to work from home.

This article also seeks to explore the nature of the relationship between work-life balance and the emotional exhaustion experienced by employed individuals while working from home during the restrictions imposed by the Romanian authorities. For Romanians, the concept of "working from home" is still new, still little exploited and the aspects regarding the maintenance of a balance between family and profession in this context present a novelty for sociologists.

To give a clearer picture of this issue, which poses many social and economic problems, carried out a research to answer the following general question: "To what extent does family and personal life influence job satisfaction?"

The family and its functionality largely determine job satisfaction if we consider that the family can influence the choice of job. Most of the time, it is the family that determines us to accept a job or to give up another one, the factors being among the most diverse: the appearance of a child, tensions in the couple due to overtime, etc.

Numerous studies conducted in the past by well-known sociologists Greenhaus, Powell, Beutell have explored the nature of the relationship between work-life balance and exhaustion, burnout, but there are very few studies adapted to the current context generated by the pandemic. This study aims to analyze such a work-family relationship in the conditions in which employees are forced to work from home in terms of the state of emergency.

WORK - FAMILY BALANCE THEORY

The main theory behind the study of the relationship between work and family is that of stress and exhaustion and is based on the idea that the individual has limited energy resources to perform many roles, and their management is difficult and inevitably involves tensions. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) are sociologists who have studied in detail the conflict between the fields of professional life and personal life, the latter being understood rather in the sense of family. These authors defined work-family conflict as "a form of inter-role conflict in which family and professional pressures are mutually incompatible in certain respects" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).

LABOR-FAMILY CONFLICT: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Numerous theories have been formulated for the study of the causes and effects of the labor-family conflict, some of which we will highlight in the following lines. Most studies have focused on three competing theories that have highlighted the interdependence between the role at work and the family.

According to Greenhaus and Friedman (1983, pp. 17-20) these three theories are:

1. *Transfer theory*, which focuses on the impact that satisfaction and pleasure in one area have on another area. Positive transfer refers to situations in which satisfaction, energy, and a sense of accomplishment from one area are transferred to another. On the other hand, the negative transfer is represented by the various problems that are transferred from one domain to another. For example, increased satisfaction (dissatisfaction) at work leads to increased satisfaction (dissatisfaction) in family life.

2. *Compensation theory* is a two-way theory that emphasizes the relationship between work and a distinct field in which one field can compensate for what is missing in the other field. It is therefore likely that these areas will be interrelated in a way that balances qualities. For example, individuals dissatisfied with family life may try to achieve performance at work, and vice versa.

3. *The theory of segmentation*, which is applied to each field, separately, so that satisfaction derives from work, family or both. Therefore, the segmentation theory is the opposite of the transference theory in which it is argued that man can separate the competing requirements of the role.

Many traditional companies perceive work and personal life as two competitive areas. Gain in one area results brings about loss in the other area. However, managers with a contemporary mindset have a collaborative attitude between employee and manager in achieving professional and personal goals with benefits for both business and personal lives of employees and managers. These managers are guided by three major objectives (Kossek, Lambert, 2005, pp. 3-20):

- 1) clearly informing employees about business priorities and encouraging employees to set personal priorities;
- 2) recognition and support of employees for both roles and responsibilities at work and outside;
- 3) the permanent improvement of the employees' performances and of the organization / company at the same time aiming the employees' personal objectives

A new concept used in sociology, but also in the psychology of the organization is that of organizational culture "family friendly environment" (Bittman, Hoffman, Thompson, 2004, p. 18) This is a culture that offers programs and policies that ensure / contribute to achieving a balance between the professional and family life of the employees. Both women and men want a successful career and a fulfilled personal life - gender arguments.

Social norms on femininity and masculinity have changed a lot in the last 30 years. The division of labor between women and men in industrial society was very obvious, paid work became very important, while household work decreased in importance. Thus appeared the "cult of true femininity", the central role of women being that of raising and educating children and working in the home. After World War II, social norms promoted the central role of women as parents and men as the material resources of the family. The identity and personal value of the man was associated almost exclusively with work performance and income associated with work. Traditional norms that identify masculinity with competitiveness, assertiveness and autonomy are associated in business with the "rules of success". (Doucet, 2004, pp. 277-303)

ANALYSIS OF STUDIES ON THE WORK BALANCE - FAMILY AND MAIN FINDINGS

Greenhaus & Powell (2006, p. 47) found that individuals with a high level of negative emotion experience more often and intensely the conflict between the roles of employee and family member because these individuals bear more stress, at work and in the family than others and because a high level of stress in both areas facilitates the emergence and maintenance of conflict.

In an experiment also carried out by the two authors, Greenhaus and Powell (published in the press), students at a master's degree at Drexel University in Philadelphia were asked to decide whether to attend one of their parents' birthdays or to attend a work meeting for a team project, none of the options can be rescheduled. They found that the pressure in each environment had a substantial effect on how each allocated their time: 84% chose the family activity (birthday party) when there was very high pressure from the wife and a pressure weak from the manager who asked them to participate in the project, 73% chose the work activity (meeting for the team project) when there was high pressure from the manager who requested the meeting and low pressure from the wife (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p. 50)

We believe that the results of this research have led to a conclusion that there is a negative work-family balance, in the sense that individuals who give more importance to work than family, give up family activities to work. Therefore, they allow work responsibilities to interfere with their family life.

According to a Eurostat study published in 2015, the most recent on this topic, in other countries people after 17:00, meet in cafes, meet friends, perform their "tasks" in personal life. In Romania we find that they do not leave work before 18:30 (Eurostat, 2015). In the current conditions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, the situation is even more difficult because people are not prepared to make a clear distinction between work and leisure and tend to perform their duties throughout the day.

Apparently we are satisfied with the balance between professional and personal life, according to a study published in 2015 by Eurostat. Globally, the youngest generations are the most satisfied, showing that business people are struggling with increased pressure. Younger employees enjoy working life more than the older generation (76% compared to 64%) and are more satisfied with their productivity levels (81% compared to 69%). Employees who are satisfied at work are more productive and less inclined to leave the company. As the job market evolves, companies are realizing that in order to hire and retain talent, they need to focus on flexible work policies, such as offering a choice of workplace locations.

A frequently asked question of young married people refers to: "how can I have a successful career and at the same time a fulfilled personal life?". Because traditional roles in the family and at work have changed, both women and men want to build a career and, at the same time, achieve their personal, family goals. Rising expectations and living costs cause many people to work harder, despite their personal needs and responsibilities recognized and asserted by them. The balance between work and personal life can be achieved by finding and maintaining an optimal rhythm between career and personal responsibilities. A Eurostat study conducted in 2015 shows that the number of families with children in which both partners work varies from 44% in Spain to 79% in the United Kingdom. In 6 European countries where the study was conducted, the percentage of families with children, in which both partners work, is higher than those without children. Most couples with children work full time, with the exception of only Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Eurostat, 2015).

The lack of professional and personal efficiency of employees is an important issue for human resources specialists and managers. They can develop and implement organizational practices



to create an optimal work environment for employees, women and men, with significant business benefits.

EY conducted a study to understand how urban generations in Romania manage the balance between their personal and professional life, but also the specific trends of generations in Romania, compared to other countries analyzed by EY globally. The study carried out by EY in Romania is based on 2562 answers to an online questionnaire, coming from respondents from urban areas aged between 18 and 55+ years. The construction of organizational programs for work-life balance must take into account the following changes: the number of parents raising their own children has increased; the divorce rate is rising; the number of working women has increased; the number of couples in which both partners have a career has increased; fathers' increased involvement in educating children (Ernst & Young, 2016).

More than half (51%) of respondents consider that it is more difficult now than three years ago to manage the balance between personal and professional life, while 26% consider that it is easier to maintain balance now (Ernst & Young, 2016).

Romanians perceive more acutely than the rest of the countries on a global scale the changes of the last three years, with an impact on the balance between personal and professional life. A similar perception exists in Germany, where 49% of respondents to the similar study conducted by EY globally said that it is more difficult now than three years ago to manage the balance between personal and professional life, followed by Japan (44%) (Ernst & Young, 2016).

Those with children have felt more difficult to manage their personal and professional work-life balance in the last three years - 56% of respondents who are parents say it has been more difficult to do so, compared to 50% of those who have no children. Compared to the rest of the countries, parents in Romania felt the most acute difficulties in the last three years, followed by parents in Germany (54%) and Japan (46%).

For many families, time management has become a problem, and especially the aspects of carrying out activities common to family members, the division of time between workplace and family demands.

Both women and men are influenced by the impact of work-family conflict. The consequences of this conflict are manifested at the level of the employee by decreasing professional performance and increasing physical and emotional health problems, and at the level of the organization by decreasing productivity, increasing absenteeism and the number of people who resign.

THE WORK-FAMILY BALANCE DURING THE COVID – 19 PANDEMIC

Working from home during the coronavirus pandemic has been and is quite difficult for most employees. Whether they work alone or have a family around them, doing household chores and having children are the main stressors. During the state of emergency, but also in the state of alert, the coordination between professional and family activities was a daunting task for each employee. Boundary theory suggests that people create and maintain physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries around them to simplify their functioning in the world around them (Allen et al., 2014). Creating such boundaries allows employees to reduce interference between work and personal life. Starting from the theory of limits stated above, it is assumed that while working from home, employees encountered difficulties in creating and maintaining temporal, physical and psychological limits due to which they may have encountered some difficulties in maintaining work-family balance. The chances of interference between work and personal life or the actual interference of family life with work life or both, during this pandemic, cannot be ignored.



Due to such a conflict between personal and professional life during the coronavirus pandemic, employees may feel emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout. In this part of the study we focused on the relationship between work-family balance and the stress and exhaustion consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and the blockages imposed by the authorities. The possible association between perceived participatory leadership and work interference with personal life was examined and the way in which this association affects emotional exhaustion was also explored.

Stress and emotional exhaustion are widely discussed components, subdomains of exhaustion. It emerged from Maslach's (1982) burnout model, which conceptualized burnout as a three-dimensional construction. Emotional exhaustion “represents the basic dimension of individual stress of exhaustion” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399). Some research has concluded that a conflict between work and family often leads to emotional exhaustion (Liu et al., 2015). During the pandemic, employees who work from home may have difficulty in maintaining work-family balance, which is why there is a need for participatory management to provide support to employees during this period.

Participatory management involves consulting subordinates on problems in the work-family relationship and possible actions needed to solve these problems (Mulki et al., 2006). Participatory leadership plays an important role in reducing stress and emotional exhaustion due to restrictions imposed by the authorities. Numerous researchers have suggested social support as one of the elements to reduce the effects of labor-family conflict (Blanch and Aluja, 2012). It can be anticipated that the supportive nature of a participatory leader will play a significant role in creating less stress among employees in any demanding situation. During work from home, the line between work and family life can be quite thin during actual working hours. In such a work-family context, the role of participatory leadership in establishing the work schedule and the level of task performance is important.

In conclusion, regardless of gender, the interference between work and personal life could lead to emotional exhaustion. During an emergency that requires work from home, if a leader practices the participatory leadership model, then he can effectively participate in reducing the emotional exhaustion and stress experienced by an employee. Given the stress that employees are subjected to during this pandemic, an organization might consider offering an online counseling service by a trained person. Such a proactive initiative of an organization during a stressful environmental situation could also help employees maintain their psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

The study is based on a very limited number of elements. The inclusion of several variables could have added more information about family work balance during a pandemic, but given the recent nature of events, data for this study were collected in a very short time.

The feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction given by the balance between work and family is not only due to an efficient management of time, but also results from the attitude towards work, towards life and towards oneself, from the comprehension that everything that is done in one side supplies energy to the other side. If work is perceived as a field outside life, as an obligation, as a chore (guilty of unhappiness, failure, health problems), the chances of balancing the balance are considerably reduced, generating the conflict between work and personal life, with effects not only on the employee's physical and mental health, but also on the health of the organization in which he operates.

The balance between work and family life can be achieved by finding and maintaining an optimal rhythm between career and personal responsibilities, in order to avoid situations in which you can be successful on one level, by sacrificing the other.



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Work and personal life should not be perceived as two areas that are in a permanent competition, but on the contrary two areas that must complement each other very well to generate bilateral benefits. In this sense, companies need to focus more and more on adopting work-life balance programs, offering permanent employee advice and facilities tailored to the specific needs of each category.

During the state of emergency, the homework scenario was quite different from the normal scenario. All family members were locked up in the house, there were no opportunities for recreation, socialization and no support was available in household chores. During such an unprecedented scenario, most employees had to focus on their professional requirements, along with meeting their personal life needs. Conflict between work and family while working from home during emergency / alert situations imposed by the authorities has emerged as one of the stress and exhaustion sources among employees.

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