NAVIGATING WORK-LIFE BALANCE: THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE ICT PROFESSIONALS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR: A REVIEW ARTICLE

Wiza MUNYEKA*

* Department of Human Resource Management, Durban University of Technology, Durban, 4000, South Africa.

Abstract: *This article comments on the work-life balance (WLB) experiences of female professionals in South Africa's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, focusing on Telkom, a leading telecommunications company. Drawing from Wiza Munyeka's 2021 PhD thesis, the study which utilised a mixed-methods approach grounded in the Life Course Perspective and Border Theory to analyse both organisational initiatives and individual experiences. Findings highlight Telkom's progressive policies, including the Telkom Touch Programme (2018) and the Policy on Hours of Work (2015), yet underscore the ongoing challenges that female ICT professionals face in managing work and personal roles. The article introduces a Work-Life Balance Framework, offering theoretical and practical guidance for organisations aiming to enhance inclusivity and support employee well-being. The study contributes significantly to literature on gender and ICT in developing country contexts and offers actionable recommendations for policy refinement and cultural transformation in corporate environments.*

Keywords: *Work-life balance; female professionals; ICT; South Africa; Life Course Perspective; Border Theory; Telkom; gender and work.*

Contact details of the author(s):

Email: masterwiza2000@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector marks a significant shift in global workforce demographics. Despite this, women continue to face structural and cultural barriers that hinder their professional growth and well-being. In South Africa, where societal expectations and occupational demands intersect, the work-life balance (WLB) experiences of female ICT professionals are often marked by unique complexities (Munyeka, 2021).

This study draws from the doctoral research of Wiza Munyeka, which examines these dynamics within Telkom, South Africa's leading telecommunications provider. By investigating Telkom's WLB policies and the lived experiences of its female ICT employees, this article sought to bridge the gap between policy intent and actual practice (Munyeka, 2021, Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

This comprehensive commentary draws upon the insights garnered from five seminal research articles authored between 2022 and 2024, stemming from the doctoral thesis of the researcher. The articles include '*A quantitative study on salient work-life balance challenge(s) influencing female information and communication technology professionals in a South African telecommunications organisation (2022),*' '*Female Information and Communication Technology Professionals' perceptive description of work and home intricacies (2023),*' '*All's (or not) fair in work and life? Focus on Females in Information and Communication Technology through the prism of work-life balance (2023),*' '*Balancing the scales: An investigation of work-life balance of women in a South African Information and Communication Telecommunications organisation (2023), and Breaking Barriers and Balancing Bytes: Exploring Work-Life Balance among Female ICT Professionals in a South Telecommunications Company-A PhD Thesis Review (2024).*

The scholarly contributions of Munyeka and Maharaj critically illuminate the persistent work-life balance challenges faced by female ICT professionals in South Africa's telecommunications sector. Through a series of rigorous quantitative studies and perceptive analyses between 2022 and 2024, their work powerfully amplifies the lived experiences of women navigating the complex intersection of professional and domestic demands in a traditionally male-dominated industry (Munyeka, 2021, Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is anchored in two key theoretical perspectives:

Life Course Perspective: This framework emphasises the role of life events, transitions, and trajectories in shaping individuals' experiences over time. It is particularly useful in understanding how female professionals navigate career and personal milestones (Elder, 1994).

Border Theory: Developed to explain how people manage the boundaries between work and family life, Border Theory provides insight into the psychological, physical, and temporal spaces that women navigate daily (Clark, 2000).

Together, these theories offer a comprehensive lens through which the study examines both institutional arrangements and personal strategies for managing work life balance.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques across four interrelated research articles. The study engaged female professionals from various departments within Telkom, including technical, managerial, and administrative roles. Data collection involved structured interviews, focus groups, and survey questionnaires. This methodological triangulation enhanced the reliability and depth of the findings, allowing for a nuanced understanding of both policy-level initiatives and individual coping mechanisms.

4. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT: TELKOM'S WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

Telkom has introduced a number of WLB policies aimed at supporting employee well-being, including:

Telkom Touch Programme (2018): A comprehensive wellness programme that provides psychological support, health services, and career guidance.

Policy on Hours of Work (2015): This policy outlines flexible working arrangements, overtime compensation, and alternative work schedules.

These initiatives reflect Telkom's commitment to promoting an inclusive and supportive work environment. However, the study reveals that the success of these policies is uneven, often depending on managerial discretion, team dynamics, and individual assertiveness.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the research by Wiza Munyeka revealed a complex interplay between policy availability and actual implementation. While many female employees acknowledge the existence of WLB policies, they often report limited access or inconsistent application.

Key challenges identified include:

Managerial Resistance: Supervisors may be reluctant to allow flexible arrangements, viewing them as disruptive or indicative of reduced commitment.

Cultural Norms: Gendered expectations about caregiving roles place disproportionate burdens on female employees.

Career Penalties: Women who utilise WLB policies may face reduced opportunities for promotion or leadership roles.

Work Intensification: High workloads and performance targets often undermine the effectiveness of flexible work policies.

Despite these barriers, some participants shared positive experiences, particularly in teams where WLB was championed by empathetic leadership and a supportive culture (Munyeka, 2021, Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024). Figure 1 shows a condensed version of the resulting framework from the study by Munyeka (2021).
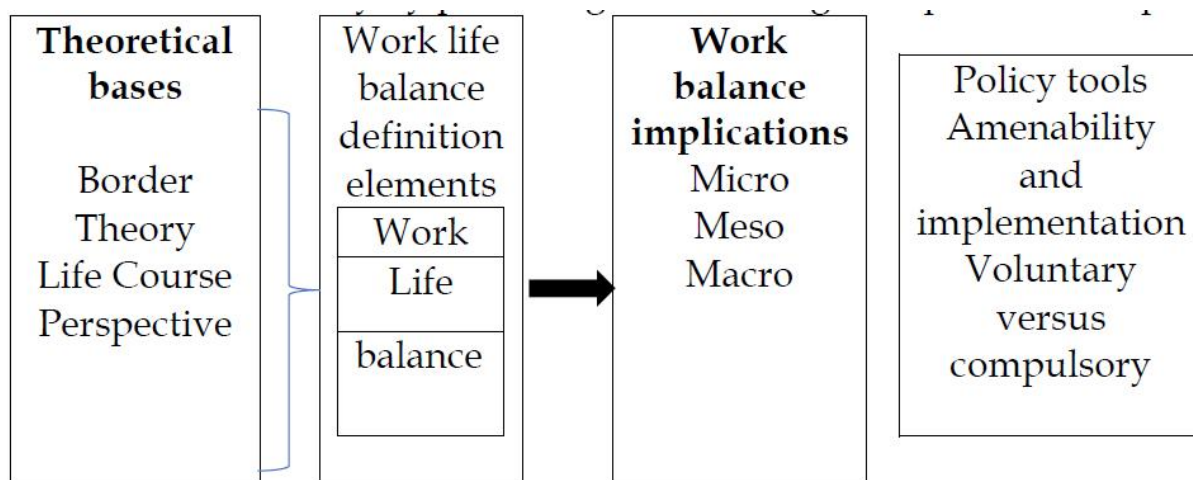
Figure 1: A condensed version of the resulting framework from Munyeka (2021)'s PhD thesis and also available in Munyeka & Maharaj (2024)'s research.

6. THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE FRAMEWORK

The study introduced the Work-Life Balance Framework, an original contribution that integrates theoretical and practical insights. This framework was designed to:
- Diagnose organisational readiness for implementing effective WLB policies;
- Guide policy development using employee-centered and inclusive strategies;
- Evaluate cultural factors that affect WLB, such as trust, transparency, and leadership style.

Through operationalising concepts from Border Theory and the Life Course Perspective, the framework served as a practical tool for HR practitioners and organisational leaders seeking to enhance gender equity and employee engagement (Munyeka, 2021, Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research by Wiza Munyeka holds significant implications for organisations seeking to improve employee well-being and retention:
- Policy Awareness: Organisations must ensure that all employees are informed and empowered to utilise available WLB policies without fear of reprisal.
- Leadership Training: Managers should be equipped with the skills and awareness to support diverse work-life needs.
- Cultural Change: Companies must challenge traditional gender roles and create environments that normalise flexibility.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular assessments should be conducted to measure policy effectiveness and identify areas for improvement (Munyeka, 2021, Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

8. CONCLUSION

The experiences of female ICT professionals at Telkom illustrate both progress and persistent challenges in achieving genuine work-life balance. While the organisation has made commendable efforts through policy and programming, the lived experiences of employees reveal a need for deeper cultural and managerial change.

The resulting Work-Life Balance Framework offers a strategic pathway for organisations to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Ultimately, supporting women in the ICT sector is not only a matter of equity but also a business imperative that enhances innovation, performance, and employee satisfaction.

REFERENCES

Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations,* 53(6), 747–770. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700536001.

Elder, G. H. (1994). Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57(1), 4–15. https://doi.org/10.2307/2786971.

Munyeka, W. (2021). Work-life balance: A case of female information and communication technology professionals at a telecommunications company [Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal].

Munyeka, W., & Maharaj, A. (2024). Breaking Barriers and Balancing Bytes: Exploring Work-Life Balance among Female ICT Professionals in a South Telecommunications Company-A PhD Thesis Review. *Journal of Business and Management Review*, *5*(3), 234-255.

Munyeka, W., & Maharaj, A. (2022). A quantitative study on salient work-life balance challenge (s) influencing female information and communication technology professionals in a South African telecommunications organisation. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, *20*, 1874.

Munyeka, W., & Maharaj, A. (2023a). Female information and communication technology professionals' perceptive description of work and home intricacies. *Cogent Education*, *10*(2), 2224990.

Munyeka, W., & Maharaj, A. (2023b). Balancing the Scales: an Investigation of Work-Life Balance among Women in a South African Information and Communications Telecommunications Organisation. *Journal of HRM*, *26*(1).

Munyeka, W., & Maharaj, A. (2023c). All's (or Not) Fair in Work and Life? Focus on Females in Information and Communications Technology Through the Prism of Work-Life Balance. *CECCAR Business*, *8*, 48-63.

Telkom. (2015). *Hours of Work: (Other Working Opportunities and Overtime)*. Pretoria. Total Remuneration & Management Human Resources.

Telkom. (2018). The Telkom Touch Policy Manual. Pretoria. Total Remuneration & Management Human Resources.