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A Study into the Continuation of Work Life Balance

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in the Parker College of Business.

By
Hayley Fritch

Under the mentorship of Dr. David Sikora

Abstract

Within the field of Human Resource Management, the topic of work-life balance has been of interest as a way to maintain satisfied employees by companies and reduce burnout for individuals. This study aims to develop a deeper understanding in the area of work-life balance. The current research shows gaps in the relationship between the actions of college students and the work-life balance they achieve in their future career. This study shows how a college student's propensity to work-life balance can affect their future balance between work and home and if college students have the propensity to think about their future work-life balance. It also fills this gap by looking at the relationship between the work-play balance (i.e., time spent on school versus time spent for leisure) a person has during their time in college and the work-life balance (i.e., time spent on work versus time spent at home) during their career. Finally, this study found that the Big Five personality inventory can be used to predict a person's work-life balance, with the areas of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism being the best predictors.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. Professor Name

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

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Work-Life Balance Overview

As the world of work becomes increasingly competitive, there is a greater need for employees to create a separation between work and life. Casner-Lotto and Hickey (1999) believed that this extra stress can be attributed to the increasingly globalized economy which creates a greater need for work-life balance programs. Ilies, Wilson, and Wagner (2009) showed how a person's mood from work can spillover into home and vice versa. This shows the need for a person to achieve a balance between work and life.

Many benefits exist from the balancing of the time spent in one's life on work activities and leisure/family activities. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) showed in their study that as work life balance increases, a person's job and life satisfaction also increase. In Akanji, Mordi, and Ojo (2015), it was shown that work-life balance can have more positive impacts than previously thought, such as increased employee morale, reduced turnover, and a decrease in absenteeism. Work-life balance initiatives also lead to a greater competitive advantage in recruitment, higher employee retention, greater employee commitment, greater productivity, and better customer satisfaction by assisting employees in achieving this balance of work and home life (Casner-Lotto, 1999).

For many knowledge workers, the line between work and life is becoming increasingly blurred. However, in Currie and Eveline (2011), participants reported having more balance in the areas in which they had created firm boundaries on the time they would spend in the area. Chen and Karahanna (2018) took this idea one step farther to show that work after hours does not benefit work

performance and can in turn, lead to negative consequences, such as work exhaustion.

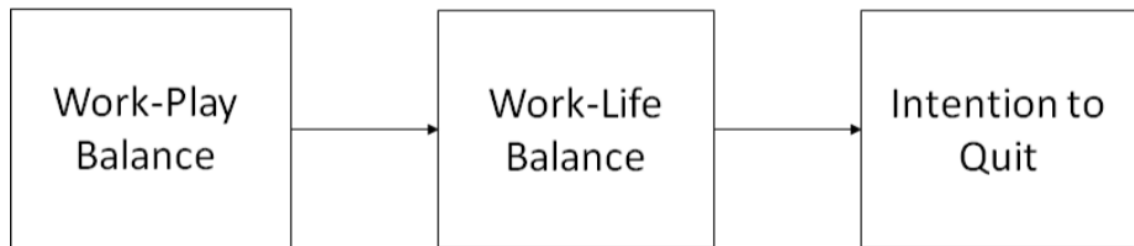
In 1999, Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr proposed a solution for this in work-family synthesis. Work-family synthesis are strategies an individual uses to manage work and family roles. A large part of this process is to create boundary management between work and home time. Boundary management is done by strictly separating the roles of work and home, thinking of only work at work and only home at home. Courtois, Dooley, Kennish, Paul, and Reddy suggested a second solution in 2004 in which companies focus on work-life effectiveness. Work-life effectiveness is a specific set of workplace practices that recommend a large amount of support for employees to achieve success at work and home. This gives solutions for both individuals and companies on how to increase work-life balance.

However, work-life balance programs do not have the same effect on all employees. Work-family conflict levels are based on the job design, job demands, and hierarchical level of an employee (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). With this being said, work-life balance programs are also not as effective to top executives as lower level employees (Stock, Bauer, & Bieling 2014).

As a result, the purpose of this study is to test the correlation between factors that affect work-life balance (i.e., work-play balance, Big Five personality test, and future orientation) and work-life balance itself. This is important because it

will further existing research in the field of work-life balance and have potential applications in academia and business.

Figure 1: A model of factors leading to work-life balance



Hypotheses Development

Research has already been conducted to show the effects of work-life balance. This study will further on this research by looking at factors that could attribute to work-life balance while in a person's college years. The first factors to be examined are that of the Big Five. The Big Five is a personality test that assesses a person in the areas of extraversion (outgoing, friendly), conscientiousness (responsible, organized), openness to new experiences (intelligent, imaginative), neuroticism (anxious, sensitive) , and agreeableness (cooperative, helpful).

A person who scores high in extraversion is likely to have better work-play balance because they are more likely to feel connected to people at work. A high score in the area of conscientiousness can lead to better work-play balance because the person is more likely to be organized with their work tasks and

complete their job faster. A person with a high score in openness to new experiences will likely have a better balance between work and play because they are likely more creative in their means of balancing the two.

Hypothesis 1: Extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to new experiences will have a positive relationship with work-play balance.

On the other hand, a high score in neuroticism can lead to a lack of work-play balance due to the anxiety the person is likely dealing with over life and the insecurity they feel in themselves and their abilities. Agreeableness is another area in which a high score likely leads to a lack of work-play balance due to the need to be helpful in every situation and inability to say no.

Hypothesis 2: Neuroticism and agreeableness will have a negative relationship with work-play balance.

During a person's college years, they are often setting the grounding for their life. This is the time when they discover who they would like to be and how they want to live their life. Because of this, it can be assumed that a person is defining the balance they will have in their work and personal life while in college. College students also need this balance. We can see this in the balance between the time spent on school activities and non-school activities.

Hypothesis 3: Work-play balance has a positive relationship with work-life balance.

When a person has adequate balance between their work and personal life, they will feel less stressed and more satisfied with their work (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Because of this effect, people who have a good work-life balance should in turn be less likely to quit.

Hypothesis 4: Work-life balance has a negative relationship with intention to quit.

Method

Sample and Procedure

This study consisted of an online survey sent to both college students and career professionals through Qualtric's online survey platform. Professionals were chosen from a variety of career fields. Career professionals were defined as a knowledge worker with at least one year of work experience who works a consistently timed eight-hour shift. Examples of this include accountants, engineers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. In total, 158 students and 109 career professionals participated in the survey. The average participant had between 3 and 10 years of work experience and worked between 36 and 40 hours each week. On average, the highest level of education received was between some college and a Bachelor's degree. Once survey data has been collected, a statistical analysis was conducted using both SPSS and AMOS software.

Measures

The survey consisted of measures for factors that can have an impact on work-life balance (personality, job satisfaction, intent to quit) as well as a work-life balance and work-play balance measurements.

Work-Life Balance. To measure work-life balance ($\alpha = .94$), Brough et al.'s (2014) 4-item inventory using a 7-point scale was used. These items asked participants to judge the balance they have between work and non-work demands. An example item is "I currently have a good balance between the time I spend at work and the time I have available for non-work activities". Answers were chosen from a range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Big Five. Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann's (2003) brief 10-item Big-Five personality assessment ($\alpha = .70$) that is rated on a 7-point scale was used. This tested a person's responses in the areas of extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to new experiences, and conscientiousness. Scores were assessed in each area. Each question asked participants to state how much they agree that the statement represents them. A sample statement is "I see myself as dependable, self-disciplined". The options to answer ranged from disagree strongly to agree strongly along with a neither agree nor disagree option.

Future Planning. Future planning ($\alpha = .68$) was be measured by Prenda and Lachman (2001) 5-item measure that uses a 4-point Likert scale. These questions asked participants about how often they make plans for the future. A sample question is "I believe there is no sense planning too far ahead because

so many things can change”. Answer options were a lot, some, a little, and not at all.

Work-Play Balance. Work-play balance ($\alpha = .88$ students, $\alpha = .93$ career professionals) was measured using Lin et al.’s (2014) 5-item work-leisure conflict inventory. This measure was used in two different ways. For students, the questions were present tense to ask about their current situation. With career professionals, the questions were changed to past tense to ask about their time in college. A sample question used for students is “I am not able to participate in leisure activities because of school.” This question is changed for career professionals to read “when in my undergraduate/graduate studies, I was not able to participate in leisure activities because of school.” Answers ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Intention to Quit. Intention to quit ($\alpha = .81$ students, $\alpha = .94$ career professionals) was assessed with a measure adapted from the Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez’s (2001) and Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro’s (1984) employee turnover intention scales. These questions looked to see if people were planning to leave their job. Once again, these questions were changed to apply to students and career professionals. A sample question for a career professional would be “do you intend to leave your current organization within the next twelve months?” For students, this same question would read “do you intend to leave school within the next twelve months for a reason other than graduation?” Answers were on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

With the work-play balance measure and work-life balance measure being similar, there was a chance that multicollinearity may exist. For this reason, extra measures were added to the survey (i.e., Big-Five personality and future planning) to allow for use of the data if needed. Based on all VIF values being under 4.0, multicollinearity was found to not be an issue and likely was not present in the measures. For this reason, work-play balance and work-life balance were treated as two separate measures.

Results

To examine the data for potential problems or issues, frequency and descriptive charts were completed for each item to show basic statistical information.

Composite scores were created for each measure used in the study. Frequency and descriptive charts were then completed for each composite score. The efforts of this are shown in Table 1, 2, and 3.

In looking at our original hypotheses, the relationship between work-play balance of a person while they are in college and current work-life balance was non-significant ($P > .05$) disproving hypothesis 3. The next hypothesis concerned the relationship between a person's work-life balance at their current job and their intention to quit. This relationship was significant ($\beta = -.33$, $P < .01$) at the 99.9% level, proving hypothesis 4. The majority of the stated hypotheses looked at the relationship between work-play balance of current college students and their scores in each area of the Big Five personality test. The relationship between work-play balance and extraversion was non-significant ($P > .05$). Work-play balance and conscientiousness also had a non-significant relationship ($P > .05$).

Similarly, openness and work-play balance had a non-significant relationship ($P > .05$). This disproved hypothesis 1 which stated that each of these factors would have a positive relationship with work-play balance. However, other aspects of the Big Five were more promising. The relationship between neuroticism and work-play balance was significant ($\beta = -.29, P > .01$). Work-play balance and agreeableness shared a relationship ($\beta = -.14, P < .1$), making it significant at the 90% level. These findings supported the hypothesis 2 which stated that neuroticism and agreeableness have a negative relationship with work-life balance. This concludes the data and insight gained from the hypotheses. However, by including extra questions within the survey, there was more raw data to be used for statistical analysis. The remainder of this section will discuss the insight found during this analysis.

While the relationship between the Big Five and work-play balance was insignificant, the relationship between the Big Five and work-life balance was very different. When testing the significance of each area of the Big Five with work-life balance using AMOS statistical software, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism had the strongest relationships ($\beta = .24, .19, .16$ respectively). Further analysis was then conducted into these three areas of the Big Five personality test.

The first area of the Big Five to discuss is conscientiousness. The relationship between work-life balance and conscientiousness was significant ($\beta = .32, P < .01$). Further analysis using AMOS software showed a mediated relationship between conscientiousness, work-life balance, and intention to quit. This analysis

showed a relationship between conscientiousness and work-life balance ($\beta = .33$), and a relationship between work-life balance and intention to quit ($\beta = .35$). Testing the relationship between conscientiousness and intention to quit without a mediator also proved significant again ($\beta = .23$). This demonstrated that work-life balance partially mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and intention to quit.

The second area of the Big Five to prove insightful was agreeableness. The relationship between work-life balance and agreeableness was significant ($\beta = .27$, $P < .01$). When conducting a Structural Equation Model (SEM) test, in which each area of the Big Five was simultaneously compared with intention to quit, agreeableness had the highest impact in predicting quit intentions ($\beta = .30$).

The third and final area of the Big Five is neuroticism. Neuroticism showed a significant relationship ($\beta = -.28$, $P < .01$) with work-life balance. Further analysis using SEM testing proved further significance. A mediated relationship also was tested (using the same SEM model) between neuroticism, work-life balance, and intention to quit. Neuroticism and work-life balance shared a significant relationship ($\beta = .30$). Again, work-life balance and intention to quit also shared a significant relationship ($\beta = .35$).

Discussion

Although it was shown that work-life balance cannot be predicted by a person's work-play balance during college, there is still useful information to be gained from this study. These results show that a person's focus likely changes between their college years and after they enter their career. This study also demonstrates

that as a person has better work-life balance they are less likely to quit. This gives companies a reason to promote work-life balance through their programs and employee actions.

When looking at the Big Five, it was shown that the Big Five personality assessment was not a good predictor overall of work-play balance of a person while they are in college. While neuroticism and agreeableness can be predicted, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness cannot be predicted. This provides insight into the lack of impact personality likely has on a college student's decision of how much time to spend on play activities and work activities. However, the Big Five personality test was a good predictor of a person's work-life balance. This could be due to the development of the personality and values of the adults. College students are often still discovering themselves and who they want to be. Also, this could be attributed to the greater stability in the life of career professionals as opposed to the often-changing routines of college students. The top two influences on work-life balance from the Big Five, conscientiousness and agreeableness, are both factors not easily changed in a person.

With this being known, Human Resource departments should assess these aspects of a person to understand their likely work-life balance before they enter the company. For this reason, this assessment can, and should, begin to be used in the hiring process to determine a person's work-life balance since we know there is a link between work-life balance and several positive factors. It should also be noted that conscientiousness has a direct relationship with intention to

quit making this assessment even more important. On the other hand, the third strongest impact from the Big Five on work-life balance comes from a person's propensity to be neurotic which can be easily affected. It is important that companies understand the impact they can have on a person's emotional stability and use their power in a positive way. In this case, Human Resource departments need to be aware of the needs of each employee and offer benefits, such as life resources (financial support and therapy services) and healthcare, to meet these needs to, in turn, increase employee retention.

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Strengths and Limitations of the Research

One strength of this study is its comparison across time of one individual. By asking survey questions about a career professional's current situation and situation while in college, we were able to compare likely attitudes across time without the need for a time gap in data collection.

A limitation of this study comes from the diversity of participants in this study. In terms of nationality, participants were made up of 184 White, 56 black or African American, 9 Asian, 3 native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 15 other. Because of the lack of diversity in participation beyond Whites and African Americans, we were unable to accurately make statistical comparisons based on the correlation of work-life balance and ethnicity.

Future Research

In the future, more research needs to be conducted to find better predictors of work-play balance. Based on the literature review, it seems work-play balance is a new term to enter this field of research. For this reason, it may be beneficial as well to solidify a more formal definition for this term. While this study was unsuccessful in finding a predictor of work-play balance, it would add value to the research in the field of Human Resources in the future. Research should also be conducted to take a deeper analysis of the relationship between the Big Five personality test and work-life balance. While this study scratched the surface, there is still so much more to be learned on this topic.

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Table 1*Work-Play Balance Students*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Work-play balance	2.83	.89	.88							
2. Intention to Quit	4.56	.72	-.05	.81						
3. Future Planning	2.85	.64	.02	.14	.68					
4. Extraversion	4.34	1.68	-.03	.03	.18**					
5. Agreeableness	5.15	1.09	-.14	.01	.13*	.08				
6. Conscientiousness	5.79	1.07	-.05	.25*	.28**	.08	.17**			
7. Neuroticism	4.86	1.40	.29**	-.12	-.14*	-.27**	-.23**	-.35**		
8. Openness to New Experiences	5.27	1.13	.06	.10	.11	.34**	.18**	.25**	-.34**	

Notes. Reliability estimates are shown in **bold** on the diagonal. *N* = 158.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2*Work-Play Balance Career Professionals*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Work-play balance	2.72	.97	.93							
2. Intention to Quit	4.03	1.28	-.04	.94						
3. Future Planning	2.85	.64	-.19	.21*	.68					
4. Extraversion	4.34	1.68	-.10	.23*	.18**					
5. Agreeableness	5.15	1.09	.01	.34**	.13*	.08				
6. Conscientiousness	5.79	1.07	-.10	.25*	.28**	.08	.17**			
7. Neuroticism	4.86	1.40	.25*	-.26**	-.14*	-.27**	-.23**	-.35**		
8. Openness to New Experiences	5.27	1.13	-.11	.13	.11	.34**	.18**	.25**	-.34**	

Notes. Reliability estimates are shown in **bold** on the diagonal. *N* = 109.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3*Work-Life Balance*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Work-life balance	3.41	1.09	.94							
2. Intention to Quit	4.03	1.28	.33**	.94						
3. Future Planning	2.85	.64	-.03	.21*	.68					
4. Extraversion	4.34	1.68	.14	.23*	.18**					
5. Agreeableness	5.15	1.09	.27**	.34**	.13*	.08				
6. Conscientiousness	5.79	1.07	.32**	.25*	.28**	.08	.17**			
7. Neuroticism	4.86	1.40	-.28**	-.26**	-.14*	-.27**	-.23**	-.35**		
8. Openness to New Experiences	5.27	1.13	.11	.13	.11	.34**	.18**	.25**	-.34**	

Notes. Reliability estimates are shown in **bold** on the diagonal. *N* = 109.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.