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Declaration page

‘I declare that this thesis that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of BA (Hons) Psychology is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.’

Signed: Jennifer Sharkey

Student Number: 10332823

Date: 21st March 2019
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Jennifer Sharkey
March 2019

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.”
- Marianne Williamson, 1992
ABSTRACT

The aim of this mixed-methods research study was to test the traditional concept of work-life balance which suggests workers can experience better well-being by being able to psychologically switch on and off. Participants were 133 full-time workers split between those that worked solely from their workplace and those that worked from a combination of their workplace and home. Each participant completed quantitative online surveys that measured their perceived stress, life satisfaction and job satisfaction levels. In their own words, they also answered qualitative questions about how their jobs impacted their lives, what they would change and what motivates them. Results found participants who worked from a combination of the workplace and home had significantly greater job and life satisfaction levels than their workplace-based counterparts. Conclusions drawn suggest there is real merit in offering flexible constructs to today’s Information Age workers in order to harvest better psychological well-being in the workplace.
INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) has been a focus of Organisational Psychologists since the 1990s (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994) but it was not until the turn of the millennium that research into this area started in earnest (Warren, 2015; Chang, McDonald & Burton, 2010; Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006). Researchers have focused on a viewpoint that workers can successfully achieve WLB once they have clearly defined hours of work, effectively allowing them to psychologically switch on and off (Warhurst, Eikhof & Haunschild, 2008; Messersmith, 2007;). WLB is characterised by achieving a state of balance, where the demands of a person’s occupation and personal life are equivalent i.e. the splitting of equal measures of time and energy between work and home life (Gyanchandani, 2017). However, the validity of the traditional WLB viewpoint has been called into question (Warhurst et al., 2008) and even the use of the term balance has been subjected to criticism by some scholars (Day, Kelloway & Hurrell, 2014) who see it as misleading and not a true representation of Information Age workers. This scholarian viewpoint is further evidenced by findings which found work-family conflict prevalent among US workers with almost 70% reporting they are struggling to balance work and personal obligations (Schieman, Glavin & Milkie, 2009).

Despite the concept of WLB being debated for decades, very few feasibility studies were found to have been carried out on identifying psychologically healthy work environments and the impact, whether positive or negative, on employee well-being (Day et al., 2014). Further, when Chang et al. (2010) carried out a meta-analysis review of 245 empirical WLB peer reviewed research studies, published between 1987 and 2006, they discovered there was a lack of consistency with results. In their study, Chang et al. (2010) focused on the methodology employed in each case i.e. hypotheses raised, sampling frames and surveys/measures used and
concluded there needed to be improvement with same to help identify and better understand how workplaces can impact the psychological well-being of their workers. Kelloway & Day (2005b) posited and stressed the importance of adopting a broader approach when analysing well-being in the workplace so that it embodied physical, psychological and societal contributing factors. Their holistic model looked at consequences in terms of individual outcomes (i.e. physical, psychological and behavioural), organisational outcomes (e.g. both employee and financial turnover) and societal outcomes (e.g. government initiatives) (Kelloway & Day, 2005a).

The shortcomings in previous studies, as outlined above, are the key driving force behind this new piece of research, which will strive to evaluate, analyse and understand more about psychological well-being levels of today’s Information Age workers. In addition to using only time-tested psychological scales, it will also offer respondents the opportunity of putting their thoughts and needs into their own words by asking them three qualitative questions.

*Work-life merge*

With the emergence of the Information Age, there is something called *work-life merge* (WLM), a phrase coined by Facebook Executive, Emily White (Hinsliff, 2013), that is gathering some traction. In the current climate, workers may not have the luxury of psychologically switching off, especially those who work flexible hours (Chen & Karahanna, 2018). Such workers, through their many portable devices, have instant fingertip access to work servers, email accounts and clients. This flexible work model can remove the necessity of a worker to be desk based, resulting in the lines that once very precisely separated work and personal lives being eroded. IT workers, for example, can reboot servers from home at night and take time off in lieu. They may also choose to work remotely from home during high peak commuting times and use the time the next day to run a personal errand or visit a doctor. While
this concept of WLM is relatively new (Hinsliff, 2013), the seeds were first sown as far back as the 1990s when an increasing number of organisations brought in offerings of flexitime to employees (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). However, Kossek & Ozeki (1999) found employees were slow to take up such opportunities due to existing company cultures coupled with ignorance around its effectiveness both from an employee and employer perspective. Fast forward three decades and the workplace is virtually unrecognisable with the introduction of remote wireless technology. Such technology has brought with it a surge of interest by jobseekers looking to work remotely, as evidenced in 2017 by one online Irish jobs search engine (Gordon, 2018).

This new way of working introduces a departure from the traditional WLB way of living and brings with it new challenges for researchers interested in analysing well-being in the modern day workplace. For example, what are the consequences, if any, for workers who are permanently psychologically switched on? How does having more flexibility affect their well-being and satisfaction levels? What role can organisations play in recognition of this changing work environment? While this research seeks to address these queries, it becomes apparent in the first instance that the very constructs of flexibility itself require balance and careful modelling.

*Flexibility in the workplace*

Michel (2011) demonstrated how companies can ‘cash-in’ on employees who are open and flexible, resulting in jobs being defined as something that workers *are*, rather than something that they *do*. The focus of this nine-year ethnography study (Michel, 2011) was on two banks who offered 24/7 administrative support to workers and encouraged timeout/leisure at work, provided childcare, free meals and amenities as well as car servicing to employees. However, Michel (2011) found that the consequences of offering such ‘perks’ lead to participants suffering poorer physical health and admitting that *their life was their work*. This
suggests that encouraging a more informal working environment, that allows workers ‘to be themselves’, can leave them quite vulnerable. What they may perceive as freedom and autonomy may essentially result in even more control by employers leading to a situation where workers are under pressure to be permanently poised for work. This could be detrimental to their health and personal life (Fleming, 2014) and could even lead to an early grave (Gonzalez-Mulé, & Cockburn, 2016). Reports (Kennedy, 2018) on the inquest into the sudden death of a 21-year old bank intern, Moritz Erhardt, suggested his death could have been triggered by exhaustion after working for 72 hours straight (Kennedy, 2018). This demonstrates the serious risks involved when work and goals are so tightly bound together, that even taking time out to sleep or rest is not an option.

Understanding basic needs and what motivates workers is also a vital stepping stone towards creating greater employee well-being (Chmiel, Fraccaroli & Sverke, 2017) and perhaps a lot can be learned from a large research study carried out on self-employed workers (Warr & Inceoglu, 2017). Results showed participants enjoyed greater engagement with their work and reported higher levels of happiness than those in direct employment. They also enjoyed more success, were more satisfied, energised and innovated. The flexibility, freedom and autonomy they enjoyed brought out higher standards in their work, as well as giving them a greater competitive edge. Their feelings of satisfaction were boosted as they recognised any rewards they got were attributable to their own hard work and contribution (Warr & Inceoglu, 2017).

**Stress in the workplace**

However, flexible hours controlled by management have also been found wanting, as research (Wood, 2016) carried out at a large UK supermarket uncovered abuse in the management of zero/flexi hour contracts that took place in order to keep costs down. This led to employees feeling stressed due to uncertainty about their hours and the knock-on effect it had
on their personal lives, resulting in negative feelings towards the employer (Wood, 2016). To address issues of such poor work practices similar to those as outlined by Wood (2016), the Irish government recently outlawed the use of zero-hour contracts except in cases of emergency ("Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018", 2019) resulting in greater rights for workers. Employers may even gain from such legislation, as this style of poor management, particularly in the service industry, could result in a false economy (Motro, Ordonez & Pittarello, 2014). Management may think they are saving money, when in reality stressed and unhappy employees translate into dissatisfied customers as well as resulting in employee sick leave, legal challenges and ultimately loss of revenue (Motro et al., 2014).

Conversely, properly controlled management of flexible working solutions and new policies can reap positive results (Barnes, 2018). One company, in an effort to improve employee well-being, ran a trial and introduced a four-day working week but still paid employees for five. Researchers found this new flexible structure increased well-being, job satisfaction and reduced stress, while suffering no loss of revenue or quality of service to its clients. Additionally, as part of their extra four days off per month, each employee was obliged to work voluntarily in their local community one day per month (Barnes, 2018). Volunteering, such as this, not only serves the community but also gives the employee an opportunity to give something back (Piliavin & Siegl, 2007). Additionally, volunteering has been found to boost both psychological well-being and self-reported health of volunteers, particularly those who had a lower level of social integration than their counterparts (Piliavin & Siegl, 2007).

However, Wood & Michaelides (2016) discovered that not all workers, who wish for more autonomy and flexibility by being their own boss, can escape the hazards of work-related stress. They found as demands on freelancers increased so did their anxiety and stress levels. They also found that an increase in working hours alone was not detrimental to well-being as it brought calmness and greater enthusiasm, but this changed when the degree of difficulty of
their workload was increased, which negatively impacted on their home life. Interestingly, spending less time at home as a result of working longer hours, correlated positively with a decrease in work-family/non-work interference (Wood & Michaelides, 2016). This is another key finding, as it demonstrates how longer hours alone may not be an issue for employees but rather if demands are unreasonable and workloads increase it can lead to stress.

Job & life satisfaction

For many years, the link between a happy workforce and greater productivity was dismissed by researchers due to a lack of supporting empirical data (Chmiel et al., 2017). In the 1950s clinical psychologist, Frederick Herzberg, posited making a job more interesting rather than simply increasing pay led to greater job satisfaction, as well as harvesting employee psychological growth (Herzberg, 1987). His two-factor motivation-hygiene theory suggested the key variable in order to improve job satisfaction was motivation, whereas poor hygiene external factors such as salary and conditions leads to dissatisfaction. However, Herzberg was quick to add that dissatisfaction is not the opposite to satisfaction i.e. an improvement in hygienic factors does not equate to satisfaction (Herzberg, 1987). Hackman & Oldman (1975) later constructed a Development of the Job Diagnostic Survey theoretical model consisting of five core job dimensions (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback). They suggested these factors influenced three critical psychological states relating to meaningfulness, responsibility and results. These in turn then lead to higher motivation, performance, satisfaction and turnover and lower absenteeism (Hackman & Oldman, 1975).

Throughout the 1990s the number of studies on job satisfaction declined from the previous decade (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001) as research findings at the time were conflicting. However, Judge et al. (2001) conducted a broad review of 300+ studies and were firm in their conclusion that the satisfaction-performance relationship held real merit and
required further analysis. When Zelenski, Murphy Jenkins (2008) carried out their study, doubt still existed as to the connection between the two but their findings also concluded that happier employees were more productive. Subsequent research (Oswald, Proto & Sgroi, 2015) has found that there are many advantages to achieving healthy levels of psychological well-being of employees, not just to the employees themselves but to companies who go on to experience an increase in productivity, revenue, a more satisfied workforce and, ultimately, happier shareholders (Oswald et al., 2015). Greater well-being at work also brings about an improvement in employee creativity, productivity and loyalty, resulting in enhanced customer care (Sgroi, 2015). Such renewed positivity amongst the workforce also brings benefits to society at large, as well-being plays a key role in creating strong and thriving communities (Jeffrey, Mahony, Michaelson & Abdalla, 2014).

The role of organisations

Workplace stress is bad for business with annual costs to employers in the region of $300bn in the US (Smith, 2016) and £5bn in the UK (Russell, Maitre, Watson & Fahey, 2018). Recognising how employees are a company’s most valuable resource is a must in today’s fast paced and competitive working environment (Hyacinth, 2017). Companies, who place increasing shareholder value as a priority above the human factor, can find themselves severely out of pocket due to costs of fighting cases brought by disgruntled employees and, in some cases, even leading to bankruptcy (Hyacinth, 2017).

To combat such escalating problems, legislation in Ireland and the EU outlines a ‘Duty of Care’ employers have to their employees to ensure they are not unduly compromised at work (HSA, 2018). The ESRI also recently identified (Russell et al., 2018) several key work stressors amongst workers in the UK and Ireland, such as emotional demands, time pressure, bullying/harassment/violence, physically demanding work, effort-reward imbalance and long
working hours. They also found that by putting in place appropriate support structures, in partnership with both managers and co-workers, such stressors can be mitigated (Russell et al., 2018). However, such support is only of benefit once the demands on employees are not unreasonable and management actively engage in ensuring support is sustained (HSA, 2018). Once again, a recurrent theme with the research outlined in this paper points towards how companies can fail in their approach in harvesting psychological well-being in the workplace. Such failure seems to highlight a disconnect between management and their employees, and perhaps even a disconnect between researchers, policymakers and organisations.

Such disconnection is further exposed when, for example, trends and demands change, such as in the 1990s (O'Riordan, 2018) when HR experienced a transition from *simple HR* to *strategic HR*, with the aim to place more emphasis on the interests of organisations so that HR practices and policies aligned more closely with their needs (O'Riordan, 2018). This ultimately led to HR professionals having to rethink their place and take on a more strategic position of serving the needs of managers and shareholders above the needs of their employees. Ultimately, on the ground, this equated to HR changing from being a *people* partner to a *business* partner and left employees feeling neglected, resulting in poorer performance (O'Riordan, 2018). The challenge now facing HR professionals is changing the mindset of management who may see HR as a costly *extra* rather than something that *adds value*. Good HR practices can act as a motivating force for staff as it gives them a voice and a sense that someone cares and understands their needs, leading to suitable flexible working options, greater confidence and positivity in terms of employee productivity, performance and well-being (O'Riordan, 2018). Again, such findings point towards the need for employers to be more transparent, flexible and aware that employees have voices, needs and expectations, which if met, could lead to very successful partnerships (O'Riordan, 2018).
Evidence of not paying proper attention to peoples’ and workers’ needs can be found when considering Brexit, Donald Trump’s election to the US Presidency and recent Yellow Vest protests in Paris. Brexit has been viewed as a vote against the British elite, with supporters believing their values and interests were being ignored (Mauldin, 2016). In America, Trump’s election was seen as a victory over the coastal elite by those who also felt left behind (Zurcher, 2016). Anger has been gradually brewing in France since the 1980s following the introduction of economic and cultural regulations, resulting in economic hardship for workers believing they too have been forgotten by those in charge (Henley, 2018). These are the very real consequences of ignoring the basic needs of individuals that perhaps organisations should heed when managing their own workforces.

Transparency is another key component for employers to bear in mind when wishing to create thriving, collaborative and happy working environments as choosier employees, such as millennials, have been found to ‘job hop’ (Gallup, 2016) if they observe poor management practice in the workplace. Researchers, LoMonaco-Benzing, & Ha-Brookshire (2016) found that what was once considered to be a lack of loyalty on the part of these young workers was, in fact, an action taken as a result of the company’s culture, values and work practices not adding up to what they were sold at interview. They also found that as these workers were brought up in less traditional and more progressive/pro-social environments, it has led to a lower tolerance of poor management systems (LoMonaco-Benzing et al., 2016).

Conversely, those in charge have the power to turn things around as management intervention was found to be effective (Kelly et al., 2014) with the introduction of increased supervisory support to employees coupled with greater work schedule flexibility. Results of such intervention were a decrease in work-family conflict, a feeling of being more in control of their lives and an increase in life satisfaction levels. Employees also perceived themselves as getting adequate time to spend with loved ones, delivering much needed psychological boosts
(Kelly et al., 2014). Again, this serves to highlight the many positives that management can realise by carefully choosing and tailoring the correct level of support and flexibility to suit both parties.

**Rationale for this study**

This mixed-methods research study will attempt to quantitatively analyse and compare differences in levels of well-being of today’s Information Age workers by using the psychological variables of perceived stress, job satisfaction and life satisfaction. It will seek to test the traditional work-life balance concept that workers experience better well-being by being able to psychologically switch on and off. Further, to try and bridge the gap of disconnection that evidentially exists between workers and their employers, this current study also includes qualitative questions to capture participants’ thoughts and needs. By drawing on Kelloway & Day’s (2005a) more holistic approach of encompassing outcomes pertaining to individuals, organisations and societal factors, it is hoped these quantitative and qualitative findings will add to the body of research that exists in this area and highlight to employers the merit of putting in place properly managed constructs that work for both sides.

**The three hypotheses**

1. There will be a significant difference between work-life balance (WLB) workers and work-life merge (WLM) workers on levels of affective job satisfaction (AJS)
2. There will be a significant difference in levels of well-being of a) perceived stress (PS) and b) satisfaction with life (SWL) between WLB and WLM workers
3. There will be a significant difference in levels of satisfaction a) SWL and b) AJS between WLM workers who have flexible working arrangements with employers (WLM Flexi) and those who do not (WLM Non-flexi)
The three qualitative questions

1. How does your job impact or affect your personal life?

2. What would you change about your job to enhance your personal life?

3. What motivates you most about working?
METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants (N = 133) in this quantitative and qualitative anonymous study were male (N = 50) and female (N = 83) full-time employees ranging in age from 18–65 years old. In addition to being over 18 years of age, participants were required to be working a minimum of 20 hours per week but not solely from home. Two groups of workers were identified as WLB (work-life balance) and WLM (work-life merge) with a split ratio of 66%/34% respectively. WLB workers (N = 90) being defined as full-time workers who worked solely from their place of work and WLM workers (N = 43) being defined as full-time workers who worked from a combination of their place of work and home. For the third hypothesis, the WLM group was further split between (WLM Flexi) being defined as those that had a flexible working arrangement with their employer (N = 31) and (WLM Non-flexi) those that did not have a flexible working arrangement with their employer (N = 12). Participants were invited to participate in the online survey through the social media platforms of Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. Some participants chose to share the survey on their own personal profiles generating a snowball effect of sample collection. Consent was obtained from all participants before proceeding with the survey and no incentives or rewards were offered or given for their participation.

Design

A mixed-methods research study was carried out to quantitatively analyse data regarding self-reported levels of Perceived Stress (PS), Satisfaction With Life (SWL) and Affective Job Satisfaction (AJS) between the two groups of workers. Thematic analysis was also carried out on the three short answer questions asked.
One Independent Variable (IV):

1. Full-time workers (with two levels) for first two hypotheses:
   a) WLB workers (who work from their place of work only)
   b) WLM workers (who work from a combination of their place of work and home)

One Independent Variable (IV):

1. WLM workers (with two levels) for third hypothesis:
   a) WLM Flexi workers (who had a flexible working arrangement with their employer)
   b) WLM Non-flexi (who did not have a flexible working arrangement with their employer)

Three Dependent Variables (DVs):

1. Perceived Stress (PS) total
2. Satisfaction With Life (SWL) total
3. Affective Job Satisfaction (AJS) total

**Materials**

Google Forms was used to create an electronic questionnaire with an online link posted on Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. An information sheet and consent form were included as a precursor to the survey (see Appendix A). Demographic questions were asked to identify gender, age group, hours of work, place of work and commuting times (see Appendix B). Three widely used psychological research scale questionnaires were used i.e. the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) and A Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (BIAJS) (Thompson & Phua, 2012) (see Appendix C). Three qualitative questions were also
asked to learn more about how jobs affected participants’ personal lives, what they would change about their jobs to enhance their personal lives and what motivates them to work (See Appendix D). Contact details for support services were provided at the end of the survey (see Appendix E). The following software was used: SPSS v.25 to carry out the quantitative analysis, MS Word 2016 to create APA style tables, MS Publisher 2016 to draw the thematic maps, MS Excel 2016 for importing the raw data from Google Forms and NVivo v.12 to create nodes, themes, sub-themes and the word cloud when carrying out the thematic analysis of the qualitative answers using Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-steps of thematic analysis.

*Questionnaire 1: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)*

Participants completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1993), which was designed to measure an individual’s perception of stress during the past month. The questions are constructed in such a way as to make them easy for respondents to understand, and the answers give insight into how controllable and unpredictable they perceive their lives to be, which are central factors when experiencing stress (Wu & Amtmann, 2013). The scale, due to its general nature, is seen as being suitable to any subpopulation group, who have at least a junior high school education (Cohen et al., 1993). For this survey, the shorter 4-item scale was used (PSS-4), which asked respondents to rate their stress over the last month by using two negatively stated and two positively stated items. The internal consistency of this shortened 4-item scale was found to be a sufficient and suitable tool for assessing perceived stress levels (Vallejo, Vallejo-Slocker, Fernández-Abascal & Mañanes, 2018). PSS-4 asks about participants’ thoughts and feelings during the last month, e.g. —In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? and —In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? and are rated on a 5-point scale from Never to Very Often. Scores range from 0-16, with the
lower the score, the lower the perceived stress and the higher the score, the higher the perceived stress. Reverse coding was employed for items 2 and 3. Internal reliability (Cronbach’s α) reached its desired level for this scale at .75 (Cronbach, 1951).

**Questionnaire 2: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**

Participants also completed the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985), which was designed as a tool to measure the judgemental component of subjective well-being. There is a moderate to high correlation with SWLS scoring and other scales that also focus on subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1985). The scale has also proven to be a useful tool in detecting changes in life satisfaction of patients undergoing clinical intervention (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Research from a combination of both self- and peer- reported studies of life satisfaction and subjective well-being, strongly suggests that subjective well-being is a far-reaching and lasting phenomenon, and not just a spur of the moment judgement (Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik, 1991). When completing the survey participants rated, for example, the conditions of their life, their satisfaction with life and whether they would make life changes if they could start over. The SWLS consists of five items, e.g. —So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life, —In most ways my life is close to my ideal, and were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1- strongly disagree, to 7- strongly agree. Higher scores (ranging from 31-35) are indicative of a greater degree of life satisfaction. Conversely, lower scores (ranging from 5-9) are indicative of lower life satisfaction. Internal reliability (Cronbach’s α) reached its desired level for this scale at .90 (Cronbach, 1951).

**Questionnaire 3: A Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (BIAJS)**

The third and final quantitative scale that participants completed was A Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (BIAJS) (Thompson & Phua, 2012), which was designed in response to
criticism of research methods of measuring affective job satisfaction. Previously, research scales were lengthy and measured job satisfaction cognitively rather than affectively and the brief BIJAS addressed both issues whilst also maintaining integrity (Thompson & Phua, 2012). The BIJAS consists of seven items, e.g. —I find real enjoyment in my job, —Most days I am enthusiastic about my job and were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1- Strongly Agree to 5- Strongly Disagree. Three of the seven items were distractor items (2, 4 and 6) and only the remaining four items were used to find total score of job satisfaction. Internal reliability (Cronbach’s α) reached its desired level for this scale at .88 (Cronbach, 1951).

Procedure
This study comprised of quantitative data and qualitative data collected when participants submitted their completed online surveys. An online information sheet advised participants of the nature of the study on psychological well-being of workers and that it would take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Before starting the survey, they answered three compulsory questions to confirm they were 18 years of age or older, that they worked a minimum of 20 hours per week and that they consented to take part in this survey (See Appendix A). All participants were then asked a series of demographic questions (See Appendix B) before completing the three quantitative multiple-choice questionnaires (See Appendix C) and the three short answer qualitative questions (See Appendix D). Once participants completed the survey, a pop-up screen thanked them for their participation and asked them to submit. No further action was required from them post submission.

Ethics
The information sheet also informed participants that the survey abided by The Code of Ethics of Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and that participation was voluntary and that they had
the right to withdraw at any time. However, due to the anonymous nature of all data collected, they were also made aware it would not be possible to withdraw from participation once they submitted their answers, as it would be impossible to attribute data to any one individual. They were also advised all data collected would be stored on a password protected PC and be destroyed one year after the examination board published their results. They were also given contact details for both the researcher and supervisor (See Appendix A). They were advised contact details for support services would be provided at end of the survey, should any questions raise minor negative feelings (See Appendix E).

Data analysis

In an effort to understand more about how work impacts and affects participants’ personal lives, what they would change about their job to enhance their personal lives and what motivates them about work, the following qualitative questions were asked:

1. How does your job impact or affect your personal life?
2. What would you change about your job to enhance your personal life?
3. What motivates you most about working?

To analyse these answers, Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-steps of thematic analysis was used, which included familiarisation with data in the first instance, followed by the creation of initial codes and identification of themes and sub-themes. Thematic maps were then created which acted as a good visual guide when repeatedly reviewing and refining the themes and sub-themes further. Finally, a thematic report was then created, which was supported with direct quotes from participants.
RESULTS

SPSS v.25 was used to run descriptive and inferential statistical analysis in the quantitative part of this study, the results of which are detailed below. Preliminary analysis of the data collected found violations of parametric test assumptions. Therefore, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests were performed in place of the originally intended parametric Independent Samples t-tests and MANOVA tests. The significance threshold was set at .05 for each test, which were all two-tailed. The z value was used to calculate the effect size for any significant results (Cohen, 1988). NVivo v.12 was used to carry out the thematic analysis of the answers given to the three qualitative questions asked, using Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-steps of thematic analysis.

Descriptive statistics

Participants in this study (N = 133) were male (N = 50) and female (N = 83) ranging in age from 18-65 with the largest proportion belonging to the 46-55 age group (36.1%) and the second largest belonging to the 26-35 age group (26.3%) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Participants broken down by age groups
The sample consisted of two groups of full-time workers i.e. work-life balance (WLB) workers (N = 90) who worked solely from their place of work and work-life merge (WLM) workers (N = 43) who worked from a combination of their place of work and home (See Table 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of workers per group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance workers</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>67.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-life merge workers</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To take part in the survey, each participant had to work full-time for a minimum of 20 hours per week. In the WLB group, those that worked on average of 40–49 hours per week represented the largest group (46.7%) with the second largest working an average of 30-39 hours per week (28.9%) (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Average hours worked per week by the work-life balance group
In the WLM group, those that worked on average of 30–39 hours per week represented the largest group (34.9%) with the second largest working an average of 40-49 hours per week (30.2%) (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Average hours worked per week by the work-life merge group

For both groups, the majority had commutes of either Up to 5 or 5-10 hours per week with the biggest difference being in the 10-20 hour per week bracket belonging to 13.3% of the WLB group (See Figure 4) and only 4.7% of the WLM group (See Figure 5).

Figure 4: Average hours spent commuting per week by the work-life balance group
Each participant completed questions from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction Scale (BIAJS). Cronbach’s Alpha reliability was found to be at the desired level for each (See Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of psychological measures for hypotheses 1-3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Stress</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Life</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>24.43</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>14.60</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests of normality were run for each of the psychological scales used and results showed the significance value of the Shapiro-Wilk tests was less than .05 for each scale indicating the data deviated significantly from a normal distribution (See Table 3).
Table 3: Test results for normality of scores from the three psychological scales used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Shaprio-Wilk df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Stress Total</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction With Life Total</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Job Satisfaction Total</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Inferential Statistics**

Due to violations of parametric test assumptions, as outlined above, only non-parametric tests were used in this study.

*First hypothesis* looked at affective job satisfaction (AJS) levels of WLB workers (N = 90) and WLM workers (N = 42) to establish if there would be a significant difference between the two groups (IV = WLB & WLM conditions; DV = AJS levels).

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the WLB (mean rank = 62.07) condition and the WLM (mean rank = 76) condition did differ significantly in AJS levels ($z = -1.97$, $p = .049$, $r = .17$). Therefore, the null can be rejected (See Table 4).

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U test results showing significant difference in affective job satisfaction levels between work-life balance and work-life merge conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>1491.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect size (small to medium)</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second hypothesis looked at a) satisfaction with life (SWL) and b) perceived stress (PS) levels to test if there would be a significant difference between the WLB & WLM groups (IV = WLB & WLM conditions; DVs = SWL and PS levels).

A Mann-Whitney test revealed that the WLB (N = 89, mean rank = 61.49) condition and the WLM (N = 43, mean rank = 76.87) condition did differ significantly in SWL levels (z = -2.17, p = .030, r = .19). Therefore, the null can be rejected (See Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mann-Whitney U</th>
<th>1467.50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect size (small to medium)</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the WLB (N = 86, mean rank = 64.90) condition and the WLM (N = 41, mean rank = 62.12) condition did not differ significantly in PS levels (z = -.40, p = .690). Therefore, the null cannot be rejected.

Third hypothesis looked at SWL and AJS levels to test if there would be a significant difference between WLM workers who have a flexible working arrangement with their employers (WLM flexi) and those who do not (WLM non-flexi) (IV = WLM flexi & WLM non-flexi; DVs = AJS and SWL levels).
A Mann-Whitney test revealed that the WLM flexi (N = 31, mean rank = 25.61) condition and the WLM non-flexi (N = 12, mean rank = 12.67) condition did differ significantly in SWL levels (z = -3.05, p = .002, r = .47). Therefore, the null can be rejected (See Table 6).

Table 6: Mann-Whitney U test results showing significant difference in satisfaction with life levels between the work-life merge flexi and work-life merge non-flexi conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SWLS Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>74.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td>-3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect size (large)</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Mann-Whitney test revealed that the WLM flexi (N = 30, mean rank = 21.90) condition and the WLM non-flexi (N = 12, mean rank = 20.50) condition did not differ significantly in AJS levels (z = -.38, p = .736). Therefore, the null cannot be rejected.

Conclusion

As hypothesised, a significant difference was found between WLB and WLM workers in their levels of job and life satisfaction but none was found between these groups on level of perceived stress. WLB workers had a longer working week with 46.7% of them working an average of 40-49 hours per week compared to 30.2% of WLM workers. A greater proportion of WLB workers also had a longer commute with 13.3% travelling between 10-20 hours per week compared to just 4.7% of WLM. These results would indicate that long hours and commutes impact on satisfaction levels. Also, as hypothesised, WLM workers who had a flexible working arrangement with their employer enjoyed greater life satisfaction levels than those who did not but there was no significant difference found in job satisfaction levels between them. These results suggest there is a correlation between job flexibility and greater life satisfaction.
Qualitative thematic analysis

The researcher used Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six steps of thematic analysis to analysis the answers given. Three qualitative questions were asked to gain greater insight into the thoughts and needs of participants, all of whom were in full-time employment. The three questions asked were:

1. How does your job impact or affect your personal life?
2. What would you change about your job to enhance your personal life?
3. What motivates you most about working?

A word cloud from the answers given was generated in NVivo v.12 (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Word cloud of answers given by participants to the three qualitative questions asked
Familiarisation with data and initial coding

The raw data was downloaded into a spreadsheet and reviewed by the researcher in its entirety to gain familiarity with it before being imported into NVivo. Initial codes were then generated.

Transition from codes to themes

The next phase of Braun & Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis involved the organisation of the initial codes into broad themes. Each code was categorised into unnamed themes and in some cases the same code was categorised into more than one theme. When relationships between codes and themes began to emerge, sub-themes were created. At this point, the initial themes were further reviewed to ensure an accurate representation of the coded extracts was being met. Thematic models were then generated to create visuals of the themes which were then refined further by making any adjustments that the researcher deemed necessary.

Defining and naming themes

Continual analysis and refinement of the themes and sub-themes led to the creation of definitions and names and the researcher was able to outline each theme in detail confident of its relevance to the data collected. Once all themes were defined and named, a thematic report was generated which connected the themes back to the research questions asked and the previous literature reviewed on well-being in the workplace.

Themes

Question No. 1: “How does your job impact or affect your personal life?”

Four overarching themes were identified in the answers with a number of sub-themes in support of same. A summary of themes and sub-themes can be seen in Table 7 below.
Table 7: Summary of themes on impact or affect job has on personal life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brings benefits &amp; positivity</td>
<td>• Enhances my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Positive impact &amp; affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes up too much time</td>
<td>• No time for personal pursuits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of family time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tired and exhausted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work too inflexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brings structure &amp; balance</td>
<td>• Have good work-life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have set boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Free to choose time off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively affects mental health</td>
<td>• Hard to switch off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Moody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stress &amp; worry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1: Brings benefits & positivity

Participants spoke of the many benefits and positive affect their jobs had on their lives. Some viewed their job as an enhancement to their personal lives and linked being happy in work to being happy in their personal lives.

Participant 99: “If work is going well it helps my personal life too”

Participant 22: “I am happy with my job therefore happy with my life”

Others spoke of how remuneration from their jobs enabled them to fund their personal lives and enhance their standard of living.

Participant 118: “It provides me unique opportunities and a gold standard of living.”
Participant 21: “Gives me satisfaction and money to fund my personal life.”

**Theme 2: Takes up too much time**

A strong theme throughout the answers given was around the issue of time and the negative impact having too little time had on their personal lives. Participants also spoke about lack of flexibility with work hours resulting in less time for family or personal pursuits.

Participant 25: “It takes a lot of my personal time and as such it prevents me from fully enjoying my family”

Participant 10: “Restricted with flexibility - main problem. I have to work 9-5:30 no exceptions.”

Others acknowledged the role technology played in how it blurred the boundaries between work and personal time.

Participant 89: “It somewhat impacts due to new technologies breaking down the divide between work time / personal time”

Some took a more pragmatic viewpoint when acknowledging the impact technology had on their lives resulting in a merge of life and work.

Participant 83: “Extensively.... but I accept the nature of the role I'm in is labour intensive (in stints). By accepting that and being aware, it makes other of my life easier to assess and manage. Of course, at times, its straining on my personal life and I've probably lost out on some interests but I'm playing the long game and you must sacrifice to get places. If you think emails are on my phone, research is on my phone, etc... there isn't much getting away from it so I see it that my life and profession are to be managed as one entity as opposed to "my Life and my Job".”
Tiredness as a result of working long hours was also an issue for many participants as it resulted in having limited time with family and friends but also brought on feelings of guilt for some too.

Participant 111: “My job is so tiring mentally that I do not want to have many interactions once I am off work. It also impacts the people with whom I spend personal time.”

Participant 12: “It's hard to juggle family life & work with young children. Feelings of guilt & being tired”

Theme 3: Brings structure & balance

Some participants spoke of being able to establish boundaries between their working and personal lives and having good work-life balance. This seemed to be easier for those who had greater flexibility in their work.

Participant 94: “It is great because I can choose my own days off to a degree as I am my own boss.”

Participant 69: “Not really as I am freee to choose my time off”

Participant 7: “My job doesn't affect my personal life adversely. I have a fairly good work life balance.”

Other participants regarded the impact their work had on their personal lives as something they could control and make a conscious decision about in order to minimise any negatives.

Participant 45: “Tend not to bring work physically nor mentally home with me. This is something i learned to rather than instructed to do.”

Participant 4: “I have established boundaries around work and home to make sure they don't impact each other”
Theme 4: Negatively impacts mental health

There was a strong theme around mental health and how work had a negative impact on same. Strong feelings were expressed with many talking about how hard it was to switch off mentally from the stress and worry of work. Worrying about work when at home was a common complaint amongst some participants.

Participant 18: “Can be worried about managing well in work. Worry at home then”

Participant 19: “Hard to switch off. Lot of support expectations”

Participant 127: “It can be hard to let go, I am often left with the emotions, stress, worry, anxiety, fear, self doubt, feeling not good enough, inadequate. These feelings can be hard to shake off and so are sometimes clouding who I am in my personal life.”

Not being happy in work had the potential to greatly affect participants mood and feelings of happiness in general.

Participant 35: “It often causes me unhappiness”

Participant 87: “Feel sometimes unsatisfied and therefore more moody in my personal life.”

A thematic model of the themes and sub-themes discussed above is shown in Figure 7 below.
**Figure 7:** Thematic map: How does your job impact or affect your personal life?

**Question No. 2:** “What would you change about your job to enhance your personal life?”

Five overarching themes were identified in the answers with a number of sub-themes in support of same. A summary of themes and sub-themes can be seen in Table 8 below.
Table 8: Summary of themes on desired job changes to enhance personal life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes:</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better work structures</td>
<td>• Change efficiencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free up more personal time</td>
<td>• More flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shorter commute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work less hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change job</td>
<td>• More fulfilling role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Retire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Try something different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not change anything</td>
<td>• Happy in job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have good work life balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Pay increase**

For some participants the only change they would make to their jobs to enhance their personal lives would be to see an increase in earnings.

Participant 30: “Better salary!”

**Theme 2: Better work structures**

Some participants expressed frustration about work structures that were in place and felt that same needed improvement so that they could be more engaged and their skillset better utilised.

Participant 111: “I would have a job that allowed me to utilize my skills, not one that dealt with so many topics which I find exhausting and uninteresting.”
Participant 93: “Make it more challenging”

Participant 127: “More support, training, time to do paperwork, team building, skills developing”

**Theme 3: Free up more personal time**

Many participants had a strong desire to change their working hours so they did not encroach on their personal time.

Participant 43: “I would like to be able to plan my work commitments/tasks so they better align with my personal life's commitments. This is not very realistic though.”

Participant 64: “Minimising the amount of work I need to take home.”

Some participants spoke of taking control over any encroachment of personal time.

Participant 83: “I think it's important if you have access to "work" outside of work, on your phone or otherwise, that you decide when you are offline. This is probably the one thing I've changed, and had to change...”

A greater level of flexibility and freedom in the workplace was also a common thread found throughout the answers.

Participant 10: “Having more flexibility in my working hours.”

Participant 48: “Would like to be able to work slightly less hours. Getting home earlier in the evening would make a huge difference”

Many participants expressed a wish to have the option of working from home and reduce commute. Others wanted to work shorter days or change over to part-time work. Some believed this could be achieved with better use of technology and/or hiring more staff.
Participant 46: “Either a combination of working from home and the workplace or hire additional staff to reduce the long days i work”

Participant 103: “Less travel from donegal to dublin for meetings/ greater use of technology”

Theme 4: Would not change anything
Some participants had no desire to change anything about their jobs and were happy with the status quo. Those that elaborated further on their reasons for being happy with their current work set-up spoke of an element of freedom and autonomy that existed in their lives.

Participant 125: “Not much, I'm very lucky in the sense that my job has a great work/life balance and allows for exploration of interests”

Participant 62: “I have created my job and I really like it”

Participant 69: “It does not impact my personal life as I can do my work as I see fit most of the time.”

Theme 5: Change job
For some, they wished to change their roles entirely, retire or try something different to gain greater fulfilment even with less pay.

Participant 82: “My current role is not what I would like to do long term. I am well paid so appreciate that I need to work hard and am happy to do so but I would prefer to do this in a role that I truly enjoy even if that involves lower pay.”

A thematic model of the themes and sub-themes discussed above is shown in Figure 8 below.
Figure 8: Thematic map: What would you change about your job to enhance your personal life?

Question No. 3: “What motivates you about working?”

Four overarching themes were identified in the answers with a number of sub-themes in support of same. A summary of themes and sub-themes can be seen in Table 9 below.
Table 9: Summary of themes on what motivates participants most about working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Improving</td>
<td>• Adding to knowledge base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enhancing skillset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People interaction</td>
<td>• Colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>• Enjoy my work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enjoy the challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helping others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pay cheque</td>
<td>• Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Learning & improving**

Learning new things and improving skillsets was found to be a motivating force for some when participants were asked what motivates them most about their jobs.

Participant 90: “The challenge to continuously improve myself and learn new things”

Participant 128: “Learning new things and bettering skills I have”

Additionally, the challenge of each day being different served as a motivator for some.

Participant 118: “Every day can be different, but all with the same background of technology consulting. Different clients and different technologies, but all technologies.”

In addition to such personal challenges, some participants were motivated by wanting to make a difference in the lives of others while at the same time bettering themselves.
Participant 110: “the Idea of making a difference in someone's life and wanting to constantly become better at what I do”

Theme 2: People interaction

A strong motivating force for many were the positives they got from interacting with other people whether clients, customers or fellow colleagues. Participants were quite enthusiastic about this aspect of their working lives.

Participant 12: “I love what I do, teaching something I am very passionate about and interacting with people”

Participant 90: “The possibility of changing a persons life”

Participant 41: “making a difference to as many people as possible”

Those that experienced good relations with fellow colleagues and enjoyed team work were further motivated by such an experience.

Participant 82: “...Being in a collaborative environment where a small a team we try to achieve goals is a real motivator for me.”

Participant 120: “Great colleagues, interesting work.”

The social life and simply experiencing the positives of being with others was another motivating force identified.

Participant 51: “Being useful, having a purpose, socialising”

Participant 17: “I love to interact with people”
Theme 3: Satisfaction

Deriving satisfaction was a very strong theme among respondents both from a professional and personal point of view with a link observed between job satisfaction and personal satisfaction.

Participant 68: “Job satisfaction. I can see that what I do has a positive impact on the children I work with”

Participant 88: “Personal fulfilment”

Participant 52: “Personal satisfaction and money”

Satisfaction also stemmed from helping others which had a knock on effect of making some participants feel good about themselves.

Participant 22: “The fact that I make people feel good”

Participant 45: “I work in Training and education so seeing others achieve makes me feel good about myself”

Some participants were motivated by the feelings they got from accomplishing tasks and from feeling useful. Others were motivated when their efforts were acknowledged by their employer. Some enjoyed the challenge of a job well done as well as helping the business to be successful.

Participant 13: “Feeling of accomplishment and being useful”

Participant 131: “Acknowledgement from my employer of my work”

Participant 109: “Doing things right and to the betterment of the business”

Theme 4: The pay cheque

Some participants cited money as their sole motivator to work as it was needed to meet their basic requirements.
Participant 49: “Got to pay the rent and bills”

Participant 35: “Security”

Whilst others also felt money was their main driving force to work they also acknowledged some element of personal interest in their work.

Participant 43: “Interest in the work itself is a factor but mostly it is down to pay.”

Participant 96: “Money. And career progression and achieving/exceeding targets. But mainly money.”

But for some, it was all about the pay cheque.

Participant 37: “Pay day. I have zero self worth invested in my job. I'm not a career person.”

Others were keen to believe that money could not be the only driving force behind going to work. Those working in goal orientated roles linked achieving their goals with basic survival, which by default brought with it a sense of reward.

Participant 83: “I think we all work for money but there has to be more to it to be satisfied. My role is very goal orientated because if we don’t achieve our goals we’re out of a job. The whole process gets me up and motivated as a result... it's rewarding work I guess.”

A thematic model of the themes and sub-themes discussed above is shown in Figure 9 below.
Conclusion

Throughout this qualitative analysis there was a strong theme around the issue of time. Many participants complained of long working hours and long commutes leading to very little time to spend with family, friends or on personal pursuits. While some were motivated purely for financial gain, many spoke of enjoying interaction with colleagues and clients and of the satisfaction they got from helping others. Some were frustrated at work constructs that they felt needed improving. There was an acknowledgment too that the lines between their working lives and personal lives were becoming more blurred due to advancing technology, which was accepted more positively by some than others. There was a real impact on mental health for some participants with answers detailing how worry and stress about their jobs bled into their homelife resulting in moodiness and a difficulty in psychologically switching off. Whilst some were happy with their working and private lives in terms of balance, many wished for less hours and greater flexibility. These qualitative findings are very much in keeping with the significant
results found in the quantitative aspect of this survey and, once again, points towards a problem where excessive demands on workers leads to poorer quality of life.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed-methods research study was to test the traditional work-life balance concept that workers experience better well-being by being able to psychologically switch on and off. This was done by measuring psychological well-being levels of WLB workers (who worked from their place of work only) and WLM workers (who worked from a combination of their place of work and home), as well as asking them some key qualitative questions. By bringing in both elements of quantitative and qualitative analyses it was hoped the findings would offer a deeper understanding surrounding workplace well-being as well as garnering valuable insights pertaining to workers’ thoughts and needs in this Information Age. As hypothesised, the results found a significant difference between the two groups in both their job satisfaction and life satisfaction levels with the WLM group scoring higher in both tests, but no significant difference was found between the groups on their perceived stress levels. Additionally, the WLM group was split into WLF Flexi (workers who had a flexible working arrangement with their employer) and WLM Non-flexi (workers who did not have a flexible working arrangement with their employer) and, as hypothesised, the more flexible group reported significantly higher life satisfaction levels. However, no significant difference was found between the same groups on their job satisfaction levels.

For the qualitative part of the study, participants were asked to describe how their jobs impacted their personal lives, what they would like to see changed and what motivated them to work. Themes that were identified ranged from positive impacts, such as, structure and financial security to negative mental aspects, such as, worry, stress and unhappiness that spilled over into their personal lives. A strong complaint amongst participants was they did not have enough time to spend with family or on personal pursuits. Desired changes ranged from better work structures to a wish to for a more flexible working arrangement, with some suggesting this
should be possible with today’s remote technology. For others, they were quite happy with the ratio of work-life balance they had already achieved in their lives. Motivating drivers ranged from the pay cheque to a real desire to want to learn more and improve their skills. Many participants expressed how work challenges plus interacting with clients, customers and colleagues were key motivators for them, as well as a strong desire to help others.

The findings here support research and theoretical models previously outlined in this paper. Whilst some participants in this study spoke of achieving a good work-life balance, this was only cited by a few as the majority spoke of their struggles with long working hours and commutes leaving them too exhausted to enjoy personal pursuits. Day et al. (2014) referred to scholars who criticised the term balance as they saw it as misleading and not a true representation of what today’s workers achieve in their work and personal lives, and the findings in this study reinforce that view. Job and life satisfaction levels were found to be higher for workers who were not tied to their place of work every day unlike their more restricted counterparts, indicating that a degree of flexibility is a key factor to achieving greater well-being. Wood (2016) had also demonstrated from their study that when flexibility is restricted it negatively impacts on workers.

Participants expressed a need for more support and better work structures in the workplace and how much they were motivated by new challenges, learning and helping others. This is particularly interesting because despite the concept of work-life balance being researched in depth over the past three decades, it would appear the early theories of Frederick Herzberg (1987), discussed previously, are as relevant today as they were when he first posited them back in the 1950s. For Herzberg, it was of huge importance to make a job interesting to help keep employees motivated while at the same time harvesting their psychological growth. However, despite such early insightful theories, a disconnect between employees and their employers still exists with excessive demands on the former’s lives. This was evident in this
study by the emergence of a strong theme of exhaustion from participants working and commuting over long periods, as well as complaints of pressure to perform whilst ‘off the job’ too. Some participants in this study spoke of how today’s technology blurs the lines between their work and private lives and those who appeared to have a stronger internal locus of control seemed to accept this as a new way of living, while others found it too intrusive and invasive.

Like all studies, this research paper is not without its weaknesses and perhaps the qualitative aspect of this study could have been conducted by interview to gather even richer data. As it stood, participants were asked to complete an online survey and this could have taken place in any number of places such as at home, at work, whilst travelling, under pressure, etc, bringing with it any number of antecedent conditions that may not have been ideal for some. There was also no opportunity to offer face to face support for any participants who may have found some of the questions disturbing and whilst they were given the contact details of support services, it may have fallen short for some participants. Also, the intended parametric tests could not be run due to test scores not being normally distributed.

The strengths of this study lie mainly in its attempt to learn and understand more about the well-being of today’s Information Age workers by giving them an opportunity to put their thoughts and needs into their own words. None of the psychological questions presented were compulsory yet many chose to take the time to talk about themselves, some quite personally. The quantitative element of this study used only tried and tested psychological scales and significant differences were found, as hypothesised. These significant findings were enhanced further by the richness of qualitative data gathered and analysed. The sample size was quite adequate with a good ratio split between the two conditions and with good representation across the age groups and sexes.

In conclusion, the findings in this study call for a need for a more contemporary approach by researchers when analysing and addressing variables that help to promote
psychologically healthy workplaces and for these new learnings to be communicated effectively to employers and policymakers. Psychological well-being in the workplace is an area that has been heavily researched by organisational psychologists, but perhaps what is lacking are real practical models that are fit for purpose in creating healthy work environments and healthy minds. Employers may not fully understand and recognise the far-reaching and mutual benefits that are to be had by adopting and managing flexible work constructs. Failure to be cognisant of peoples’ needs comes with serious consequences, as has been evidenced across the globe in recent years and outlined in this paper. Herzberg (1987) spoke of how people want to be interested, motivated and engaged, but not forgotten, ignored or left behind. Significant findings, such as those found in this study and comparable studies, coupled with Kelloway & Day’s (2005a) holistic model of adopting a broader approach, should act as a blueprint for future researchers, policymakers and management interested in harvesting psychological well-being in today’s workplaces.
REFERENCES


