

Factors Contributing To The Implementation Of Work-Family Balance Practices In Malaysian Oil And Gas Companies: From An Individual Perspective

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Abstract: *Recently, more attention is being paid to the impacts of Work-Family Balance Practices (WFBPs) at the organisational level. Factors underlying the preference for WFBPs are the flexible working hour, work support, job stress, and performance reward system. Most of past researches shared the attention of the organisational efforts on the work-related consequences such as job satisfaction, turnover intention and affective commitment amongst the employees. However, the current study aims to explore and later reveal the factors undertaking WFBPs at the individual level. The study is conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews to collect data of the experience of 34 managers and executives from the two selected Malaysian Oil and Gas companies. The description and conceptualization of the work-family balance described by the respondents explain the acceptance and insight of the practice offered. The findings revealed four factors namely well-being improvement, traditional and moderate cultural values, Islamic work ethic, and equal opportunities that give direct and indirect impact on an individuals' choice to undertake the WFBPs. Furthermore, this study is an effort to accumulate the factors of WFBPs at an individual level which are significant to the manager and executive role in the workplace. Therefore, the findings of this paper contribute as a profound path for future research on individual roles such as manager and executive.*

Keywords: Work-family balance practices; Individual level; Malaysian Oil and Gas; Manager

1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for work and family integration in terms of roles and responsibilities has become a norm amongst employees and employers, and such demand is consistent with the increasing number of women and men involved in the labour force both in developed (e.g. the UK) and developing (e.g. Malaysia) countries. There is a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of balancing or harmonising between work and family. The way to balance or harmonise both responsibilities has been shifted from traditional to dual-earner families (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). Work and family research has peaked amongst

scholars, and ideas varied across different sides and concepts in achieving work-family balance inside and outside the workplace. The role played by the manager in instructing the work and family balance practices and its adaptation relies on their balancing success between work and family (Kumari, 2012).

The focal point of this study is to analyse the factors influencing the preference to undertake work-family balance practices (WFBPs) amongst executives and managers in oil and gas (O&G) companies in Malaysia. In order to analyse the practices amongst managers, there is a need to explore how managers practice WFBPs in the workplace and how this action impacts the individuals. According to Dulk *et al.* (2011), managerial attitudes and experiences are key aspects of a manager's role in a workplace. Actions played by a manager for instance as a decision maker, is a crucial role within organisations, specifically as an internal agent. One of the important concerns is how a manager should mediate the rights of employees to utilise work-family policies (Laura Den Dulk *et al.*, 2011). There have been a number of longitudinal studies involving perceived managerial support. Powell and Mainiero (1999) argued that the support of the manager is important to the individuals or employees in the organisation in implementing the work-family balance policies (for example, the arrangement programmes). Drawing on an extensive range of sources, some authors (e.g. Eby *et al.*, 2005; Md-Sidinet. *al.*, 2010; Dulk *et al.*, 2011; Berman *et al.*, 2013; Koet *al.*, 2013) have set out different ways of describing the managers' support and utilising those practices or programmes. These factors should all be combined to create family-supportive workplace environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW (THEORETICAL DEFINITION OF WORK FAMILY BALANCE)

The broad use of the term 'work-family balance' is common amongst scholars in work and family areas, including organisations or in public discussion in an attempt to be 'family-friendly' (Fagnani, 2004; Abendroth and Den Dulk, 2011). Work-family balance, whether legislative or managerial, often depends on employees' practices and employers' discretion (e.g. see Budd and Mumford, 2006). Employees who take preference over their work tasks indicate that the employees have more choice of what they want to do and when to do it, hence supporting the work-family balance. However, the concept of work-life balance has been criticised in terms of its accuracy in using the concept as a subjective quality of life measurement (Pichler, 2009). This means to say that the use of work-family balance as an indicator that family well-being should be objected, such as a study into the positive or negative diversity within different groups, societies and countries in a plural society (Noraini M. Noor *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the introduction of work-family balance has been defined differently based on various perspectives.

Although opinions on work-life balance varied, an agreement exists to a certain extent that work-family balance refers to the ability to harmonise one's work, family and personal life (Poelmans *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, Professor Poelmans argues that the current understanding of a practical and theoretical work-family balance is to achieve the balance in organisations. The diction of work and family balance has become an important feature of much current debate between employers and policy makers (Rubery & Urwin, 2011). It has been demonstrated that a career achievement within individual satisfaction at the workplace or personal life responsibilities can be challenging and can affect factors within each role (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011; Foundation, 1989). The ability to strike a balance between workplace desires and personal life desires is a key subject discussed amongst personnel and companies worldwide (Beham, Prag, Drobnic, Präg, & Drobnič, 2012; Stock, Bauer, & Bieling, 2013). Nevertheless, the theory does not fully explain the construct of 'balance'. For instance, Sturges and Guest (2004) examined the time balance amongst

graduates by considering their toleration between extra working hours and their relationship with the work and family lives. It results in a dissatisfaction either in terms of time balance, involvement balance or satisfaction balance. Meanwhile, the search of the literature revealed few studies which insisted that balance is not considered a linking mechanism between work and family (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Balance is believed to be achieved by the player or couple who manage to align dual earning and caring responsibilities by excluding emotional strains along the way to achieve it (Crompton & Lyonette, 2014).

In order to emphasise some key principles towards the achievement of harmonising between work and family needs, the following definition is considered for what it excludes. Felstead *et al.*(2002) conceptualises work-family balance as a sensitive choice and self-sufficiency with respect to the aspects of engagement by doing work at home. Although this result differs from other published studies, it focuses on the way in which workers shift the restrictions of work and non-work at home. In addition, the definition given is to clarify the option to work at home by companies in which individuals are accountable for the quality of their own productivity (Felstead *et al.*, 2002).

The unconducive working environment either in an organisation or at home has shifted the employment and the reality of today's workforce because it tends to overlook the fact that the employers might consider work-family balance (Lewis, 1996). Consequently, the another interpretation of work-family balance is given by (Greenhaus *et al.*, (2003)) who urges individuals to be able to expand engagement and satisfaction equally between own employment and family responsibilities. This definition includes an understanding of two equal components of the work-family balance, namely inputs and outcomes. Each component is represented as having a positive or negative balance by being equally high or low in levels of time, attention and involvement. Moreover, the following definition is useful because work-family balance has been broadened to include the cross-appearance of resources. Clark (2001) explains that with a minimum of role conflict, an individual can accomplish satisfaction and good functioning either at home or in the workplace. The term 'role conflict' is used by other scholars to describe the imbalance of multi-roles played by men or women either in the workplace or at home.

The following section describes the methodology of the study, followed by the findings and the discussion about the significant factors contributing to the implementation of WFBBPs.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The research philosophy underpinning this study is interpretivism. The "epistemology concerns what it is possible to know whereas ontology concerns what there is to know in the world 'out there' which results in philosophical traditions that have answered research questions in different ways" (Harper, 2011). The qualitative interview is used to obtain the interviewees' perspectives, and in particular, to discover how and why they developed their particular perspective (King, 2004). Thus, the present research conducted a preliminary study on a small-scale sample and attempted to model a full-scale performance in the actual interview.

The interview guide was obtained from the literature analysis and formulated according to the aims of the study. Initially, the sample was selected from amongst employees at the meso- and micro-levels of organisations. The selection of the sample will refine the parameters of this present study. The actual interviewees consisted of the 34 employees amongst managers and executives from the two Malaysian Oil and Gas companies. In gathering the research data, the demographic factors i.e; age, educational level and social level within the Malaysian managers were considered.

3.2 Measures

It is very important to understand the research design before carrying out the research. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the methodological framework through the underlying philosophy of the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist approach in social science is used to explain the meaning of human actions or behaviours and interaction through their actual experiences. The interpretivist approach (phenomenology) and the study design using semi-structured interviews were adopted to study the WFBPs amongst Malaysian employees in the workplace. In-depth information was gathered from the interview transcription, and the collected data were stored, coded and analysed using NVivo.

3.3 *Data Analysis*

The information collected from the interviews was processed using a systematic analysis. This process involves transcription of the audio recorded into digital text which was further analysed using template thematic analysis. As explained by King, Cassell and Symon (2004, p256), template analysis is 'the process of identifying a principal or a priori themes from textual data'. In detail, to start the data analysis, a set of a priori themes were determined by referring to the interview schedule which has the study's objective drivers that provide structure to the process of data analysis. The results involve producing the initial template, coding, and interpreting process with main purpose of gathering the final descriptive codes. These processes are then grouped into themes that reflect the richness of the phenomenon captured. Each of the codes addressed was divided according to the research questions of the study. Thus, the codes are the result of interpretation of the semi-structured interview questions which are later directed to achieve the aim of the study.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the thematic analysis revealed the individual elements that impact the impression of the WFBPs among employees. The factors are clarified as job satisfaction, Islamic Work Ethic, Traditional and moderate cultural value, equal opportunities and increased self-esteem, and well-being improvement. The following sub topic detailed the findings.

4.1 *Job Satisfaction*

The findings of the study showed that the first aspect mentioned by the individuals who undertake the WFBPs is the job satisfaction. Even though Company A is a government-owned company, which is well-known to have good family-friendly working environment, the respondents of this study stated that there is still low awareness amongst the employees in undertaking the WFBPs in the workplace as shared by a 35-year-old female manager. The job nature of the O&G sector involves the offshore oil platform that separates the social entertainment of a person for more than two weeks. Yet, the respondents of the study shared their feelings on job satisfaction in terms of knowledge, skills and experience that are valued in the O&G future career. On top of that, the respondents also mentioned that the satisfaction allows some of them to appreciate the pleasant working environment created from the WFBPs on the ground or onshore, thus, giving them the advantage to experience a more work-life balance.

On the other hand, the respondents of the private O&G companies acknowledged that the implementation of the WFBPs has an impact on the career and work-life progress in the workplace. Based on the findings, the respondents stated that the concern is about their job progression in the O&G industry. The self-development experience at the early stage was to have working experience with the Company B, a privately-owned O&G company. One of the respondents pointed out that the WFBPs has been introduced in the company for almost ten years, and until today, the practices have proven to have some impacts, particularly on the individual working experience.

4.2 *Islamic Work Ethic*

The second factor found contributing to the implementation of WFBPs on the individual well-being is the influence of being a kind Muslim who promotes Islamic teaching value and translating other faith-belief values into own actions. The actions towards the avoidance of risk that could undermine the values of good faith, fidelity, diligence, and integrity are one of the company's business ethics. On top of that, a huge number of Muslims working in Company A, indicated that the WFBPs' influence on the workforce actions towards work ethics is significant. As a Muslim, some of the respondents in the study repeatedly mentioned the importance of being nice and gentle with women at all time. This includes providing private space for personal needs such as to pump milk. To add, another faith believer further mentioned about the cultural and ethical beliefs in term of women's right being respectful across different genders.

Another Islamic work ethic being emphasized amongst Malaysian-Muslims is to obtain the permission to fulfil personal needs and religious responsibilities which do not comply with the standard HR policies of the company. The 'taking permission' before action is an example shared by one of the respondents, which allowed her to take up to fifteen minutes' break from the given working hours for pumping breast-milk in the mother's room. One of the respondents, a female manager, explained that this action relies on the trust given by the company through the top manager in doing something other than the standard work within the working hours in the workplace. She continues by relating her action to the Islamic teaching that trust is not only given by the company but also by Allah the Almighty or God which prevents her from committing sin.

Furthermore, individuals view the roles of managers as being equally committed with the work and life, in complementing one to another in the workplace. The finding shows that such actions is a representation of the self-belief teach and value from the beginning of person's life towards their career pathway and other life outside the workplace. The commitment is believed to integrate between personal achievement and organisation performance which results to job satisfaction and job performance. Namely, this the life complements of those with love and support from other people allows individual to balance their life domain. This has, in turn, led people to apply and implement the WFBPs in the workplace as a means of portraying the Islamic values to the community.

4.3 Traditional and Moderate Cultural Value

Cultural value is considered a crucial factor by the Malaysian-Malay respondents. The Malaysian-Malay culture is part of the well-known organisational cultural that impacts the working environment setting of Company A. According to the participants, cultural values encompass those elements which influence their daily actions, understanding of ethical behaviour within the workplace is related to the religious or faith-belief of an individual in the workplace.

The WFBPs enriches the individual performance both at work and at home which was found to be prominent in the public-sector workforce, especially amongst managers and executives in the O&G government-owned company. The respondents of this study stated that the employee benefits grant in the company which developed their working attitudes and work ethics. In addition, she also explained that the development of family-friendly cultural in the workplace does not only benefit the women in the company. Men were also profited. This experience includes the support and encouragement from the men colleagues.

Some of the respondents commented that the traditional way of achieving the work-life balance is by having family time after work such as having dinner together and also by creating the same bonding atmosphere with the colleagues in the workplace, for instance, during lunch break or during the company's event. Moreover, some respondents explained that the Malay culture values togetherness amongst the members of the community rather than having 'me time'. The example given by the respondents about this tradition is having a friend to talk after working hour by visiting each other's houses and getting updates of each

other as a way of communication. The traditional way of communication mentioned by the respondent in this study involves the body language, eye-to-eye contact, and the voice intonation while conversing. These are the relationship values that have been implemented in the workplace. Thus, the collective culture of Malaysian type community involves the traditional and religious values concerning managers who influence the working ethic of the organisation.

Another example of cultural value is proposed by the Chinese and Indian culture such as respecting the elderly. This value is also applied in the workplace, where the novice workers would certainly have to respect the experienced workers in the company. Respect is an essential value in creating a pleasant working environment.

4.4 Equal Opportunities and Increased Self Esteem

Another aspect which was brought up in the interview is self-esteem development and equal opportunities. The findings of this describe the respondent's self-satisfaction by referring to individual attention and personal needs from the implementation of WFBPs in the workplace. For instance, there are different expressions shared by respondents through their self-esteem satisfaction, which impacts on individual attitude and behaviour, in the workplace.

As Company B interviewee R31 stated, the demand on job performance is very high in a private sector company. She described how she struggled to manage her emotions as a young mother at the beginning of her career and stated that the existence of WFBPs helped her to better manage her time

The impact of the self-satisfaction which is described by one of the respondents of this study could lead to the individual behaviour or attitude while completing the tasks given by the company. Thus, indirectly, such self-esteem development and satisfaction do represent the driver to undertake WFBPs in the O&G workplace.

4.5 Well-being Improvement

The third implication analysed in this study highlights the respondents' concern of other important added values to the work and family life. The findings showed that the respondents emphasized important aspects on how it facilitates their well-being.

To conclude, the examples of the participants' transcriptions from the interview is summarised in Table 1. As being clarified in this paper, the implementation of WFBPs is proven to be affected by the individual's attitude and behaviour in the workplace.

Table 1: Examples of the participants' transcriptions from the interview

Main Themes	Example of the participant transcripts
Job satisfaction	<i>"...Yet, the practice helps me to understand the importance of getting to know the benefits provided by the company related to the work-life balance. This is by promoting the practice and after effect regarding the feeling of satisfaction with the job given in the workplace"</i> (R21, a manager from company A)
Islamic Work Ethic	<i>"In balancing between work and family life is gained by adding more responsibility to make more benefit in your life. The more you give to society, the more you get back in terms of love and other support. This is the part where I believe that as a Muslim, the Almighty teaches us through the religion about giving more and sharing with others"</i> (R25, a manager from company A)
Traditional and moderate cultural value	<i>"As a father, I understand the situation from my wife's view and fatherhood experiences. Indirectly, it gives comfortable situation amongst men and privacy to the women to pump milk. In terms of support, the company through bosses will allow you to go out and support such activities"</i> (R1, a manager from Company A)
Equal	<i>"These practices such as the flexible working hour, mother's room, and ladies</i>

opportunities and increased self-esteem	parking, help me in a different way of coping with my current position as a manager compared to the previous year, yet, the practices will give some impact to other people as well as they know how to use them” (R13, a manager from Company B)
Well-being improvement	“Performance comes from fresh mind & body which is usually a result of healthy lifestyle. Therefore, I support active life-styles such as from the non-work activities between staff and myself. By promoting a healthy event after work, sometimes we set up an internal sports game between my department colleagues and me” (R15, a manager from Company B)

5. CONCLUSION

The study provides significant factors at the individual level of an organisation to undertake WFBPs at the workplace. The analysis gathered from the interview data were generated from managers and executives in the Malaysian Oil and Gas companies. Based on the thematic analysis, the study revealed five main factors that are significant to the study’s findings, those of which include job satisfaction, Islamic work ethic, traditional and moderate cultural value, equal opportunities and increased self-esteem, and well-being improvement.

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