



Research Proposal

# Organizational Leadership: Creating Work-Life Balance or Karoshi

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## Abstract

*The motivation of this research proposal is to gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits of having a work-life balance for both the manager and employee of an organization. More specifically, the goal is to learn if a work-life balance is a want or a need for both parties and how it influences an organization. At the present time, many companies are suffering from turnover costs, absenteeism, retention problems, and low productivity output from their employees. Work-life balance directly influences an employee's productivity and desire to work for an organization. Most employees believe that they are not working for a company that provides an opportunity for a work-life balance. As such, the study of work-life balance and its benefits should be evaluated on a regular basis and more specifically, at different levels within an organization. The researchers propose a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The goal of this research proposal is to better understand work-life-balance from a management perspective versus the perspective of their subordinates.*

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance, Perspectives, Ethical Aim, Karoshi, Leadership, Management

## Introduction

"Karoshi" is a Japanese term that means death by overwork. In order to effectively manage employees, it's important for leaders, managers, and organizations to understand what a healthy work-life balance means for everyone. Having this "ethical aim" can be beneficial for all stakeholders affiliated with an organization. According to Ricoeur (1992), ethical aim can be defined as "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (p. 172).

Understanding how to obtain a healthy and positive work-life balance from all perspectives via the lenses of management and subordinates can help with organizational commitment, job performance, and job satisfaction levels. Managers need to be flexible and consider the needs of others. Organizations who understand the importance of investing in their employees and creating a work-life balance will be able to retain their employees.

### **Literature Review**

As we are all aware, not every person comes with the same viewpoints, ideas, or methods of thinking or processing things, but these are things that make us unique and really fascinating as humans. The idea of a work-life balance is merely a perspective, and your perspective can lead to a happy or sad solution for both the employer and their subordinates. According to Rehman and Waheed (2012), work-life conflict and balance are based on the perception of employees and their life stage. Thus, the researchers of this research proposal will look at perspectives regarding work-life balance via the lens of management versus their subordinates.

The focus of management is to accomplish organizational goals by maximizing productivity and increasing profitability. As an organization grows and expands, revenue becomes a need, where it needs to be produced, and focusing on increasing revenue can be the driver of many of their choices for a work-life balance. And for some, that means more labor is needed. On the other hand, the priorities of those subordinates can be their personal well-being or their families/hobbies. If both parties have different priorities, then the understanding of work-life balance is hindered. Employees' motivation, attitudes, and behaviors towards work-life balance are highly dependent on how they interpret the signals from employers about the work-life balance system designed but also implemented (Pasamar, 2020). Therefore, if management can only see a work-life balance as a privilege or incentive rather than a right, it makes a work-life balance much harder to obtain (White & Maniam, 2020).

A lack of work-life balance can also lead to the expectation of additional work and tasks. If the subordinate views the organization as just a means to an end, then the desire to work at their best has potential limitations. Another viewpoint is that subordinates may feel like they are giving it their all, yet the workload is still overwhelming, or they even have a fear of losing their job, so they do as they are told by management. The workload is an expectation set by both parties and supported by the organization. How much to give and how much to take can dictate a

feeling of healthy or unhealthy work-life balance. An online study completed in a health care environment investigated the association of general well-being and different leadership styles among employees in a German hospital. The results showed that leaders reported higher well-being scores than followers. Physicians without leadership responsibilities had the lowest scores for well-being. Practitioners of both transformational and transactional leadership were associated with higher well-being scores, while those practicing laissez-faire and destructive leadership had lower scores for almost every professional group (Erschens, 2022). Leaders and managers in a position to understand and address the need for a better work-life balance for all individuals within an organization.

Another factor to consider is work schedules, depending on employee's respective role. The ideal work schedule would be an environment where employees can have the ability to balance both work life and home life. Both managers and their subordinates have family, parents, and doctors' appointments that all need accommodating. According to Denson (2022), certain careers like academia offer individuals with work-life balance due to the flexibility. Faculty members are able to devote more attention to their children while enjoying the ability to accomplish work commitments outside of the 9am to 5pm work requirements of many other professional paths. According to White and Maniam (2020), non-work-life balance can also negatively impact the psychological and physical wellness of people.

Ultimately both managers and their subordinates do prefer a work balance. The idea of having a better work-life balance can be beneficial for both managers and their subordinates. It increases morale, engagement, and motivation which will lead to better retention of employees and sustaining a sought-after company culture. According to Dunne (2007), the benefits of a work-life balance consists of not only an increase of job satisfaction but also customer satisfaction, improvement in employee relations, and better retention of employees; therefore, attracting individuals with higher skills, resulting in increased staff efficiency. Dunne (2007) mentioned the following is needed in organizations: (1) more flexibility to fit lifestyle demands, (2) a sense of control over work, (3) reduced stress levels, and (4) empowerment of staff. Pasamar (2020) stated that if work-life-balance initiatives are not transparent and communicated properly to the employees, the strength of the system will be affected.

## Methodology

A healthy work-life balance fosters a healthy work environment. It contributes to preventing burnout in the workplace, hence reducing stress. It is desirable for employees to have flexible work arrangements that provide them the opportunity to spend quality time with family and friends or care for their loved ones and themselves (Brackett, 2020).

### **RQ: How can you determine if you are achieving a work-life balance?**

To evaluate how the perspective of management on work-life balance differs from that of their subordinates, we are proposing a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative data gathering strategies. We believe that the following strategies will be the best approach for our research:

Conduct a quantitative survey - Develop a survey questionnaire that asks both managers and subordinates about their perceptions of work-life balance. The survey could include questions about work hours, workload, job flexibility, stress levels, personal time, and family obligations (Team Building Hub, 2022).

Conduct qualitative interviews - Conduct semi-structured interviews with a subset of survey participants to gather more in-depth qualitative data. Use open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives on work-life balance. Interviews could be conducted with a sample of participants to ensure that perspectives from different levels of management and subordinates are captured.

Analyze data - Use statistical analysis to analyze the survey data and identify differences in the responses between management and subordinates. Use content analysis to analyze the interview data and identify common themes and perspectives on work-life balance.

Triangulate results - Use triangulation to compare and contrast the survey and interview data to identify similarities and differences in the perspectives of management and subordinates.

Draw conclusions - Draw conclusions based on the data collected, including any differences or similarities found between the perspectives of management and subordinates on work-life balance. Use the results to make recommendations for policies or practices that could improve work-life balance for both groups.

## Data Collection

A digital survey questionnaire will be used to collect responses from 120 employees (10 managers and 110 subordinate staff) from a government agency in Sacramento, California. The questionnaire will be available using SurveyMonkey. The following questions using a 5-point Likert scale will provide valuable data about their perceptions of work-life balance (Work-life Balance Survey):

1. How satisfied are you with your current work-life balance?
2. How often do you feel that work interferes with your personal life?
3. How often do you feel that personal responsibilities interfere with your work?
4. How often do you work outside of normal business hours (e.g., evenings, weekends)?
5. How often do you feel that you have enough time to take care of personal responsibilities (e.g., family, hobbies, health) outside of work?
6. Do you feel that your supervisor supports work-life balance?
7. Are there any specific policies or practices that you would like to see the company implement to support work-life balance?
8. Overall, how would you rate the company's support for work-life balance?

To gather more in-depth data, we will ask the following open-ended questions:

1. How would you describe your current work-life balance?
2. What are some of the biggest challenges you face in achieving a good work-life balance?
3. How do you think the company could better support employees in achieving work-life balance?
4. Are there any specific policies or practices that you find particularly helpful in achieving work-life balance? If so, please describe.
5. How has your work-life balance changed since you started working at the company?
6. How does your work-life balance compare to that of your colleagues?
7. What impact does your work-life balance have on your well-being and job satisfaction?
8. Do you have anything further to add on your experience with work-life balance at the company?

The survey data will be analyzed statistically to find disparities and correlations in replies between management and subordinates. We will apply content analysis to evaluate the interview data to uncover themes and viewpoints on work-life balance. Additionally, we will use triangulation to compare and contrast the survey and interview data to identify similarities and differences in the perspectives of management and subordinates. And finally, we will make a recommendation to executive management based on the results of the research.

### **Conclusion**

The authors of this research proposal believe that, good communication, support, and flexibility are all essential for achieving a work-life balance. “In other words, adjusting working patterns for everyone, regardless of caring responsibilities, age, race, gender or disability, so that they can find a rhythm that enables them to more easily combine work with other responsibilities and aspirations (Dunne, 2007). This can lead and break the cycle of unhealthy workplace balance.

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