

## **WORK-LIFE PRACTICES USED BY BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS CASE STUDY: BUSINESSES OF KORCA'S REGION (ALBANIA)**

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### **Abstract**

During last years, employers had to deal more with work-life conflict. This conflict has increased due to demographic changes at the work place such as the increased number of women at labour force, the aging of population and the development of communication technology. Work-life conflict has significant business costs associated with lack of engagement, absenteeism, turnover rates, low productivity and creativity. Organizations are, always, under pressure to implement work-life practices to help employees to fulfil, simultaneously, their organizational and family responsibilities. A work-life balance is an organizational concept that empowers employees to split time and energy between work and other important areas of their life successfully. Companies can implement specific work-life practices within their organization to increase morale, productivity and profits. In this paper, we will try to explain these work-life practices at the individual and organizational level. We want to see if there is a link between work-life practices at the individual level and organizational performance such as less work-life conflict, more motivated and dedicated employees at work. Also, we will explain if work-life practices at the organizational level have their impact at improved recruitment and the organizational productivity improvement. While there is no one accepted definition of what constitutes a work-life balance practice, the term usually refers to one of the following: organizational support for dependent care, flexible work options, and family or personal leave. The benefits of implementing work-life balance practices are not only for employees themselves, but also for the families, organizations and society. At the end, we will show, which are the most used work-life practices by Albanian businesses. These are some data resulted from a study we have undertaken in businesses of Korca's Region (Albania).

**Key words:** *work-life practices, flexible work, conflict, productivity,*

### **Introduction**

The expression "work-life balance" was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In other words, work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) and

"lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). This is related to the idea of "lifestyle choice." Work-life balance practices are deliberate organizational changes in programs or organizational culture that are designed to reduce work-life conflict and enable employees to be more effective at work and in other roles. Employees had to deal with many demands between work and home responsibilities which has increased their relevance, due in large part to demographic and workplace changes( a greater numbers of women in the workplace), transformation in family structures( a rise in the number of single parents) and the development of communication technology. These changes create their own conflicts among multiple roles individuals occupy, in response to this organizations have designed various practices to help employees to fulfil their employment and personal commitments. Some of practices used for work-life balance are: flexible hours, the shortened work week, teleworking and family leave.

### 1. Work-Life practices

Organizations can implement various work-life balance initiatives that may assist employees to better balance their work and family responsibilities, gain improvements in well-being and provide organizational benefits. There are a large variety of family friendly policies which include but are not limited to the following: flexible working hours, job sharing, part-time work, compressed work weeks, parental leave, telecommuting, on-site child care facility<sup>1</sup>. In addition, employers may provide a range of benefits related to employees' health and well-being, including extended health insurance for the employee and dependents, personal days, and access to programs or services to encourage fitness and physical and mental health. Still, other practices may support children's education, employees' participation in volunteer work, or facilitate phased retirement<sup>2</sup>.

**Flexi time** allows employees, to determine (or be involved in determining) the start and end times of their working day, provided a certain number of hours is worked. This can allow them to meet family or personal commitments/emergencies (enable employees to respond to both predictable and unpredictable circumstances during the day or to reduce their commuting time by starting and ending work before or after the rush hour).

**Telecommuting:** remote work, or telework is a work arrangement in which employees do not commute to a central place of work. A person who telecommutes is known as a "telecommuter", "teleworker", and sometimes as a "home-sourced," or "work-at-home" employee. It is becoming more and more common for people to do at least some of their regular work from home instead of going into the office. This type of arrangement can be advantageous for employees by allowing them: to organize their work day around their personal and family needs; to decrease work-related expenses; to reduce commuting time; and to work in a less stressful and disruptive environment. It may also help to accommodate employees who, because of particular disabilities, are unable to leave home. The fact that employees who telework can use this added flexibility to capitalize on their personal peak productivity periods can also favourable influence a company's bottom line..

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<sup>1</sup> Hartel et al 2007

<sup>2</sup> European Research Studies Volume XIII, Issue (1), 2010,204

**Compressed Work Weeks:** is an arrangement in which an employee works his/her full-time hours (e.g. 40 hours in a week) in fewer than the normal number of days per time period. There are various types of schedules used for compressed work schedule. This can be beneficial for employees in terms of additional days off work (e.g. longer weekends allowing “mini vacations”) and reduced commuting time, whereas employers can extend their daily operating hours, with less need to resort to overtime. Compressed work week arrangements may be particularly useful for employees who wish to reduce the number of days per week spent at work, but who can not financially afford to decrease their working hours. Compressed work weeks are often initiated by the employee, but sometimes the employer may initiate the option to improve operational efficiency, to maximize production (reduced daily start up costs) or to establish longer business hours which can enhance customer service. Common arrangements for a forty hours work week are working ten hours per day, four days a week; working an extra hour a day with one day off every two weeks; or working an extra half hour a day and having one day every three or four weeks off.

**Part-Time Work:** Part-time arrangements can also allow people with health problems, disabilities or limited disposable time (e.g. students) to participate in the labour force, develop their skills and obtain work experience. Finally, they can facilitate re-entry into the workforce for those who have had career breaks — particularly mothers (or fathers) who have stayed at home to raise their children — or provide a gradual exit for employees nearing retirement. From the employer’s point of view, the use of part-time workers, where feasible, can help maximize the use of human resources and increase operational flexibility, by providing additional coverage during peak periods. Part-time employment can also be considered. Part-time work should be promoted in more, higher-level occupations, for instance, Daimler Chrysler in Germany promotes part-time work in leading positions in the company<sup>3</sup>.

**Job Sharing :** Is an alternative work schedule in which two employees voluntarily share the responsibilities of one full time job, and receive salary and benefits on pro-rata basis. Job sharing creates regular part time (half days, alternative days, alternative weeks, etc.) where there was one full time position, and thus avoids a total loss of employment in a layoff.

**Special working arrangements** for employees who are caring for young children or relatives. Allow staff members with responsibilities for child-rearing or caretaking to work shorter hours, or at hours that are conducive to their particular arrangement<sup>4</sup>.

**Paternity Leave:** a paternity leave is a program where an employee can take time off to care for his children.

**Career Development Leave:** Allow employees to take time off to attend college or other training courses that contribute to improvements in their career. Or, allow an employee to cut down their hours to attend school<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>( Clarke, et al, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> “Promoting a Work-Life Balance.” Social Environmental Report 2005

<sup>5</sup> “Promoting a Work-Life Balance.” Social Environmental Report 2005

## 2. Benefits of Work-life balance

Organizations which have designed and use work-life practices have many benefits for both organizations and employees. Organizations have their benefits such as getting and keeping the right staff, getting the best from staff and improving productivity. Sometimes, finding and keeping good staff can be difficult especially in a tight labour market. Employers who can offer work-life balance and flexible work options are likely to have the competitive edge, gain access to a wider recruitment pool, and are more likely to hold onto existing staff. Helping employees achieve work-life balance is integral to their general health and wellbeing, increasing their work satisfaction and motivation. They are likely to be more committed, more flexible and more responsive to the business and customer's needs. Getting and keeping the right staff and getting the best from them will help to increase productivity. Costs associated with recruitment, training and absenteeism will reduce and employees will be more engaged motivated and committed.

In the other hand, employees want different things such as a good quality of life ,an enjoyable work life with career progression ,training and development ,good health ,affordable childcare or eldercare, further education, more money, time to travel ,time with friends and family , time to do sports and hobbies, time to do voluntary work. So, work-life practices create three precious benefits for them, which are: Being able to effectively manage multiple responsibilities at home, work and in the community without guilt or regret, being able to work in flexible ways so that earning an income and managing family/other commitments become easier, being part of a supportive workplace that values and trusts staff.

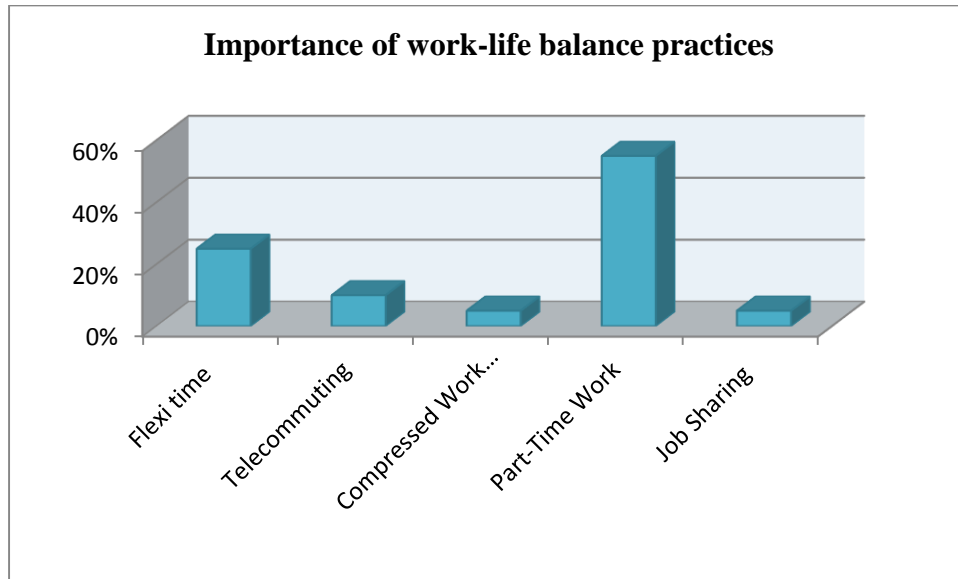
## 3. Practices used by business organizations in Korca's Region

We have studied businesses in Korca's Region, to understand if they use work-life balance practices and which are the most useful practices by them. We have studied 30 businesses and we have distributed 400 questionnaires to employees. Also, we wanted to realize which are the most important leaves for employees used by businesses. Only 27% of businesses had regular practices of work-life balance and 37% didn't know what this term means.



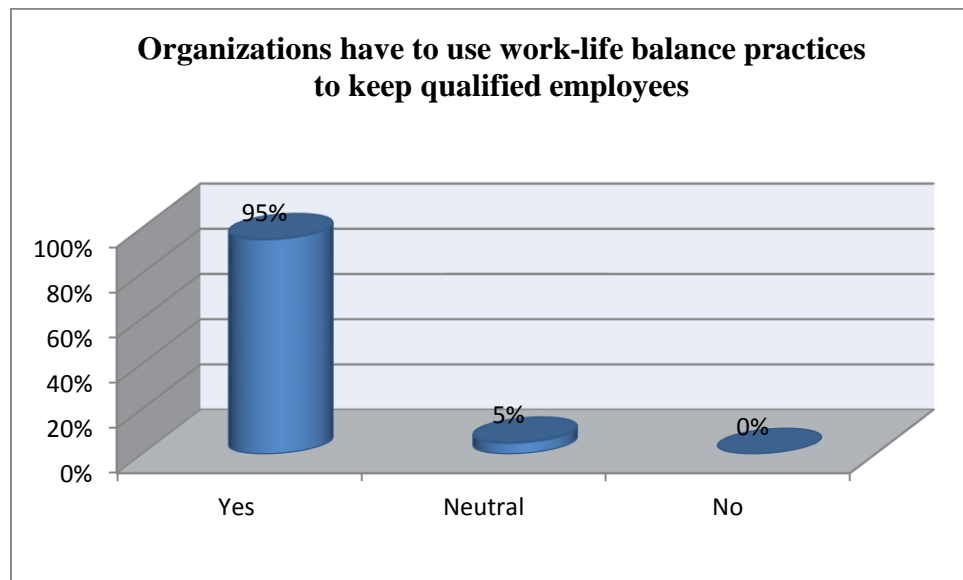
**Fig.1: The existence of work-life balance practices in businesses**

55% of employees considered “part-time work” as the most important work-life practice and the most irrelevant practices were “compressed work” and “job sharing”.



**Fig 2: Which are the most important work-life practices.**

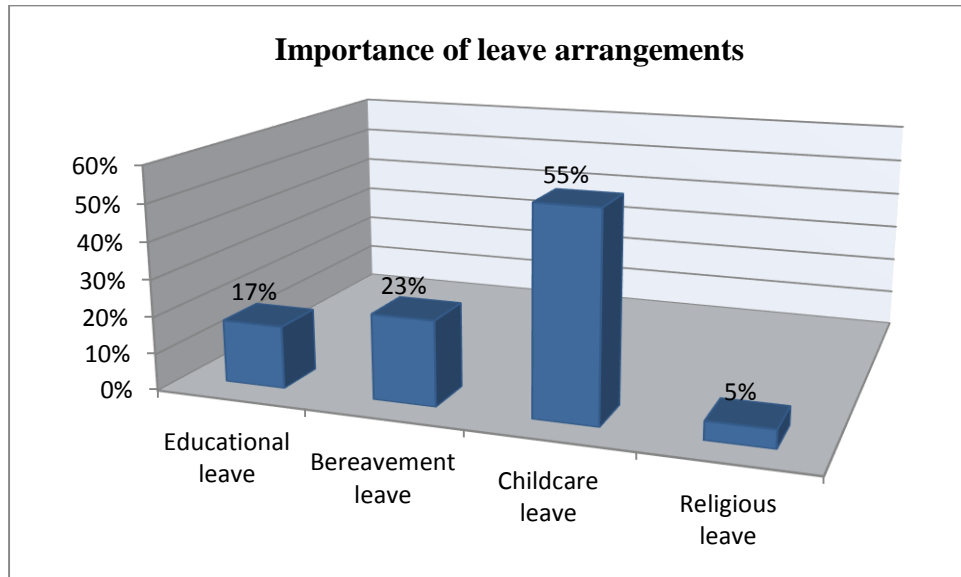
An interesting data shown from this study is that businesses which use work-life balance practices know that these practices are important to keep qualified employees. As it is shown in the figure below 95% of businesses agree that it is necessary to use these practices if you want to have a qualified staff.



**Fig 3: Organizations which use work- life practices have qualified staff**

Most of employees 55% considered childcare leave as the most important leave and 5% of employees considered religious leave as the less important practice. It is a satisfactory fact that

businesses use leave arrangements to help their employees to fulfill their familiar and work responsibilities.



**Fig 4: Importance of leave arrangements.**

#### 4. Conclusions recommendations

Organizations which have designed and use work-life practices have many benefits for both organizations and employees. A successful work-life balance allows staff members to feel happier, healthier, and more productive, in addition to feeling a stronger team spirit and loyalty to their employer. Employers will likewise experience increased productivity and low turnover rates which, in turn will have a positive effect on the organization's bottom line. Organizations that choose to ignore the importance of the work-life balance will endure high-turnover rates, low morale, and unhappy employees. Work-life balance must be supported and encouraged at all levels of the organisation, including senior management, line managers and all staff. Business organizations use work-life practices to have a good recruitment process and to keep qualified staff. So, work-life balance practices help business organizations to improve their productivity and performance. Although, from many studies it is shown that not necessarily the use of these practices will reduce work-life conflict. Users of work-life practices are mostly women, men are focused only on negative consequences of these practices and both sexes who are career oriented will think twice before using these practices offered by organizations.

#### 5. Recommendations

Businesses in Korca's Region need to use more work-life practices, if they want to increase employees commitment and to improve their performance. It is a significant fact that businesses know the importance of these practises and the most useful practice was part-time job. Other practices were non-existent. This fact, is explained a part from jobs profile and a part from needs of the labour market. Employees were familiar with leave arrangements and they considered

childcare leave as the most important leave. Business organizations in Korca's Region have to use more work-life practices to help their employees to have a good performance in work and in their families. Some other practices that organizations may use to be closer with employees needs are:#

- Allow employees to have their birthday off.
- Job redesign, sometimes it is necessary to redesign a position to alleviate stress.
- Vacation: Give employees an opportunity to earn or buy more vacation time.

Organization have to treat each employee with respect regarding their boundaries and work/life challenges and understand that they might not fit the "traditional" categories of groups or individuals with balance needs.

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