



Demystifying the life domain in work-life balance: A Malaysian perspective

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Abstract

Traditionally, the word ‘life’ in the concept of work-life balance focuses on family obligations. This conceptual paper sets out to present the notion that “life” goes beyond family responsibilities and is unique to employees of different demographics. Given the impending difference in how “life” is viewed by different groups of employees, this study reviews the literature and argues for the need to distinguish between different dimensions of the non-work domain. The discussion is centered on the transformation taking place within the Malaysian workforce. Recent trends indicate that “life” and “family” are indeed distinct domains. There is a need for organizations to acknowledge this distinction and provide relevant support to attain a balance between work, life, and family. The paper will help strengthen the knowledge about the “life” in the concept of work-life balance and employers better understand the conceptualization of “life” in work-life balance so that they can strategize and enhance employee well-being and eventually gain competitive advantage. Currently, the terms work-life balance and work-family balance are used interchangeably to represent a balance between the family and work domain. This is especially evident in collectivist countries such as Malaysia. However, the emphasis on family without due consideration to the needs of employees with different demographic configurations may result in work-life backlash. Hence, this study argues that the non-work domain is not limited to family obligations and should encompass both family obligations and personal activities. The emphasis on striking a balance between work and family domain should not be done at the expense of the well-being of employees with lesser or no family obligations.

Keywords Work-family balance · Work-life balance · Work domain · Non-work domain · Family · Life

Introduction

The integration between work and life has been a topic of interest among researchers for many years. In 2006, Olson-Buchanan and Boswell discussed how boundaries between work and life were blurring. Fourteen years down the road, the intertwined nature between work and life is still being discussed. Gaskell (2020) reiterated how blurred work-life

boundary appears to be the new norm. While traditionally employees would attempt to segmentize their work and life domain, this attempt is futile in the present world where technology such as our smartphones are propelling the after-hours connectivity and blurring the border between work and life (Gaskell, 2020). Fundamentally, the belief that work and life are independent domains has been contested and studies have debunked the myth that professional employees will not let their private life interfere with their work-life (Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010) and vice versa.

Sadly, most superiors and organizations fail to accept that work and life are intertwined, making it necessary to balance work and life to enhance employee well-being. Most superiors consider work-life balance (WLB) a fad and choose to turn a blind eye towards this balance (Koon, 2020; Mukherjee, 2019). The failure to acknowledge the pertinence of WLB and extend the necessary support sends a negative message to employees. This is in line with the proposition of organizational support theory (OST). This theory posits that employees weigh their value in the organization through the support rendered within their organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The

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degree to which organizations provide support to employees reflects how much the organization values them as an employee and are concerned about their well-being (perceived organizational support) (Koon, 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Therefore, when organizations fail to care about employees' need for WLB and provide the required support, employees view the organization in a negative light.

In an effort for organizations to provide the necessary support to establish WLB, they need to better understand the conceptualization of the work and life domain. While the conceptualization of work is relatively clear, most organizations and superiors disregard the notion that life goes beyond family obligations mainly childcare. This is especially evident in a developing and culturally unique context such as Malaysia. Similarly, most past studies have also equated the term life with family obligations which is focused on childcare. This limited understanding of what the life domain entails curtails their ability to render the relevant support. Therefore, the objective of this study is to address the gap and demystify the conceptualization of life in the term WLB, especially in the Malaysian context.

Demystifying WLB

This conceptual paper intends to focus on a better conceptualization of the life component in WLB. A review of literature on work-life based research revealed a plethora of studies that employed terms such as WLB, work-family balance (WFB), work-life conflict, work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, and so forth to represent WLB. These terms are theoretically distinct and need careful conceptualization (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

While it is impossible to find one best definition that encompasses what WLB represents, it is important to understand the distinction and the interrelationship between these commonly used terms. Firstly, it is essential to understand that individuals juggle multiple roles. These roles can be generally categorized into professional (work) and personal (non-work roles) (Das & Baruah, 2016). Fundamentally, individuals with WLB are found to engage in multiple roles through effective distribution of time and effort across work and non-work domains (e.g., Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

WLB has also been signified as engagement in these work and non-work roles with a minimal conflict between these roles (Das & Baruah, 2016; Duxbury & Higgins, 2002; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). A balance between work and life is said to diminish when there is role conflict (Duxbury & Higgins, 2002). On the other hand, WLB is found to be enhanced when there is work-family enrichment (WFE) and family-work enrichment (FWE) (Chan et al., 2016). Work-family enrichment discusses the extent experiences in a particular domain enhances the quality of life in another domain (Greenhaus &

Powell, 2006). Enrichment could either occur through two pathways—(1) instrumental pathway where resources obtained from one role promotes improved performance in the other; or (2) affective pathway (where positive emotion garnered from one role indirectly promotes improved performance in the other role (Chan et al., 2016).

In contrast to these existing views, Haar, Russo, Suñe, and Ollier-Malaterre (2014) proposed that WLB should be based on Kossek, Valcour, and Lirio (2014) proposition which depicts WLB as “a holistic concept, unique for each person and that depends upon his or her life values, priorities, and goals” (p. 362). It can be implied that what matters in one's life may not matter to another. Fundamentally, a balance should be perceived as an individual's holistic feeling of satisfaction derived from how they function in multiple roles (Direnzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2015; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Hence, it is important to understand varied perspectives on the life domain as life may be perceived differently by a different group of people within the organization.

Background of Malaysia

Malaysia as a Developing Nation: Increasing Work Demand and Transformation of Workforce

The intertwined nature of work and life is an emerging trend especially in developing countries such as Malaysia. A brief review of the Malaysian scenario could help shed some light on why such a transformation is gaining momentum. Malaysia is driven to become a high-income nation supported through high growth. This drive was noted through Malaysia's Key Development Eras which commenced with the period of the New Economic Policy (1971–1990). This policy intended to eliminate outright poverty notwithstanding race and abolish the classification of economic function by race. Moving forward, the government kick-started the journey towards becoming a developed nation by the year 2020 with the establishment of Vision 2020 during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysian Plan. Amidst global changes fuelled by the financial crisis of 2007 to 2010, this Vision was reviewed, and a higher growth rate was proposed to ensure Malaysia inched closer to her dream of becoming an established country by the year 2020. Accordingly, the National Transformation 2050 (TN50) was announced during the tabling of the 2017 Budget. The primary aim of this plan is to facilitate Malaysia's quest to be among the leading states in the world in terms of fiscal progress, resident well-being, and innovation. Fundamentally, Malaysia's development plans attempt to incorporate inclusive growth that promotes sustainable individual and societal well-being (OECD, 2016).

The announcement of TN50 is timely and reflected the government's pledge towards helping Malaysia become a

developed nation. However, development is often accompanied by hidden negative implications. The downside of such drive toward development and performance is its' impact on work demand (Parris, Vickers, & Wilkes, 2008; Zivcicová, Bulková, & Masárová, 2017). In line with the quest towards development, a surge in work demand is expected. Higher work demand is inadvertently translated to the implicit expectation of longer working hours among Malaysian employees.

While the Employment Act stipulates maximum working hours of 48 h per week, this is hardly enforced (Noor & Mohd, 2015). For instance, Ramos, Francis, and Philipp (2015) found that the respondents from the Malaysian banking sector spent on average 52 working hours per week. Generally, Malaysian employees worked on average 15 h beyond their stipulated weekly working hours compared to their counterparts in Singapore, Australia, and Hong Kong (AIA, 2017). This could be ascribed to the perception that working extended hours can be perceived as being hardworking and more committed to the organization (Boleh Blogger, 2016).

Besides the increasing work demand, a transformation in the Malaysian workforce was also noted. In general, Eby, Casper, Lockwood, and Brinley (2005) concluded that the configuration of the workforce has altered considerably in recent years based on their content analysis of 22-years on work and family research. Given such changes in workforce composition, Burke (2010) found that such transformation further exacerbated the clash between work and life domains.

The workforce composition in Malaysia has also changed from several aspects. First, the increased involvement of women in the Malaysian labor force (Department of Statistics, 2018a, 2018b) has influenced the rise of dual-earner couples. This trend has paved the path for a transition from a traditional family system to a companion family system (Fatimah, Jemain, Ibrahim, Nasir, & Anuar, 2009). The traditional family system refers to the system based on family members playing traditional roles. In the traditional family system, the focus is on raising the family. The role of the father and mother are divided where the father serves as the main source of income and the mother is the homemaker.

On the contrary, in a companionship family system, the role of the father and mother is based on love, communication, and tolerance as both parents are involved in the labor force and at the same time are responsible for the family upbringing. In such system, both men and women partake in activities within both domains of work and family (Roy, 2016). If decades ago men are the breadwinner, now they are also involved in house chores (Chalawadi, 2014). On the other hand, if decades ago women are mainly involved in house chores, now they are also the key player in the workforce (Burnett, Gattrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2010; Chan & Pervaiz, 2014; Kollinger-Santer & Fischlmayr, 2013; Uppalury & Bhaskar, 2014). Hence, dual-earner couples now struggle to strike a balance between demands of work and other aspects of life

such as caring for children and elders (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016).

In numerous developed countries, the companionship-based family system is prevalent compared to a traditional one. Similarly, in Malaysia, the companionship-based family system is generally observed (Fatimah et al., 2009). This is especially needed in a context where families are progressively moving towards smaller sized families and the onus of tending for the family unit is shifting onto the shoulders of fewer adults (LPPKN, 2019).

The second notable change in the work domain is the increase of labor force participation of single employees or never-married employees (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006; Semlali & Hassi, 2016; Waumsley, Houston, & Marks, 2010). Recent research shows that there is a decrease in the percentage of married people, a rise in the proportion of divorced people, and an increase in the median age of marriage (Waumsley et al., 2010). The ratio at which families are developing is decelerating and this inevitably is reflected in the increasing percentage of never-married individuals (LPPKN, 2019). This upward trend remains to date. The statistics for the 2017 Malaysian labor force indicate that approximately 62% of employees are married and the remaining are either never married, widowed, or divorced (Department of Statistics, 2018a, 2018b). While this proportion has not changed significantly since 1982 (Department of Statistics, 2018a, 2018b), it is important to note that almost 40% of the workforce constitutes single or never married employees.

A common misconception that plagues most organizations is that unmarried employees are free of parental or family obligations. While it seems obvious that married employees spent most of their non-work time on activities centered on child care, everyday chores, and other family needs (Idrovo, Leon, & Grau Grau, 2012; Shah, 2015) compared to their single counterparts, that does not mean single employees are free from such roles. Malaysians regardless of their marital status still live with their loved ones in either a nuclear or extended family arrangement (LPPKN, 2019). Such family structure coupled with the collectivist and humane orientation (Hassan, Dollard, & Winefield, 2010), requires all family members to shoulder the responsibility to care for others. Sadly, organizations fail to realize that in most collectivistic cultures, unmarried children also bear family responsibilities in the form of caring for their elders (Ramos et al., 2015). This obligation is encapsulated in the concept of filial piety (Hassan et al., 2010).

Third, the inclusion of single and Generation Y or Millennials in the Malaysian workforce has increased the necessity to focus on life beyond family commitments. There is a pressing need to focus on other non-work activities such as leisure activities as well (Noor & Mohd, 2015). For instance, single employees also seek opportunities to spend their non-work time more on hobbies, sports, time with friends, travel,

voluntary work, and personal development (Chalawadi, 2014; Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Lazar, Osoian, & Ratiu, 2010). A similar expectation is noted among Generation Y or Millennials. They are generally younger with about one-third of them still single and about 40% without children (Chung, Kamri, & Mathew, 2018). Therefore, they experience reduced family to work conflict (Chung et al., 2018) and may seek balance in other aspects of life such as leisure activities. With the proliferation of Generation Y in the workforce, it is important to address their WLB expectations as well. Millennials live by the motto YOLO (You live only once) (PWC, 2012). Hence, they aim to live better lives than their parents and strongly advocate the need for WLB. PWC (2012) found that 97% of Millennials deem WLB important. WLB tops their list of things that matters to them. They are always planning their vacation or mini-breaks to allow them to recharge. However, based on the survey, almost half of them felt organizations failed to address their need for WLB.

Malaysia's Cultural Background and Work-Life Conflict

The subject of work-life balance has been extensively researched in Western (Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009) and developed countries (Ratnesh, Ali, & Sinha, 2019). However, there are only a few studies on work-life balance (WLB) in contexts beyond Western countries (Ratnesh et al., 2019). The lack of attention does not undermine the issue. Instead, this issue is gaining prominence in developing countries and countries with different cultural value systems such as Malaysia.

Fundamentally, there is a need to view work-life issues from a cultural lens (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Perrigino, Dunford, & Wilson, 2018). For instance, collectivist societies such as Malaysia may view and experience WLB differently (Haar et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2010). Generally, work interference with family (WIF) is higher than family interference with work (FIW). However, in the Malaysian context FIW was significantly greater than WIF (Hassan et al., 2010). Allen, French, Dumani, and Shockley (2015) reported a similar finding that family-to-work conflict was notably higher in more collectivistic cultures compared to individualistic cultures.

Collectivist society experiences a greater sense of connectedness, hence, enhancing their need to care about each other and understand how their work demands affect their family domain and vice versa (Powell et al., 2009). It is a common perception that in a collectivist society, support is received from extended family members, which helps reduce work and family conflict (Hassan et al., 2010; Powell et al., 2009). However, Allen et al. (2015) found that contrary to the common perception, employees in collectivist society experience greater family-to-work conflict. This reinforces the fact that

family is viewed as an obligation in Asian culture. Therefore, individuals in such culture experience greater family demands (Allen et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2010). For instance, in Malaysia family refers to an extended family that can include a large number of members. This naturally translates into greater family obligations such as more visits, more events to participate in and so forth—which contributes to FIW and can be exhausting (Hassan et al., 2010).

Typically, unlike individualistic cultures where work and family are treated as distinct domains, collectivist cultures treat these two domains as integrated domains (Yang, 2005). Work is viewed as a means to provide for the family and is rarely viewed as interference to family life (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). Family is embraced as the most pertinent in-group and includes extended members (Hassan et al., 2010). Similarly, other cultural orientation or structural variables (e.g., family structure) unique to a specific context may influence work-life practices (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017).

This raises the question of whether Western assumptions on WLB hold to a culture such as Malaysia. Hence, this paper will review the issue of work and life in Malaysia specifically to better understand the underlying problems within the context to minimize the possibility of work-family backlash.

Work-Life Balance in Malaysia

Despite the existence of policies to promote WLB (see Noor & Mohd, 2015), these policies are either underutilized or limited to employees with family obligations. Such a narrow focus towards the offering of WLB policies may result in a work-life backlash—“a phenomenon reflecting the negative attitudes, negative behaviors, and negative emotions—both individual and collective—associated with multiple forms of WLB policies (on-site provisions, parental leave policies, and flexible work arrangements) and practices, including both the availability and use of these policies” (Perrigino et al., 2018, p. 604). To make matters worse, these policies are generally adopted to a greater extent within the public sector. The private sector is exempted from adhering to these policies as Malaysia continues to encourage the private sector to focus on the economic development of the nation (Noor & Mohd, 2015) and propel Malaysia towards her quest to become a developed nation.

Inadvertently, the mounting pressure of work demand is expected to negatively influence the life domain. Increasing work demands will naturally over-shadow personal needs (Shah, 2017). Longer working hours and after-hours connectivity not only negatively affect employees' lifestyle health which includes physical activities (TheEdge, 2018) but also limits their time available for non-work life (Abdul Hadi, 2019; Mukherjee, 2019). As Abdul Hadi (2019) succinctly

states, “long working hours reduces opportunities for socially productive leisure by restricting the time available for being an effective marriage partner, parent and citizen”. To some extent, this can be counter-intuitive towards efforts to integrate all-encompassing development that encourages sustainable well-being for both individual citizen and society.

There is a call for the Malaysian government to reduce the weekly working hours of 48 h to 40 h to allow employees to achieve a better equilibrium between work and life (Abdul Hadi, 2019). Sadly, many employers have turned a blind eye towards employees’ call for better work-life balance (WLB) and placed this need at the bottom of the ranking (Mukherjee, 2019; TheEdge, 2017). To make matters worse, the tension between work and life is exuberated with the transformation brewing within the composition of the global workforce in general and the Malaysian workforce specifically. This includes an increase in dual-earner couples and never married employees in the workforce. Such transformation coupled with the traditional value system that defines Malaysia has fuelled the need for the organization to revisit the conceptualization of life in the term WLB. In such a conflicting situation, the need for WLB has become even more substantial (Parris et al., 2008).

Notwithstanding the presence of policies to encourage work-life balance, these policies are restricted to employees with family obligations (Noor & Mohd, 2015). The needs of employees without young children such as Generation Y, single employees, childless employees or even employees with older children often take the backstage (Noor & Mohd, 2015). The failure to accommodate non-family aspects of life can induce stress and be detrimental to the well-being of employees and their performance at work (Mansour & Mohanna, 2018). While the work-to-leisure conflict was reported to adversely influence psychological well-being, contentment with leisure and job, this was especially evident in the case of Millennials (Tsaur & Yen, 2018).

The above-mentioned changes in the composition of the workforce and the present cultural norms prompt an important question – what signifies WLB in the minds of employees of all demographics? More importantly, what defines their life domain? This paper puts forward the notion that when organizations fail to understand what embodies the life domain of employees, they may fail in rendering the right support for their employees to strike a balance between work and life. It is pertinent for organizations to be aware of the issue of WLB as it significantly influences an employees’ life, work and family (Duxbury & Higgins, 2002). Most workers are constantly juggling demands and making choices between work and personal life (Buelens & Broeck, 2007). The failure of organizations to extend better support in facilitating the achievement of WLB may jeopardize either their employee’s performance at work or the quality time for their personal activities, or in a worse case, both domains of work and life

concurrently. The following section will distinguish work and non-work domains to facilitate a better understanding of activities that should be included within work and life domains.

Work Versus Non-Work Domain

Work Demand

Work demand has been identified as one of the most important antecedents of conflict in the work and life domain (Karimi & Nouri, 2009). Work demands refer to physical, communal, or managerial aspects of a job that require sustained physical or mental effort (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Work demand in this study is defined as the efforts needed (physical and/or psychological) to perform the task given in paid employment excellently. Some scholars used the terms job demand or career demand which brings the same meaning as work demand (Helmle, Botero, & Seibold, 2014).

Work demand can be divided into two — (1) time-based demand and (2) strain-based demand (Idrovo et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2005). Time-based demand is the time an employee needs to spend on work. The amount of time spent on the job has frequently been studied as an antecedent of work-home conflict (Karimi & Nouri, 2009) and work demand was mostly measured by hours worked in WLB study (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011; Voydanoff, 2004).

Job involvement is one of the examples of time-based demand. Job involvement describes the extent work situation is essential to a person and their psychological identity (Helmle et al., 2014). Individuals are considered to be involved in their work if they keenly partake in their job; treat it as their key life concern; identifies accomplishment in their job as pivotal to their self-esteem and self-concept (Helmle et al., 2014). The other example of time-based demand is the type of job. According to Duxbury and Higgins (2002), several bodies of research suggest that the type of job an individual hold will affect his or her ability to balance work and family demands. There are a few studies that show that travel demand in performing work is also one of the time-based demands as it would be time-consuming (Duxbury & Higgins, 2002; Mäkelä, Suutari, & Mayerhofer, 2011; Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010).

Strain-based demand is likely to cause high levels of physical and psychological fatigue (Virick, Lilly, & Casper, 2007), job dissatisfaction and turnover intention (Spector et al., 2007). Examples of strain-based demand are work overload, work pressure and job insecurity (Beham & Drobnic, 2010). One of the reasons for work overload is downsizing (Virick et al., 2007). Overload is experienced by those who remain in the organization as they are expected to put more commitment to their work domain (Shah, 2015). Another strain-based demand is job insecurity. Job insecurity can be experienced in

two forms—(1) objective job insecurity (definite employment loss), and (2) subjective job insecurity (inherent individual's inherent fear about their employment future) (Beham & Drobnic, 2010). Work overload and job insecurity will most likely lead to work pressure.

Work pressure or job stress reflects the feeling of having limited time to finish given work, working intensely, and at a swift (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). In a survey conducted by Goveas (2011), job stress was identified as employees' primary problem to achieve excellence in quality of service. Lazar et al. (2010) stated that employers should take a thoughtful consideration of job stress that is faced by employees. Research found that managerial men and male psychologists value the organizational support that would lessen their job stress and raise their joy in work by having lower intentions to quit, and more positive emotional and physical well-being (Burke, 2010).

It is important to take note that the implication of work demand on work and attitudinal outcomes is predisposed to cultural variation (Spector et al., 2007). Generally, employees in Malaysia have the perception that the employees must work long hours or take the work home for better career advancement, promotion and rewards. This commitment is reflected in their willingness to work longer hours compared to their counterparts in Singapore, Australia, and Hong Kong (AIA, 2017). Employees in a collectivistic society are still willing to invest additional effort into work to be perceived as someone who sacrifices for their family's well-being (Spector et al., 2007). In such cases, the negative implication of work demand on outcomes such as satisfaction is lesser in collectivist society compared to counterparts in individualist society (Spector et al., 2007).

Non-work Domain: The Dominance of Family over Life

The term WFB and WLB has been used interchangeably in past studies. Most researchers either used the term WLB (e.g., Pocock, Skinner, & Ichii, 2009; Poelmans, Kalliath, & Brough, 2008; Reiter, 2007) or WFB (e.g., Beham & Drobnic, 2010; Bourhis & Mekkaoui, 2010; Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008; Marcinkus, Whelan-Berry, & Gordon, 2007) at a time. These terms were inconsistently defined in past studies. Some researchers such as Shah (2015), Maharshi and Chaturvedi (2015), Mazerolle, Goodman, and Pitney (2015) and Cowart, Gilley, Avery, Barber, and Gilley (2014) used the term work-life balance in their study which focused on family matters. On the contrary, researchers such as Tomazevic, Kozjek, and Stare (2015), Beham and Drobnic (2010) and Tremblay (2008) used the term WFB when their study also examined personal activities beyond family matters. The usage of either one of these terms in an inconsistent manner tends to mislead the finding of the research and does not reflect the actual situation.

Fundamentally, since the introduction of work-family research in the 1970s, non-work domain was mainly focused on family responsibilities (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016; Gagnano, Simbula, & Miglioretti, 2020). Over time, the work-family concept was replaced with work-life to represent a wider range of activities beyond family responsibilities such as leisure activities, social relationships, hobbies and so forth (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016; Perrigino et al., 2018). Despite acknowledging the fact that the non-work domain involves a wide range of activities, family responsibilities remained a prominent component of the life domain. Hamilton et al. (2006) stated that many researchers have assumed that 'life' is analogous to 'family'. Most scholars put family demands especially childcare as one of the compulsory components of non-work demand (Chalawadi, 2014; Daipuria & Kakar, 2013; Kulkarni, 2013; Mellner, Aronsson, & Kecklund, 2014). For instance, Burnett et al. (2010) defined non-work demand as domestic chores and the hours devoted by parents on housework. Similarly, Lakshmi (2013) referred to non-work demand as activities that include babysitting, senior care, and unpaid duty such as household chores. Hence, in most cases, the word 'life' has been defined in a narrow sense and limited to childcare and in some instances, elder care. In reality, the life component in WLB is not limited to family obligations (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007).

Due to such misleading assumptions, not all employees appreciate and use the benefits commonly offered by organizations (Hamilton et al., 2006; Perrigino et al., 2018). Such narrow conceptualization of activities within the non-work domain has led organizations to overlook the need for WLB among employees of all demographics such as single or childfree employees (Hamilton et al., 2006; Reed, Blunsdon, Blyton, & Dastmalchian, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007), Generation Y (Yan, 2018), and others. Such insular misconception has resulted in many single employees being forced to work long hours assuming that they have no important personal activities out of the work domain (Pocock, Williams, & Skinner, 2007). Generation Y employees expressed their disappointment with how organizations deal with the issue of WLB as it does not meet their expectations (PWC, 2012). Furthermore, many organizations were found to extend compressed work weeks, job sharing or telework options for employees with young children—leaving employees without such responsibilities ineligible and unappreciated (Perrigino et al., 2018; Spinks, 2004). The recent Covid-19 pandemic is proof of such mindset. Employees with young children were prioritized when remote working was enforced at public and civil services departments (Carvalho, 2020).

Surprisingly, despite the increasing labor force participation of employees of all demographics, organizations have failed to accommodate the need of such employees (Hamilton et al., 2006; Huffman, Culbertson, Henning, & Goh, 2013). These employees who do not gain from family-

oriented benefits experience frustration and work-life backlash due to perceptions of inequity (Perrigino et al., 2018). It is inaccurate to assume that employees without childcare responsibilities do not have other needs. Hence, there is a pressing need for a more flexible, people-centered approach to workstyle design. It is important for organizations to embrace the fact that employees from different demographics are driven by different needs within the life domain.

In view of this, some researchers have accurately used the term WLB to represent activities outside work which is not limited to family matters but also inclusive of personal matters, friends and community (Benito-Osorio, Muñoz-Aguado, & Villar, 2014; Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Mellner et al., 2014). Marcinkus et al. (2007) associated the non-work domain with parenting and community work. Poelmans et al. (2008) stated that non-work domains revolve around one's family, social, and spiritual roles. Wheatley (2012) stated that the non-work domain comprised of free time spent on leisure activities, and family time. Accordingly, Stankiewicz, Bortnowska, and Łychmus (2014) claimed that non-work refers to family, health, social activity, private interests, and so forth. It seems like scholars in the most recent years have embraced a clearer description of the non-work aspect - one that incorporates activities other than conventional family obligations. The extended conceptualization now includes activities such as favourite pastimes and other forms of relaxation (Mäkelä et al., 2011; Reed et al., 2005). However, this trend is not acknowledged in most Malaysian organizations. With a cultural norm that focuses on family well-being, most organization pay a great deal of attention to family oriented WLB policies (Noor & Mohd, 2015). In view of the transforming workforce, it is pertinent for organization to understand that non-work domain encapsulates two distinct dimensions- family and personal life. In a nutshell, Malaysian organizations need to embrace the fact that life domain within work-life balance encompasses personal needs that are not limited to family or childcare responsibilities.

Non-work Domain: Demands Vs Needs

Role engagement requires the investment of time and psychological involvement in specific roles (Ramos et al., 2015). Roles within the non-work domain require individuals to invest enough time and effort to experience the satisfaction resulting from these roles (Ramos et al., 2015). While these roles are part and parcel of an individual's life, family roles such as child care and eldercare responsibilities are given priority as such roles involve responsibility towards the care of others. These roles are clearly demanding as it requires a substantial investment of time, psychological involvement in the role and effort of an individual. Employees bearing such responsibility are expected to navigate work demands as well as fulfill the needs of the child or elders.

While we can identify family roles as responsibilities, activities within the personal domain such as leisure activities seem less of an obligation. Such a mind-set influences employees within collectivist society to prioritize their family responsibilities and be willing to forgo activities within the personal domain. However, it does not mean activities within this domain are less pertinent. Leisure activities such as vacation, exercise, social activities and so forth help individuals to recharge and relieve stress from work and family-related responsibilities (New Straits Times, 2018). Engagement in such activities generate positive emotions and undeniably helps facilitate the achievement of WLB (New Straits Times, 2018). Subsequently, individuals who achieve WLB will experience enhanced well-being which results in positive work-related outcome (e.g., high performance, high career development), non-work-related outcome (e.g., high family satisfaction, high life satisfaction) and low stress-related outcome (e.g., low depression, low hostility) (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). This can be related to the principle of positive spillover (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). "Affect spillover refers to feelings caused by experiences in one life domain influence the other life domain" (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Hence, when an individual experiences positive emotions from leisure activities, this emotion is transferred to other domains such as work and family.

This facilitates the development of a sense of balance between all domains of life and justifies the need for employers to take responsibility to ensure their employees have enough time for activities and responsibilities within the non-work domain. Extending support for WLB to employees of all demographics (and not just ones with family responsibilities) will create a perception of justice within the organizations.

Based on the Organizational Support Theory (OST), if employees deem their employers to be supportive, they are likely to return the favor by committing themselves to their workgroup (Dick, Wagner, & Christ, 2004; Gilley, Waddell, Hall, Jackson, & Gilley, 2015). Employees will acknowledge the fact that their employer is concerned for the well-being and they will naturally reciprocate by contributing greater efforts to help the organization achieve its' goals (Baran, Shanock, & Miller, 2012). Organizational support assures employees that their organization is dedicated adequate attention to their non-work related needs (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006; Warner & Hausdorf, 2009). This sense of assurance nurtures positive attitudes towards the organization and fosters enhanced employee involvement and obligation to invest extra effort in return for further benefits (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986).

Therefore, we believe that it is pertinent for employers to distinguish and acknowledge non-work demands among employees. Employees of all demographics will experience family responsibilities and personal needs within their non-work or life domain. However, their view of family and life

obligations differ among individuals according to their responsibilities and commitment. The dominance of family responsibilities such as child care and elder care depends on the family configuration of individual employees. For instance, childcare responsibilities will most likely dominate the non-work domain of employees with young children compared to their counterparts without young children. Eldercare responsibilities will most likely dominate the non-work domain of employees with elder family members to care for compared to their counterparts without a dependent elder family member. On the contrary, employees without young children or elderly dependent family member will most likely emphasize other interest in their non-work domain compared to family responsibilities. Regardless of the extent of family responsibilities, employees of all demographics will seek fulfillment in life through activities such as hobbies, leisure activities, social relationships and so forth to experience enhance well-being. It helps them cope with demands in life. Hence, work-life balance strategies must consider these needs and expectations.

Implication to Practice

The need to distinguish WFB and WLB is certainly not a fad (Gragnano et al., 2020; Khan & Agha, 2013; Poelmans et al., 2008), but the logical consequences of dramatic and irreversible changes taking place globally in terms of demographic shifts, the intensification of work and the fragmentation of time (Poelmans et al., 2008). Hence, the issue should be pursued as a strategy to build a positive work environment, which leverages the firm's performance (Khan & Agha, 2013). Employers need to understand their role in extending required support to employees to facilitate the management of their multiple roles, be it as parents or non-parent (Campioni, 2008; Karimi & Nouri, 2009).

Family-friendly policies or work-life policies do not exist in a vacuum; they need to be adapted to different cultural, political, economic and social conditions (Poelmans et al., 2008). In terms of the Malaysian context, the vision in National Transformation 2050 (TN50) would be a concrete base to force the organizations to sit back and consider the effect of WLB to reach the objectives as planned. It would be more significant in years to come as the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is consistently pursuing their quest to increase the percentage of women participation in the labor workforce. As per the year, 2015 women's participation has reached up to 55% and 30% of women in the top management position (Department of Statistics, 2015). Thus, in years to come men and women have to compete as they have equal opportunity to have a better job and better career advancement (Lyness & Marcia Brumit, 2005; Maharshi & Chaturvedi, 2015; Shah, 2015). This action is expected to affect the demographic pattern in the labor population by increasing the mean age of the marriage as priority will be given

to stabilize the career before getting married (Hamilton et al., 2006; Pasamar & Ramón Valle, 2013). Thus, the number of single employees will keep increasing to the extent that it would become another main group other than the group of married employees.

Research on this topic can transform governments and employers' mindset and provide insights into the formulation and implementation of human resources policies (Duxbury & Higgins, 2002). For instance, in Malaysia, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development admitted that there is no specific policy on WFB and WLB, instead, they only have program-based activities to promote WFB which at the moment only targeted the family matter especially caring responsibilities. Similarly, no policies related to WLB were noted within the acts and policies under the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resource. It is hoped that this conceptual paper opens the minds of officials to formulate and implement WLB policies that encapsulates the life domain and promotes employee's well-being.

Besides, with an assumption that private sector companies are in need to be competent and perform at a greater level, these organizations should have a certain level of awareness about the need for WLB policies. Organizations need to go beyond family obligations when designing WLB policies. Ultimately, it is hoped that this discussion would strengthen the knowledge about the distinction between WFB and WLB in Malaysia and help enlighten employers on how they can facilitate the experience of WLB among their employees. Clearly, the "one size fits all" approach to benefits offered or policies stipulated in administration is under-utilized by a certain group of employees (Mohd Noor, 2011; Roberts, 2007; Spinks, 2004).

In a nutshell, this conceptual paper agrees with the notion underlying the OST and strongly proposes that inclusive WLB support for all employees is necessary. Support should be distinguished between family-oriented support as well as life-oriented support.

Limitation and Direction for Future Research

Our conceptual propositions are not without limitations. Primarily, the propositions were based on gaps identified in the literature and reviews about practices at the workplace specifically within the Malaysian context. While the notions presented may be widely practiced in developed nations, this issue remains a problem in developing and collectivist nations such as Malaysia. Furthermore, these propositions have yet to be tested empirically. Future studies need to explore the possible differential effect of family demands and life needs on employees' perspectives on WLB and the possibility of minimizing work-life backlash. In addition, the present paper did not discuss the association of better conceptualization of life with outcomes such as work-life synergy (Beutell & Wittig-

Berman, 2008) and work-life flexibility (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Future studies should incorporate these constructs to better understand the interrelationship between these variables and WLB. It is pertinent to explore if a better conceptualization of the “life” in the term WLB will lead to enhanced work-family synergy and help organizations structure better employment scheduling practices.

Conclusion

The workforce is not made up of a homogeneous group of people. With the inclusion of people with different family or life obligations, it is pertinent for organizations to customize the support extended according to the needs of employees. Adopting the one size fits all approach is not the way forward. Extended support is only possible if organizations are more proactive in understanding the various responsibilities and interests that fall within the family and life domains of any employee. While it may be impossible to understand all aspects of family and life, it would be a good initial step towards creating a more balanced life. It could assist the management in imposing better and more appropriate support on WFB and WLB to improve their employee’s well-being, service quality and performance.

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Authors’ Contributions Not applicable.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflicts of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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