

## Work – Life Balance Perception and ICT Usage by Staff of Private Universities in South-Western Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examines the role of ICT in the maintenance of balance between work and personal life roles of private universities staff in South-Western Nigeria. Data for the study was gathered through a three-paged structured questionnaire administered to a randomly selected group of staff of Fountain University, Osogbo. It was discovered that ICT has not only contributed to the extension of work roles beyond the work place but it has also created opportunities for cross roles transfer of responsibilities. Using regression analysis method, it was discovered that on a general level, rather than increase the pressure of work on the respondents, ICT ( $\beta = 0.31745$  ;  $p < 0.05$ ) significantly help maintain balance. However, the use of ICT for the purpose of working at home is negatively correlated ( $R = -0.1144$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) with the work-life balance perception of respondents. It was also discovered that using ICT to work while in transit is positively correlated ( $R = 0.4523$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) with perception of a balanced work-life by the respondents. The study concluded that usage of ICT by private university staff should rather be encouraged and expanded upon for the purpose of work-life balance.

**Key words:** work-life balance, border management, work-life conflict, ICT

### 1.0 Introduction

Work, is generally considered as a part of life. Recent findings in human resource studies have however shown that work and life could be two related but totally different concepts. Though separated by certain physical, psychological and temporal boundaries, the two concepts are operationalized within the same context of time and space. The nature of work itself has changed from the 9-to-5 affair to a 24-hour, 7-day society, where customers expect services at times that suit them (CIPD, 2007). Technology, such as the cell phone, internet and other emerging gadgets, were expected to help alleviate this pressure and provide several options for “control and creativity in manoeuvring the tenuous balance between work and family” (Temple 2009). This however was not the case; rather than lessen the “work pressure”, the new technologies ensure that the worker is almost always available for work.

The ever expanding potentialities of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as well as the wide deployment of its factors such as computers, software and recently, the pervasive use of the Global System for Mobile (GSM) telecommunication in Nigeria are helping to increase efficiency and reduce transaction cost across all segments of the economy (Onyukwu, 2007). These gadgets enable more qualitative work to be achieved leading to higher earnings and by extension higher standard of living.

However, this expansion in accessibility may not take into cognizance the demand on the employee by other non-work commitments, such as child care, dependent elder-care or even other social obligations that may require some time off work, the lack of which may affect motivation, job satisfaction and ultimately, job performance.

Individuals play multiple roles in their lives. A person could be a father, husband, brother, uncle, nephew, son and in-law at home, while he could also be a boss, employee, subordinate, professional peer and employer at work. All of these roles have significant influence on the personality of the individual and whether collectively or individually, they all have serious implications for his health, temperament at home and work and ultimately on his overall performance in both spheres. These divergent role demands however could be broadly categorized into two: work roles and personal-life roles. In certain professions, however, spill-over of roles are inevitable. In academics for instance, research work may require extension of the researcher's attention beyond the normal time frame classified as "work time". In certain cases, administrators in Universities may also be required to attend meetings which may extend their stay at work beyond the normal work period. Such extension may not take cognizance of over-time provisions and the like.

It is against this background that this study intends to examine the effects of ICT on work-life balance of staff in private universities by attempting to answer the following research question: *to what extent is ICT relevant in the maintenance of a balance between work roles and personal life roles?*

The objective of this study therefore is to investigate the effect of ICT usage on work-life balance of staff of private Universities in South-West Nigeria, using Fountain University, Osogbo as a case study.

## **2.0 Conceptual framework**

### *2.1 What is work?*

"Work", according to Kuper and Kuper (1976) as quoted by Ogunbameru (2008) "refer to any physical and/or mental activities, which transform natural materials into a more useful form, improve human knowledge and understanding of the world, and/or provide or distribute goods to others". It is "an instrument activity intended to provide goods and services to support life" (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). These definitions of work limit the concept to activities alone and to address this shortcoming, Ogunbameru (2008) stated that "the definition of work cannot be limited to references to activities alone, but must also consider the social context within which those activities are being carried out". Work in this case is primarily viewed from one angle.

The reasons why people work are made up of both economic and non-economic goals and perhaps, the most important non-economic value people receive from work is a sense of useful achievement (Lynn and O'Grady, 1978). This stance was further supported by Edwards and Rothbard (2000) in their postulation

that although work may provide intrinsic rewards its primary goal is extrinsic. The economic reason for working, on the part of the employee, is to earn money for sustenance. This view contrasted with the notion that the most obvious reason for work is the economic function of producing goods and services (Ogunbameru, 2008), which is the organizational view of work. In the first instance, the assumption is that work provides both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction which may not be limited to the work environment alone. On the other hand, work also supplies the social needs of man at the work place when people meet, converse and share experiences and the type of work one is involved in connotes a certain level of social status both for the worker and his family (Ogunbameru, 2008). Work, for the purpose of this study will be any paid activity aimed at producing goods or services while non-paying activities, whether in the course of producing goods and services or not, will fall under personal life activities.

Work plays a fundamental role in adulthood, significantly affecting self-concept and well-being. In this case, work could be expected to be a rewarding experience (Keith and Gubellini, 1975).

## 2.2 *Life*

A definition of “life” in relation to “work” is a very precarious exercise fraught with tautology and at times oversimplification of concepts. This is for the simple reason that in literature, work has been seen as part of life and vice versa. However, in the study of work-life, a distinction needs to be made and the dichotomous relationship between the two concepts explained. “Life” includes all activities outside work (Guest, 2001) covering such concepts as family, leisure and other activities not related to working for pay. This also covers free time spent without being committed to any activities whether for pay or not.

## 2.3 *Work and Life*

A 2002 study by Ezzedeen and Swiercz reveals that employees are often preoccupied with work when not working to such an extent that when they are in the company of family and loved ones, they experience an inability to be meaningfully engaged in non-work activities. The study further explains that “modern work has become knowledge based, fluid, and intellectual; overworked people think about work all of the time”. This feeling of work consciousness took on a psychological dimension aptly captured by the study as being “cognitively intrusive”. That is, the person is always thinking of work while he is supposed to be off work and concerned with other non-work activities.

## 2.4 *Work – Life Balance*

Balance between work and personal life was defined by the Irish National Framework Committee for Work/life Balance Policy as “a balance between an individual’s work and their life outside work”. The principle at stake here is that work should be healthy and should leave time and energy to pursue interests outside work (Kodz, Harper and Dench, 2002). Such “interests outside work” include extended personal responsibilities as child or elder care and the need to fulfil certain societal obligations, travel, study or even engaging in leisure activities.

The point here is that the worker has certain control over his working time. Working time means any period during which the individual is working, is at the employer's disposal and is carrying out activities or duties assigned to him by the employer (CIPD, 2007). Working time is however not limited simply to the hours of 8 – 5 that one is officially expected to work, but includes the time spent commuting between work and home (David, 2009).

The search for a balance between work and personal life is not without its critics. Work-life balance has been seen as a ploy to elevate an issue that is very naturally part of everyday life (Nicholl, 2007) as there was never any consideration of separating the two concepts until recently (Wheeler, 2009). According to some of the critics, the idea of balance between work and life was unheard of in the 17th, 18th, 19th, or for most of the 20th centuries as both concepts were largely integrated, more so as the agrarian nature of existence at the time was an amalgamation of the two. In most parts of Africa and other developing regions of the world, this is still the case. The problem of role differentiation, and, hence the need for balancing work and personal life, was qualified as a problem of a post industrial “affluent society”, characteristic of the developed West.

With the spread of the use of ICT, affluence, in terms of technology adoption and utilization, has become a worldwide phenomenon, although in relative terms. This created a globalized workforce sharing many similar characteristics and culture. Most noticeable of these character changes include the increasing globalization of labour skills (Castells 2000; Quah 1996 and 1999); the feminization of employment where special considerations are made with respect to the employment of women, and new less secure working patterns (Mishel, Bernstein and Schmitt 1999) which, in turn, generated problems for the sustainability of families and communities (Beck 2000; Carnoy 2000; Hochschild 1997; Reich 2001) especially in the developed countries.

This new workforce had to contend with conflicting demands on time, energy and commitment by the work itself, and personal or family life outside work. People have also become increasingly individualized in work and home life as traditional systems of social support through the company, state, family and community have been eroded (Beck 2000; Carnoy, 2000). Thus the individual is saddled with multiple roles in both spheres of his daily existence with little or no external support to cushion the negative effects of role conflicts and overload.

The African experience, where marriage and child birth are considered important milestones in life, is no better than what obtains in other regions of the world. Traditionally, African women's main role in the family is to cater for the upbringing of the children and to assist the husband in maintaining the economic balance in the house through supportive labour on the farm or in some other petty trades. With enlightenment and education, more women are finding their niches in traditionally male dominated paid jobs, and in some instances, time consuming entrepreneurial businesses, thus expanding the scope of the relative earnings to the family but to the detriment of their traditional roles as the main family support and maintenance agents. In some dual-earning families, the wife may earn as much as the husband. Increasing dual-earning families in

Nigeria, for instance, has increased work/life pressure substantially among all the classes of people (Alutu and Ogbe, 2007).

In justifying the dichotomy between work and life and the need for a balance between the two concepts, Burchell (2006) as cited in a report of the Equal Employment Opportunity Trust of New Zealand; opined that “the concept of work/life balance includes the priority that work takes over family, working long hours, and work intensification”. And work intensification in this case was defined as “the increasing effort that employees put into the time that they are working” or the amount of work done in a day. This extended the temporal range of potential working hours and contributed to the development of non standard, flexible and long working hours (Harkness 1999; Presser 1999)

### **3.0 Theoretical background**

Several theories have been put up to explain the relationship between work and life outside work (Krouse and Afifi, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti and Burke, 2009). The *segmentation theory* for instance states that work roles and life roles exist in separate domains and have no influence on one another (Clark, 2000; Kanter, 1977; Pleck, 1977). It refers to the complete compartmentalization or fragmentation of work and family systems (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) whereby the two domains are lived separately and have no influence on one another. This is however considered to be the weakest theory on the relationship between work and personal life (Guest, 2001).

The *spill-over theory* on the other hand recognizes the influence of the two domains on each other. It states that increased satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) at work leads to increased satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) at home. Spill-over experiences can be either positive or negative, but the experiences of work and family are identical—either both are positive or both are negative (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Grzywacz, 2000).

The *compensation theory* defines the compensatory effect between two forms of psychological interference: work-to-family and family-to-work. This theory simply proposes that what may be lacking in one sphere, in terms of demands or satisfactions can be made up in the other (Guest, 2001). In contrast to the spill-over theory, it holds that the relationship between the two is bi-directional; that is, one domain compensate for what is missing in the other. It represents efforts to offset negative experiences in one domain (i.e., work or family) by increased efforts to seek positive experiences in the other domain (i.e., family or work). Efforts are pursued through one of two pathways. One pathway includes increased involvement in one domain (e.g., work) reciprocated by decreased involvement in the other domain (e.g., family). The other pathway includes pursuing the domain offering greater rewards and fulfilment at the expense of the domain that offers little return (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). The assumption here is that the worker who is dissatisfied with family life may be happier putting in more hours and thus enhancing his performance and vice versa (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Kossek, Noe and DeMarr, 1999; Krouse and Afifi, 2007; Lambert, 1990; MacDermind, Seery and Weiss, 2002).

In a similar vein, *the resource drain theory* states that a negative correlation between family and work domains exist in such a way that any personal resource expended on one domain reduces the amount of resources available to the other domain (Bakker, Demerouti and Burke, 2009; Frone, Yardley and Markel, 1997). It also refers to the transfer or shift of a limited amount of available resources such as time, energy, attention from one domain to another and thereby reducing the availability of the same resources for utilization in the domain originally owning the resource. When the remaining or unused resources become insufficient, or are depleted, or both, the potential for increased levels of stress, fatigue, and burnout sets in (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Frone, 2003).

Specifically, support from elements within the two domains (partner and employer) has a significant impact on one another. The impact of partner support is greater when employees feel that their employers are unsupportive of their lives beyond work. Conversely, for employees with relatively unsupportive partners, the employer's family-friendliness reduces role conflicts more than partners. Thus, one source of support compensates for the lack of the other (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).

Clark (2000) in his work/family *border theory*, defined borders as encompassing psychological categories and tangible boundaries that divide the times, place and people associated with work versus family. This theory distinguishes three types of boundaries between work and non-work, family or personal life domains namely; physical, temporal and psychological boundaries. Extending role theories such as the compensation theory, border theory looks at how roles in life are separated by boundaries or borders. Permeability and flexibility are key related concepts to examine how boundaries between life domains affect integration, transitions, and conflicts between domains (Guest, 2001). Much like managing a physical geographical boundary, the Border theory implies that certain roles, and their related character attributes, are restricted specifically to one side of the divide between work and life while others can only be allowed to transit after sufficient moderation or modification. It considered many of the factors covered by the other theories and it extends on these by going beyond the personal practice of the subject or the organisational policies having direct influence on the determination of balance between work and life. This, therefore, is the theoretical foundation on which this study is hinged.

#### **4.0 Research Design and Methodology:**

Taking the entire staff of the institution as the population of the study, descriptive and inferential statistics tools such as frequency tables, percentages, and correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze the outcome of responses to the questionnaires. The sampling frame was such that enabled the capture of significant portion of the various levels of the population (see Table 1).

##### *4.1 Sample and instruments for data collection:*

Using purposive random sampling technique, a sample size of 50 was derived from a staff population of 80 (N= 80). Data gathering instrument used in this study was the questionnaire. The instrument elicited responses to categories of questions such as demographic information about the respondent's family size, sex and dependent members of family; personal work-life balance practice; personal time management

style, the use of ICT and hours of work effect on personal balance. It also sought information on the effect of support by colleagues and spouses.

#### 4.2 Variables and Measurement

A single dependent variable, the work-life balance perception of the subject, is captured in the questionnaire through response to questions on personal balance. Scoring of response with respect to this variable is based on a bi-polar; 2-point response coding system where “yes” is scored (2) and “no” is scored (1).

However, three independent variables related to the usage of ICT factors were used. These are: how often does the respondent take work home; the effects of ICT usage on work and family commitments, and working while in transit either away from home or work. Respondents were asked to rate how each factor affect their perception of work-life balance on a 2-points rating scale except for response to working from home, which have four degrees of responses beginning with “not at all” (score = 1) and ending with “always” (score = 4). A dummy response, “not applicable” (score = 0) was included to cater for jobs that are not portable as may be found in some technical or non-teaching jobs.

The relationship between the dependent and independent variables is represented by the following linear equation:

$$Y_{WLB} = a_0 + a_{ICT}X_{ICT} + a_{WKHOME}X_{WKHOME} + a_{WKTRANSIT}X_{WKTRANSIT} + \hat{\delta}$$

Where

$Y_{WLB}$  = dependent variable (personal work-life balance perception)

$a_0$  = Constant

$a_{ICT} - a_{WKTRANSIT}$  = regression coefficients of  $X_{ICT}, \dots, X_{WKTRANSIT}$

$X_{ICT}$  = independent variable 1(the effects of ICT on work and family commitments)

$X_{WKHOME}$  = independent variable 2 (Using ICT to work from home)

$X_{WKTRANSIT}$  = independent variable 3 (working while in transit)

$\hat{\delta}$  = Stochastic error term

#### 5.0 Findings and Discussion:

50 questionnaires were administered of which 42 were returned. This gives a response rate of 84% of all administered questionnaires. Table 1 shows the relative proportion of respondents to population by professional cadre.

Of the 42 respondents, as shown in Table 2, 12 (28.57%) were females. 8 (66.67%) of these are in the academics while the remaining 4 (33.33%) are in the non-teaching profession. There are however no female in the technical unit of the institution. Male respondents are spread across the three categories of profession thus: 17 (56.67%) in the academics; 9 (30%) in the non-teaching cadre and 4 (13.33%) in the technical cadre. In table 3, the cross-classification of the respondents by sex and age is presented. Modal age class is the 31 – 40 age range (50%).

Multiple regression analyses were carried out to test for multivariate relationships between the dependent and the independent variables, and the results of the examinations are reported in Table 4. The analysis

showed significant relationship between two of the three variables tested and work-life balance. A negative correlation ( $R = -0.1144$ ) exists between working at home and work-life balance. This is as expected since the two domains, according to the resource drain theory, are in conflict over the subject's time. With a negative regression coefficient ( $\beta = -0.03398$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), the assumption that working from home using ICT factors affect work-life balance negatively is proven. Taking work home is considered by the respondents as a major eroding factor for a balanced work-life. On the other hand, the general usage of ICT ( $\beta = 0.3174$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) is significantly correlated with respondents work-life balance perception ( $R = 0.330$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that ICT has a positive impact on maintaining work-life balance. This finding refuted the argument that ICT is a major contributor to work-life conflict, in other words, it supports the views of Onyukwu (2007) and Temple (2009). However, further research may need to be carried out to ascertain the cost-benefit relationship between ICT contribution to productivity and its effects on work-life balance.

One of the most portent characteristics of ICT is its portability, which is the ability to continue working while in transit. This was also tested using the t-test statistic and was found to be significant at the 0.01 level of significant ( $t(\text{cal}) = 3.28$ ). This supports the idea of role permeability and flexibility associated with trans-border movement between work and personal life domains and proves that ICT rather than being a major cause of imbalance is a facilitator for easy trans-border transition in work-life balance.

Overall, the model fit for the regression model as shown in Table 4 indicated that the assumption that there is a significant relationship between the three tested variables and the work-life balance perception of private university staff is tenable since the calculated F score ( $F\text{-cal} = 6.126$ ) is greater than the critical F score (critical-F = 2.852) at 0.05 level of significant. It is also noteworthy to mention the relationship between working at home and working in transit, two antithetical role-factors of work-life balance. Correlation coefficient at the intercept of these two variables was negative ( $R = -0.1644$ ) as expected.

## 6.0 Conclusions

This study investigated the role of ICT usage on work-life balance of staff of private universities in South-Western Nigeria. Primary data derived from administered structured questionnaires was used to gain first hand information on the perception of the respondents on the role of ICT in their level of work-life balance. Using descriptive and inferential tools to analyse the data, it was discovered that demographic characteristics have no significant influence on the work-life balance perception of the respondents with regards to the usage of ICT. This reinforced the assumption that ICT is not gender sensitive. Results also showed that working from home is a major contributor to work-life conflict and imbalance. Contrary to generally held views, respondents rated ICT usage in transit as a positive function of work-life balance, while overall ICT influence was also considered positively correlated to a perception of a positive work-life balance.

Based on these findings therefore, the study concludes that ICT rather than being a negative influence on the work-life balance of private universities staff, is a positive tool for maintaining balance. It is therefore recommended that accessibility to ICT factors and trainings be encouraged in these institutions. To further understand the role of ICT in work-life balance under other contexts, such as the comparative influence of ICT between teaching and non-teaching staff in both private and public universities further studies may be



required.

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**APPENDIX**

**Table 1: Administration of questionnaire**

	Population (by profession)	% of Total	Sample proportion	% of Total Sample	% of class sample size to class population size
Academic	48	60%	26	61.90%	54.17%
Non-Teaching	26	32.5%	12	28.57%	46.15%
Technical	6	7.5%	4	9.52%	66.67%
Total	80	100%	42	100%	

Source: Field work, 2010

**Table 2: Response Characteristics**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex:		
Male	30	71.43
Female	12	28.57
TOTAL	42	100.00
Age:		
Over 50	5	11.91
41 – 50	11	26.19
31 – 40	21	50.00
Under 30	5	11.91
TOTAL	42	100.00
Profession:		
Academic	26	61.91
Non-Teaching	12	28.57
Technical	4	9.52
TOTAL	42	100.00
No of Children:		
None	5	11.91
One	7	16.67
Two	7	16.67
Three	11	26.19
Four	9	21.43
Five	3	7.14
TOTAL	42	100.00
Work-Life Balance Perception:		

Balanced	9	21.43
Unbalanced	33	78.57
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Working from and taking work home:		
Always	18	42.86
Occasionally	6	14.28
Sometimes	15	35.71
Not at all	2	4.76
Not applicable	1	2.39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Effects of ICT on WLB:		
Positive	30	71.43
Negative	12	28.57
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Working in transit on WLB:		
Positive	24	57.14
Negative	18	42.86
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field work, 2010

**Table 3: Age and sex of respondents**

Age	Sex			
	Male	Female		
Under 30	3	2	5	11.90
31 – 40	15	6	21	50
41 – 50	9	2	11	26.19
Over 50	3	2	5	11.90
	30	12	42	100

Source: Field work, 2010

**Table 4: Regression Analysis and Model Fit**

Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient (β)	Correlation Coefficient (R)	Coefficient of Determination (R <sup>2</sup> )	t (cal)	Overall Model Fits

<b>ICT and its Context of Use</b>					Multiple R= 0.5710
ICT Usage	0.31745	0.330	0.318255488	2.60*	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.3260
Working from Home	-0.03398	-0.1144	0.204545455	-0.66	SE= 0.3542
Working in Transit	0.36714	0.4523	0.3259897	3.28**	F= 6.126
					F-Sig = 0.002
					Critical-F= 2.8517
					Constant= 0.1919

Source: Field work, 2010

\* = significant (P<=0.05), \*\* = significant (P<=0.01); # = Not Significant at (P>0.05)

**Table 5: Correlation Matrix**

Variable	ICT usage	Working from Home	Working in Transit	Work-Life balance Perception
ICT usage	1			
Working from Home	0.1385419	1		
Working in Transit	-0.015215	-0.164412135	1	
Work-Life balance Perception	0.33028913*	-0.114397209 #	0.452267017**	1

Source: Field work, 2010

\* = significant at P< .05, \*\* = significant at P< .01; # = Not Significant at P<.05

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