THE EFFECTS OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE TOWARDS EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION IN SARAWAK ENERGY BERHAD

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Effects of Work/Life Balance towards Employee Satisfaction in Sarawak Energy Berhad

The study was conceptualized out of the burgeoning issues with regards to collective union/employee dissatisfaction over work/life imbalances faced nowadays, in Sarawak Energy Berhad. Given past documentations of negative consequences of work/life conflict towards satisfaction level among employees, the study was therefore initialized to investigate the perception of work/life balance and employees' level of satisfaction, as well as to determine the relationship between employee satisfaction and work/life balance given the interwoven connection between both criterions. Based upon the purported “inter-role conflict” concept, an extension of the “role theory” and the “spillover theory”, the framework explains the anticipated relationship between both variables. A self-administered questionnaire to elicit the socio-demographic profile, perceptions of work/life balance and employee satisfaction levels were distributed to $n=100$ samples, and data was analyzed using 50 returned questionnaires. The correlation analysis to test the hypothesis revealed that there is no significant relationship between employee satisfaction and work/life balance. The results contradict the common notion as explored from previous researches, giving rise to the possible effects or presence of other mediators such as cultural tendencies, e.g. family-centered and respect for authority, as well as professionalism levels e.g. commitment and dedication to the job. The findings may pave way for further research in the mediating factors that may influence the relationship as well as beneficial for use and consideration of the management in areas of employees' personal development.
ABSTRAK

TAJUK: Kesan Keseimbangan Kerja/Kehidupan Terhadap Tahap Kepuasan Pekerja di Sarawak Energy Berhad

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In today’s fast-paced society, work-life balance has become a predominant issue at the workplace. According to Lockwood (2003), the consideration of work-life balance was contributed by global competition, renewed interest in personal lives or family values and aging workforce.

Other factors which also contribute to this phenomenon include changes in employee demographics, whereby more women are joining the workforce, as well as dual career couples which is increasingly becoming common nowadays (Moorhead, Steele, Alexander, Stephen & Duffin, 1997). In addition, the development of technology and emergence of gadgets which enable employees to work from home (telecommute), or bring work home, have gradually blurred the boundaries between work and non work (Hill, Miller, Weiner & Colihan, 1998). These scenarios are not confined to Western societies as many Asian countries have also experienced similar trends (Khatri & Budhwar, 2000; OECD 2004).

Work-life balance is a common issue to both employees and organizations alike, as juggling between the competing demands in both work and life is tiring and stressful, thus affecting productivity, as well as being blamed to such symptoms as sickness and absenteeism (Lockwood, 2003). Given the compelling consequences of such phenomena, there is a need
to further understand the issue in order to avoid the pitfalls and uncertainties should this issue is mishandled appropriately.

On the other hand, employee satisfaction has been commonly described as representing employees' encouraging appraisal, feelings and attitude towards their job (Gallato, Rashid, Suryasaputra, Warokka, Reamillo & Abdullah, 2012; Locke, 1976); these include different aspects of the work environment (Weiss, Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1967), presumably measuring the level of employees' sense of well-being (support, benefits, salary, workload, coworker relationship, management attitude) afforded to them in the job (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Several studies have identified that satisfaction may affect performance (Hawthorn effect) and vice versa (Taylorism) (Darougheha, Pashandi, Hooman & Khanmohammadi, 2013), although the present research may be more interested in the life-satisfaction (Judge & Watanabe, 1993; Weiss, 2002) aspect of employee satisfaction.

Given the interwoven connection of work-life balance and employee satisfaction, the present research is aimed at explaining this relationship. Employee satisfaction will be measured using the short-form Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) which was developed by Weiss et al. (1967), to elicit employees' satisfaction of several criteria such as Company Policies & Procedures, Compensation, Co-workers, Creativity, Independence, moral values, recognition, among others. Meanwhile, work-life balance will be measured using a 15-item scale adapted from an instrument reported by Fisher-McAuley, Stanton, Jolton and Gavin (2003), after works by Hayman (2005). The scale was developed to assess three dimensions of work life balance; "work interference with personal life", "personal life interference with work", and "work/personal life enhancement".
1.2 The Sarawak Energy Scenario

Sarawak Energy (SEB) has been serving the Sarawak Community since the past 70 years and now provides electricity to more than 500,000 account holders. At the same time, SEB’s workforce amounts to 3,700-strong employees from various backgrounds, fields and levels.

In recent years, SEB has made strong progress on its transformation journey, focusing on the State’s abundant energy resources in hydropower, natural gas and coal to create new opportunities for the Sarawak community. SEB also supports the State Government’s Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy or SCORE program by providing electricity to the SCORE customers and at the same time to help the Sarawak community to reach the goal of becoming a high income State by 2020.

With firm plans for rapid growth, SEB is demanding an increase in employee flexibility and productivity. As a consequence, certain quarters of the workforce has complained of work-life imbalances, especially those employees who have greater demands from the family, household and work domains.

1.3 Problem Statement

The Sarawak Energy Group’s Employee Union has, on several occasions, raised grousers over work life balance issues in their meetings with the Management; a clear sign of
collective dissatisfaction over employment standards. Due to urgent demands of work and in order to meet their Key Performance Indicators (KPI), some employees were required to work beyond normal working hours, during weekends and even on holidays. Due to increased workload, they had to bring their work back home most of the time, frequently travel for outstation duties and every so often are unable to fully utilize their paid-leave entitlement, resulting in less quality time with their family. The Union was concerned that if work life imbalance issues are not tackled, the “syndrome” would continue to be nurtured in SEB work culture.

The concerns or dissatisfactions as raised by the Union may be warranted, given the negative consequences of work-life imbalances that have been documented. According to several researches, lower work-life balance have been found to cause, among others, higher intention to leave (Chan, 2007; Mohd Noor, 2011) or likewise, lower intention to stay (Mustapha, Ahmad, Uli & Idris, 2011) or lower organizational commitment (Mohamed Azim, Ahmad & Omar, 2011), lower job satisfaction (Chan, 2007) and burnout or exhaustion (Shanafelt, Boone, Tan, Dyrbye, Sotile, Satele, West, Sloan & Oreskovich, 2012). As surmised by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2012), these incidental implications of work-life imbalances are a result of workers experiencing conflict in work and family priorities.

Therefore, the research wishes to investigate the perception of work-life balance and the level of satisfaction among employees’ in the organization, as well as to determine the relationship between employee satisfaction and work-life balance.
1.4 Objective

The specific objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To investigate the level of the employee satisfaction in the organization
- To determine the perception of the work life balance in the organization
- To identify the relationship between employee satisfaction and work life balance.

1.5 Research Question

The research is carried out to answer the following question:

*What is the relationship between work-life balance and employee satisfaction?*

1.6 Significance of Study

The research aims to explore the relationship between work-life balance and employee satisfaction particularly in Sarawak Energy Berhad.

Findings of the research are expected to enable the management of SEB to better understand the issues at hand, to guide the management should intervention be necessary and to plan for appropriate future policy concerning the workforce, in terms of welfare and job support.
1.7 Scope of Study

The research will be specifically carried out in SEB Headquarters in Kuching. The findings of the research may lack generalization to a broader spectrum of SEB employees across all regions, as SEB is present throughout the State. Due to budget and time constraint, the research could only be carried out in a centralised location. However, to leverage the shortcomings, the respondents will be chosen across all sectors and levels within the organization setup, since most of the core units and departments are stationed at the Headquarters.

1.8 Organization of Chapters

The following Chapter 2 will deliberate on the literatures reviewed, in order to define both the variables, namely work-life balance and employee satisfaction. A further discussion to explore the antecedents and consequences of the variables, as well as their respective constructs will also be presented in Chapter 2. Next, the probable relationships between both the variables from past studies, the underlying theories that support the relationships, and the theoretical framework will be reviewed, before arriving to the hypothesis to be tested in this study. Chapter 3 will outline the methodologies involved in data collection and analysis, before the results are presented and interpreted based on the data analysis selected for this study in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the literature reviews on the subjects of concern to the present study, to explain the relationships between the identified variables, work/life balance and employee satisfaction. Each of the variables will be described in detail and elaborated. To justify the research framework which highlights the relationship of both variables, the underlying theories of concern, "role theory" and "spillover theory", will be discussed and further elaborated. The framework highlights the hypothesized relationships of both variables, which serves to guide the course of the present research.

2.2 Work/Life Balance

The term "work/life balance" has been extensively used by HR practitioners to describe equilibrium in the demands, attention and satisfaction in both work and non-work domains (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003; Govender, 2010; Subramaniam & Selvaratnam, 2010; Mohd Noor, 2011; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004; Lockwood, 2003; Visser & Williams, 2006; Morgan, Marschke & Segal, 2009). Lockwood (2003) highlighted the apparent interest in or emergence of work/life balance, namely due to global competition, renewed interest in personal life and family values as well as the aging workforce. Manfredi and Holliday (2004)
suggested that work/life balance not only deals with minimizing the competing priorities, but also finding ways to ensure that both work and personal life complements each other.

Perhaps the most often cited definition of work/life balance is that of Greenhaus et al. (2003) where work/life balance is “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role”. There are several key points of work/life balance from what can be gathered of Greenhaus et al.'s (2003) version of the term; the “work and non-work domains”, the “roles” individuals have to play in the domains, the “engagement and satisfaction” dimensions. In the beginning, the focus was directed towards finding balance in both work and family life, but the differing trends nowadays require that the term work/life be adopted to encompass the broader non-work domains that working individuals may be involved in, not to mention those who have very little or no family commitments (Lockwood, 2003).

Most researchers have defined “work” as paid-for employment (Mohd Noor, 2011; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004; Visser & Williams, 2006), stressing the economic importance of income generated through paid labor (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea & Walters, 2002; Visser & Williams, 2006), thus highlighting the attachments towards, responsibilities to and demands from employers (Lockwood, 2003; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004). Meanwhile, “non-work” has been described to encompass attention towards family (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Lockwood, 2003), social activities, personal health including leisure and recreation, as well as other non-paid work such as voluntary works (Mohd Noor, 2011). These opposing domains within which individuals are involved in, would require him or her to play certain and specific roles which are expected in the eyes of the society or through interactions with society.
Engagement within the domains, brought about by the roles in the domain, involves obligations and responsibilities (Govender, 2010; Lockwood, 2003; Visser & Williams, 2006), investment of time and commitment (Virick, Lilly & Casper, 2007), which breeds demands and expectations of family members and employers alike (Lockwood, 2003). When individuals fail to manage or juggle the competing priorities, conflict arises and may lead to overbearing stress (Jackson, 1988), especially in such opposing and ill-balanced priorities brought about when one has both roles in work and non-work life (Ismail, 2006; Hanson, Hammer & Colton, 2006).

Nevertheless, the responsibility of attaining the balance should not be put on the shoulders of employees alone as circumstances may negate any such personal efforts. As highlighted by Visser and Williams (2006), the goal is to attain some form of control and self-sufficiency over working arrangements, which may be hard to come by with unsupportive employers. Therefore, employers too, have a role to play in accommodating better balance to ensure employees' are not bogged down by work and non-work conflicts (Lockwood, 2003; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004). These can include providing or creating a supportive culture in the company (Lockwood, 2003) in the form of “family-friendly policies” such as flexible work arrangements like flexi-time, compressed hours or working weeks, job-sharing, homeworking, part-time work, teleworking and voluntary reduced hours (Subramaniam & Selvaratnam, 2010; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004).
2.3 Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction describes employee’s feelings of fulfillment within his or her workplace, while job satisfaction deals with similar feelings towards the specific job that one holds, hence also being an employee. The constructs to such fulfillment are rather similar, such that both criterions may be considered interwoven so much so that the discussion of one is incomplete without the other. For the purpose of this discussion, job satisfaction may also refer to employee satisfaction.

Alike the previous criterion, employee satisfaction carries various meanings. Classic definitions of employee or job satisfaction may be traced to Locke (1976) who propagated that employee job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experience”. Several key points could be derived from the various definitions of employee satisfaction. Although commonly associated with positive or pleasant emotions or feelings (Locke, 1976; Vroom, 1964), some researchers also argue that both positive and negative or a collection of feelings may represent job satisfaction (Morgan et al., 2009; Robbins & Judge, 2009; Martins & Proenca, 2012). It was also generally accepted that employee satisfaction is an appraisal or assessment towards multi-faceted characteristics of the job including salary/wages, promotion or career progression, supervisor and work environment (Krishnan, Omar, Ismail, Alias, Abdul hamid, Abd Ghani & Kanchymalay, 2010; Martins & Proenca, 2012; Hussain & Khalid, 2011), factors of which have been categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic reasons (Govender, 2010) or rewards (Peak Network Consultants Ltd., 2011).
Another pertinent perspective of employee satisfaction is that it represents employees’ attitude towards their job (Weiss, 2002; Govender, 2010), or a “multidimensional psychological responses” (Judge & Klinger, 2008) in the form of cognitive (evaluative), affective (emotion) and behavioral composites. However, several researchers have highlighted that attitudes are formed based on feelings (emotion), beliefs and behaviors (Weiss, 2002; Kumari & Pandey, 2011).

Elaborating further on the intrinsic (e.g. respect and appreciation) and extrinsic (e.g. remuneration and benefits) factors which affect job satisfaction, AlBattat and Mat Som (2012) highlighted that management encouragement has been found to be a significant factor for higher job satisfaction among employees; Gallato et al. (2012) found evidence to relate organizational culture with job satisfaction. Meanwhile, on the other end, Gallato et al. (2012) cited role conflict and the need to do overtime among various factors which contribute to lower satisfaction. Meanwhile, the consequences of job satisfaction include organizational commitment (Gallato et al., 2012), as well as satisfaction in other aspects of life, which Judge and Klinger (2008) attributed the effects of spillover where experiences in work would spillover to non-work experience and vice versa.

2.4 Underlying Theory

This section will outline and discuss the theories underlying the research conceptual framework. In an attempt to explain the hypothesized relationship between both variables;
work/life balance and employee satisfaction; the discussion will revolve around two common, distinctive, yet inter-related theories, "role theory" and "spillover theory".

2.4.1 Role Theory

Role theory was propagated to explain the expected or predicted behavioral display when one is performing or enacting a role that he or she is associated with. The theory describes expectations of self and others, such that it evolves as a sort of guideline which dictates expected behavior (including reaction, belief, and attitude) when one is occupying a specific role (Biddle, 1986). In general, two common perspectives of role theory are “structural-functionalist” view (social structure fit) and “interactionist” view (social interaction fit). Briefly, structural-functionalist perspective on role theory describes societal expectation of an individual occupying a social role, or in other words how a role is expected to behave complying with social normative consensus, i.e. appropriateness and inappropriateness in the eyes of the society (Jackson, 1998). Meanwhile, interactionist perspective conceptualizes role theory as a continuous and non-rigid role adaptation, constantly changing to fit in with daily social encounters (Jackson, 1998; Mead, 1934).

One of the more relevant of role theory extensions is the “role conflict” concept, a denomination to portray the tensions or stresses when one experiences an incongruence of behavioral expectations (Jackson, 1998). The concept deals incompatibility issues with regards to the requirements or set standards expected in a role (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970), competing demands (Haar & Bardoel, 2007) or compliance in competing roles (Lui,
Ngo & Tsang, 2001). In relation to the present study which discerns the sphere of work and family, the focus would be on “inter-role conflict” between work and family, or in other words, involvement in one role (work or family) interferes or complicates the involvement in another role (family or work) (Ismail, 2006; Hanson et al., 2006) due to role demands of each competing sphere or domain (Tsai, 2008) for limited physical and psychological attention (Grzywacz & Marks, 1999). Thus, when an individual holds more than one role, especially in differing and competing domains, the individual experiences role overload and when role incompatibility arises, implications to health (stress), emotions and attitude (dissatisfaction), and work performance may crop up (Lui et al., 2001; Rizzo et al., 1970).

2.4.2 Spillover Theory

The theory explains the existence of similarity between different spheres or domains, for example in the work and family environment (Ismail, 2006; Hanson et al., 2006), as a result of the transfer of skills and values (Hanson et al., 2006), emotions and behaviors (Clark, 2000), carried over from one domain to another despite the presumed “physical and temporal boundaries” between the domains (Clark, 2000). The theory explains the connection between work and family, as the so-called spillover effects will either hinder or enhance participation in one domain against the other (Grzywacz, Almeida & McDonald, 2002; Ismail 2006).

Consequently, within the work-family context, there are two competing views of this theory; negative spillover and positive spillover. Negative spillover represents the interference or intrusion into work or family life due to commitments in the other competing
domain thus undermining proper role function (Hanson et al. 2006; Ismail, 2006; Clark, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 1999), while positive spillover signifies the synergy, enhancements or benefits of the receiving sphere from the attributes gained in the originating sphere, in terms of increasing resources or betterment of individuals in performing roles (Hanson et al., 2006, Haar & Bardoel, 2007; Grzywacz et al., 2002; Grzywacz, 2000).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The research is intended to determine whether there is a relationship between employee satisfaction and work/life balance. In view of this, the theoretical framework reflects the hypothesized relationship between both variables, without divulging any such causal relations that may exist between both variables, as this was never intended at the onset.

The framework is based upon the role theory, or in particular, the role conflict due to incompatibilities in partaking the roles in both work and non-work dimensions. Such ill-managed conflict may give rise to pressure and stress to employees, thus affecting their attitudes towards their job, or in other words, the job satisfaction may be affected. Another basis for the framework is the spillover theory, whereby negative spillover, in the context of work and non-work related issues, may affect both domains in similar fashion, while positive spillover denotes that better work satisfaction enhances the non-work aspect as well, thus creating the expected balance in both domains. The research framework is depicted in Figure 2.1 below.
Work/life balance variable which represents the perception of employees' of the state of work/life balance afforded to them within the current work setting, consist of three constructs, namely work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and work/personal life enhancement, after works by Hayman (2005) and Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003). The constructs represents the conditions where conflicts due to roles cross over into both domains, as well as the positive spillover effect of enhancement of one domain to another. Employee satisfaction is meanwhile represented by the constructs of extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction, to best represent the multidimensional facets of factors that may invoke response in the form of cognitive and attitude towards the job, as suggested by Govender (2010), Gallato et al. (2012) Judge and Klinger (2008), Kumari and Pandey (2011), Martins and Proenca (2012), among others.
2.6 Development of Hypothesis

There have been several researches in the area of work-life balance and employee or job satisfaction, especially the numerous studies which have reported evidences of a relationship between both variables, among others Ahmad (1996), Burke, Burgess and Oberrlaid (2004), Forsythe and Polzer-Debruyne (2007), to name a few. Although almost all studies have either elicited the predictor-criterion relationship, the existence of a relationship between both variables suffices for this discussion. Other researchers have also explored the mediators of this relationship, namely inter-role conflict or family role (Grandey, Cordeiro & Crouter, 2005; Huffman, Youngcourt, Payne & Castro, 2008).

In support of this discussion, a literature research into work-life balances conducted by the Centre for Health Psychology, Staffordshire University Stoke on Trent (2007) revealed that most common findings from past literatures in the fields of business, management, health and social sciences implicate work-family role conflicts on observed attitudes and behaviors at work, most notably job satisfaction; the higher the conflict, the lower the job satisfaction. An empirical study by Burke et al. (2004) examining the effects of organizations in support of work-life balance on the perception of a sample of 134 male psychologists revealed compelling evidence that work-life balance results in greater job satisfaction, apart from lesser stress at work, greater happiness, less intention to leave and better emotional well-being.

Results from Hughes and Bozionelos’ (2007) qualitative survey among 20 bus drivers employed by a relatively large, single company in the UK found that work-life imbalances had a significant contribution towards dissatisfaction in their job, apart from explaining
absenteeism and non-genuine sick leaves. The study also highlighted respondents' lower perception of management initiatives in providing the work-life balance to address their grouses, indicating that the centralization of large companies may reduce the "human touch" in human resource management. Similarly, a research by Forsyth and Polzer-Debruyne (2007) among 1187 New Zealand employees from 25 different organizations found evidence that employees' perception of management support for work-life balance is significantly positively related to job satisfaction, which in turn increases employee commitment in terms of reduced intention to leave. Other spin-offs of better work-life balance support reported include decreasing work pressure, and lower job performance, probably due to reduced work quantity as more focus is provided for other out-of-work activities, home and family.

In terms of implications of "role" perception, the findings from Virick et al.'s (2007) empirical research examining a group of 510 employees who remained employed after a layoff exercise and their experiences in the post-layoff setting revealed that there is a positive relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. In addition, within context of this specific setting, the effects of "role overload" or perception of increased work demands experienced by these layoff survivors towards impaired job satisfaction may be reconciled by improved work-life balance. From another perspective, through empirical research among 174 married, employed couples (174 male, 174 female) with two children and from working, middle-class households in the state of Pennsylvania, USA, Grandey et al. (2005) found significant relationships between work-family conflicts and job satisfaction. In particular, both work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work conflict dimensions were found to be significantly related with job satisfaction in a negative direction. This can be explained by the inter-role conflict existed as one may be threatened of their
“valued” role in the family when their role in the work setting starts to interfere, and such is observed predominantly among female respondents. Grandey et al. (2005) also concluded that women’s family role compared to men’s would explain the difference in job satisfaction observed between the genders. Concurrently, observations by Huffman et al. (2008) found that among active-duty U.S. Army soldiers stationed in Europe, those employees with family (spouse and/or children) showed a significant relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction, lending evidence to the effects of inter-role conflict.

However, Calvo-Salguero, Carrasco-Gonzalez and Salinas-Martinez de Lecea (2010) found that that inter-role conflict does not contribute to work-family conflict effects on job satisfaction, or in other words, importance of family role does not predict the relationship between work-life imbalance and job satisfaction through their study among 162 Spanish public organization employees, contrary to Grandey et al. (2005). Nevertheless, their study still found a significant and negative relationship between work-interfere-with-family (WIF), most commonly attribute of work-life conflict, and job satisfaction among female respondents.

In the Malaysian context, Ahmad’s (1996) empirical survey among 120 married secretaries in the state of Selangor, Malaysia found significant relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction, in that concerns on work-family conflict would negatively affect job satisfaction, and further, family and life satisfaction, supporting the notion that negative consequences of work- and family-related issues if work-family imbalances are not addressed. The discussions above lead to the following hypothesis to be tested: