

Article

Work–Life Balance and Employee Satisfaction during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The concept of work–life balance derives from the vision that professional life and personal life are two elements that balance each other synergistically in the development of an individual. Work–life balance can positively and negatively influence employees’ performance through employee satisfaction. Using the structural equation modeling (SEM) method (partial least squares), we empirically analyzed the work–life balance of a sample of 452 employees in Romania. The study highlights that work–life equilibrium or disequilibrium significantly affects professional and personal satisfaction, influencing employee motivation and turnover intention. Following the empirical study, we found that a state of balance between professional and personal life generates satisfaction, a higher degree of motivation, increased performance, and reduced employee turnover.

Keywords: work–life balance; employee satisfaction; motivation; performance; employee turnover

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1. Introduction

Human labor is the basis of the evolution of civilization. Intellectual or physical, the work undertaken by man supported and allowed the evolution of society to the current level, characterized by complexity in all its aspects: economic, social, and political. If the purpose of the work was mainly to ensure the survival of individuals at the dawn of human civilization, now the concept includes more than a human activity to ensure livelihood. Work is an essential activity that allows people to capitalize on their intellectual or physical potential, as well as the experience gained by them, which influences their social status, contentment or happiness, identity, social relationships, daily schedule, and behavior. On the other hand, in the last half-century, people manifested increased interest in the quality of their personal life and time allocated to relaxation, family, or other activities outside the workplace.

Given that the two aspects complete the human being, it is understandable why concerns about studying the ways and conditions in which professional life and personal life can be balanced are contemporary concerns in academia and management practice.

Work–life balance (WLB) is a balance between the two components of an individual in the workforce: work-related and leisure time spent on domestic and recreational activities. Such a balance is achieved by mitigating the conflicts between the two fields [1]. WLB is associated with involvement in work and housework or recreational activities, as well as satisfaction with their roles. Understood in this way, WLB includes three elements: a balance of time, a balance of commitment, and a balance of satisfaction resulting from the fulfillment of all these roles. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw saw this balance on three lev-

els: the balance of physical time allocated to the two areas, the balance between the degrees of involvement in the two roles assumed, and the balance between the degrees of satisfaction concerning the two roles assumed by the individual [2]. A balanced situation between professional and private life refers to how an employee reconciles the two areas (professional and private) regarding allocated physical time and the degree of involvement in the two areas. The balance between the allocated time and the degree of involvement leads to satisfaction concerning professional and personal life.

WLB occurs when professional life does not invade family life and family life does not interfere with career. Therefore, WLB is an optimal mix of professional work and other life areas, including family, household, health, social activities, and hobbies [3]. On the basis of these considerations, WLB is not only identified with a proportionate division of physical time spent in the professional and private spheres. In order to perform the WLB, the actual time allocated to work performed for an employer must be taken into account (which includes the time spent working at work, the time spent in traffic to work and back, and the time worked at home after working hours).

Achieving a harmonious balance between professional and personal life has long been recognized as crucial to individual wellbeing and organizational effectiveness. Effectively managing work and personal commitments has become essential for employees and organizations, directly impacting employee performance and satisfaction. Numerous studies have explored the relationship between work–life balance and employee outcomes, highlighting its potential to positively or negatively influence factors such as employee satisfaction, motivation, and turnover intention [4–8]. However, it is imperative to conduct empirical investigations examining specific contexts and utilize robust analytical methods to comprehensively understand this complex relationship.

This study analyzes the relationship linking WLB, personal and professional satisfaction, motivation, and employee turnover due to this state of equilibrium. The study's findings shed light on the significant impact of work–life equilibrium or disequilibrium on employee satisfaction, motivation, and turnover intention, contributing original insights to the existing literature. The research highlights the importance of achieving a state of balance between professional and personal life, presenting original evidence that such balance leads to increased performance, motivation, and reduced employee turnover. Focusing on a sample of 452 employees in Romania, the paper provides original empirical data that enrich the understanding of work–life balance in a distinct cultural context.

The structure of the paper contains five sections. The first section introduces the research topic, while the second reviews the literature. The third section proposes the research methodology, and the subsequent sections describe the research results, discussions, and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Work–Life Balance

After analyzing the literature, we found that work–life balance (WLB) was conceptualized in the early 1970s, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. This notion has developed in a complementary way with two negative phenomena that affect the workforce: workaholism and burnout [3]. The balance between professional activity and personal life has been investigated from multiple perspectives: employees, employers, and the impact that the state of balance/imbalance can generate in economic and social terms. Far from being a simple theoretical concept [9], WLB is primarily the result of preferences and options clearly expressed by each subject [10,11].

Following the literature research, we found no general agreement regarding a definition of WLB; this concept can be framed in different theoretical frameworks [12]. In role balance theory, WLB is a positive commitment to multiple roles for a satisfying, healthy, and productive life [2]. The person–environment fit theory sees WLB as a state of balance

between the resources and requirements of the two fields: professional activity and private life, promoting effective participation in both areas [13]. Liu, Wang, and Zhou [14] showed that WLB has, as a consequence, a high degree of satisfaction which translates into the absence of conflicts between family and professional life. On the basis of these considerations, we can say that the conflict between family and professional life is represented by the frequency and intensity with which the professional plan interferes with the personal plan or vice versa [15]. Both constructs have a bidirectional nature [16]. Additional work requirements may impede the fulfillment of family responsibilities (leading to an imbalance between professional and private life), or family management requirements may limit the ability to perform specific tasks at work (leading to an imbalance between private and professional life) [13]. Wayne, Butts, Casper, and Allen [17] showed that these imbalances between private and professional life significantly predict dissatisfaction (in both the professional and the family fields). JyothiSree and Jyothi [18] considered that WLB balances private activities (housework, recreation, and leisure) and time spent on employees' professional activities.

Numerous studies have investigated the preferences for managing the time budget allocated to raising and educating children and the family regarding reduced work schedules, which has substantially favored WLB [19–21]. WLB has also been investigated in terms of motivation to work [22], responsible to a considerable extent for the coordinates of individual behavior [23,24], and equally for positioning in the organizational context [25].

The exaggerated need for work, a form of work–life imbalance known as workaholism [26,27], has long been debated in the literature from a behavioral perspective [28] or as an intercultural phenomenon (Ramsey & McCorduc, 2005; Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2009) [29,30]. In addition, age dependence on work was also addressed [31], but also from a gender perspective [32–34], without determining precisely whether workaholism mainly affects women or men, young people, or the elderly, or whether there is a geographical predisposition [35].

Work–life imbalance affects both professional and personal life [36], and the predisposition to work certainly affects family time [16] while fostering interpersonal conflicts at work [37], worsening marital problems [38], and establishing a weak social relationship outside of working hours [39]. Such a situation can lead to burnout, mental stress, and health problems [40,41].

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to WLB amid restrictions that have affected the labor market and economic and social life in all its components. An essential change has undoubtedly been the increase in teleworking, a fact that has been reported all over the world [42–47]. In addition, the limitations of interpersonal actions and social distancing [48] have affected WLB, income level, employee satisfaction [49,50], and organizational performance [51].

2.2. The Relationship between WLB and Job Satisfaction

How WLB is achieved can positively and negatively influence employees' performance through employee satisfaction [52–56]. A disequilibrium between work and personal life can affect satisfaction, productivity, and individual performance [57]. Previous studies have found that achieving WLB positively relates to job satisfaction [55,58]. On the basis of the results of previous research, we propose for our empirical study the following hypothesis regarding the balance between professional and private life:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Work–life equilibrium (WLE) positively influences work and personal satisfaction, while work–life disequilibrium (WLD) negatively influences work and personal satisfaction in the perception of the employees selected for research.*

Job satisfaction is defined holistically as a global and multidimensional construct [59–61]. For Locke [62], satisfaction is the perceived relationship between what is received by

and offered to an individual from the organization. Employees experience a sense of accomplishment if they are appreciated and rewarded, which comes from valuing their work [63]. The phenomenon of labor flexibility (including work at home) is the attempt to provide support and increase the WLB of their employees [64,65]. On the basis of these considerations, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Work–life equilibrium (WLE) positively affects work motivation in the perception of the employees selected for research.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *The disequilibrium between work and private life (WLD) increases employee turnover, while the equilibrium between work and private life (WLE) reduces employee turnover through increased work satisfaction and motivation in the perception of the employees selected for research.*

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model of the research.

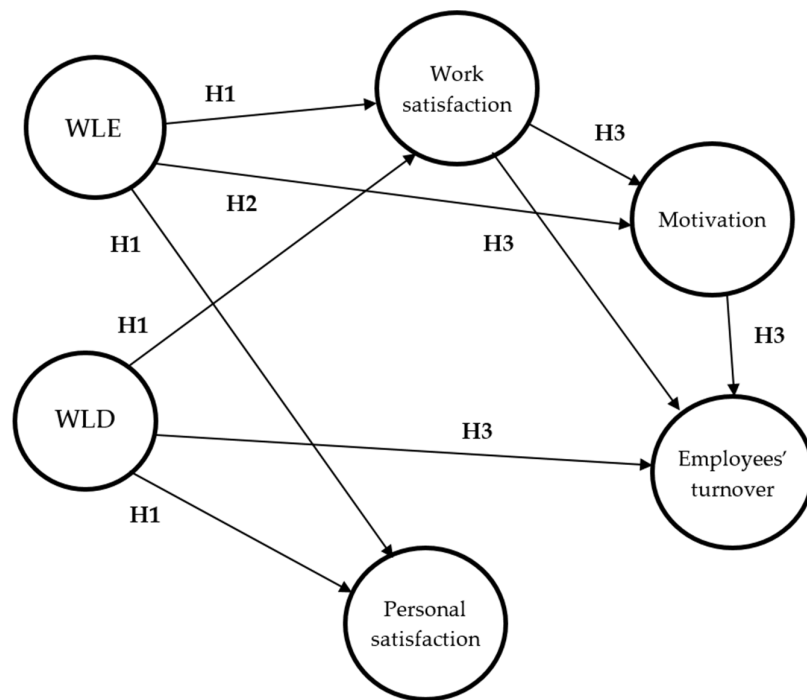


Figure 1. The conceptual model. Source: Authors' conception developed on the basis of literature review.

3. Research Methodology

The empirical analysis we performed in the paper consists of a quantitative approach to understand the relationships linking the measured variables (work–life equilibrium, work–life disequilibrium, work satisfaction, personal satisfaction, motivation, and employee turnover) using the inferential statistical research method. We used primary data (collected through a questionnaire) and secondary data (for literature review). The questionnaire survey was conducted from September 2021 to February 2022 in the Southwest Oltenia region of Romania. The target population of the research constituted employees in this region: 418,368 individuals. A sample of 515 individuals was selected with a level of confidence of 95%, with the margin of error being 4.61%. The response rate of the survey was 87.76%. The participants in this study were 452 employees who worked in Romanian organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The items of the questionnaire are addressed

using a Likert scale. According to the methodology described by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian [66], the means of disseminating the questionnaire was the Internet. Table 1 presents the structure of the sample and the descriptive statistics of the demo-socioeconomic variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

| | Answer Options | Frequencies (Percentage) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Gender | Male | 41.0 |
| | Female | 59.0 |
| Age | 20–30 years | 10.1 |
| | 31–45 years old | 43.3 |
| | 46–55 years old | 34.7 |
| | Over 55 years | 11.9 |
| Education level | High school | 18.3 |
| | Bachelor | 35.1 |
| | Master | 39.6 |
| | PhD | 7.1 |
| Position | Managerial | 16.4 |
| | Execution | 83.6 |

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of collected data.

Work–life balance (WLB) was divided into two constructs, work–life equilibrium (WLE) and work–life disequilibrium (WLD), in accordance with the literature [55,58,67]. We also considered, in the composition of the work–life balance evaluation scale, the scale proposed by Hayman [68], composed of 15 items, and the scale of Tetrick and Buffardi [69], which incorporates both directions of the relationship (work–privacy). The satisfaction component of the questionnaire used in the empirical study was constructed by the authors starting from other scales proposed in the literature [55,58]. For job satisfaction, we also took into account, in the questionnaire, the Short Index of Job Satisfaction (SIJS) developed by Brayfield and Rothe [70], a scale applied even today [71]. Therefore, the satisfaction scale was divided into job and personal satisfaction. To the satisfaction scale, we added two related concepts: motivation and performance, which are strengthened by (1) satisfaction and (2) employee turnover, which is generated by dissatisfaction.

To investigate the validity of the hypotheses, we used a quantitative research method: structural equation modeling [72]. The model of structural equations can be expressed as follows:

$$\eta = B\eta + \Gamma\xi + \zeta, \quad (1)$$

where η is the vector of endogenous latent variables, ξ is the vector of exogenous latent variables, B is the matrix of regression coefficients that relate the latent endogenous variables to each other, Γ is the matrix of regression coefficients relating endogenous variables to exogenous variables, and ζ is the vector of disturbance terms.

The variables defined in the research are WLE (work–life equilibrium), WLD (work–life disequilibrium), job satisfaction, personal satisfaction, motivation, performance, and employees' turnover intention. These latent variables (unobservable and endogenous) group the observable (exogenous) variables represented by the questionnaire items. Table 2 shows how to group the variables, illustrating the structure of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Description of the variables within the research model.

| Latent Variable | Code | Observable Variable | Scale |
|-------------------------------|-------|--|---|
| Work–life equilibrium | WLB1 | I am satisfied with the way I perform my tasks at work. | Never, rarely, neutral, often, always |
| | WLB4 | I have time each week for personal/family activities. | |
| | WLB6 | When I finish my work schedule, I stop thinking about tasks. | |
| | WLB7 | I prioritize my work tasks at work. | |
| | WLB8 | I prioritize the events I have to attend in private. | |
| Work–life disequilibrium | WLB2 | During the pandemic, I exceeded my work schedule. | |
| | WLB3 | When I had difficult tasks or pressing deadlines at work, I also worked in my free time. | |
| | WLB5 | My supervisor contacts me in my spare time for work-related matters. | |
| | WLB9 | During the COVID-19 pandemic, I sacrificed my sleep to spend more time with my family. | |
| | WLB10 | During the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked harder than before. | |
| | WLB11 | During the COVID-19 pandemic, I sacrificed my sleep to fulfill my duties at work. | |
| | WLB12 | During this time, I felt increased pressure/stress at work. | |
| Work satisfaction | WLB13 | During this period, I requested more days off than before the pandemic. | |
| | | | |
| Personal satisfaction | SAN1 | I am happy to go to work. | Total disagreement, partial disagreement, neutral, partial agreement, total agreement |
| | SAN2 | I feel fulfilled at work. | |
| | SAN3 | Work contributes to my overall happiness. | |
| | SAN4 | At work, I feel inspired and creative. | |
| Motivation | SAN5 | I am happy with my family. | Very demotivated, demotivated, neutral, motivated, very motivated |
| | SAN6 | I am satisfied with my personal life. | |
| | | | |
| Employees' turnover intention | SAN7 | How do you assess your level of motivation at work for the period 1 March 2020 so far? | Dropped a lot, lower, same level, slightly better, excellent |
| | SAN8 | How do you assess your performance at work for 1 March 2020 so far, compared to the previous period? | |
| Employees' turnover intention | SAN9 | You are considering leaving the organization for a career or a better salary. | Constant, often, sometimes, rarely, never |
| | SAN10 | Would you recommend the organization you work for to others looking for a job? | |

Source: Developed by the authors.

4. Results

We start from the formulated hypotheses and build a model using the modeling equation of structure, with partial least squares. The model resulting from the definition of the variables, as shown in Table 2, is illustrated in Figure 2.

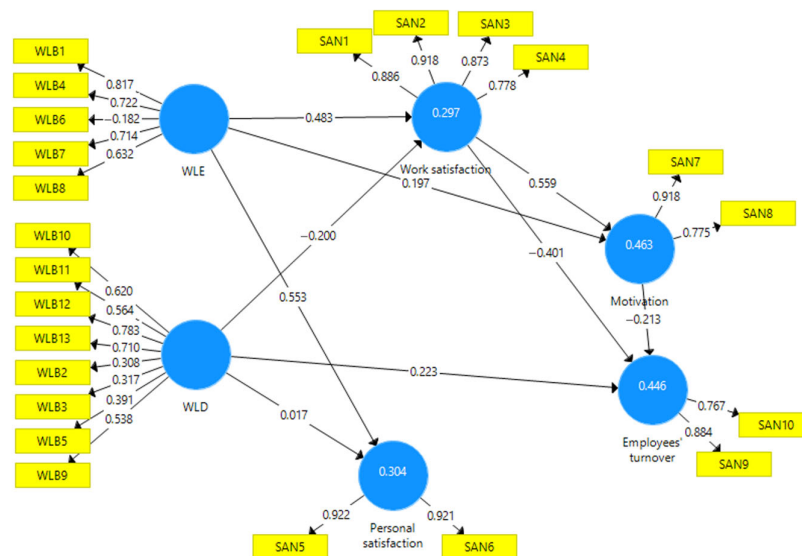


Figure 2. The initial model built using SEM-PLS. Source: Developed by the authors on the basis of collected data using Smart PLS v.3.

In order to optimize the model that emphasizes the influences of WLB on professional and personal satisfaction, as well as on the motivation and employees' turnover intention, we eliminated exogenous variables that had a load of less than 0.7, proceeding according to the methodology described by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt [73].

Furthermore, to increase the validity and reliability of the model, other items were removed, with the resulting model (Figure 3) having a high degree of validity, reliability, and suitability. The values of 0.053 of the SRMR (standardized root-mean-squared residual) and 0.944 of the NFI (normed fit index) indicate a good fit for the applied model.

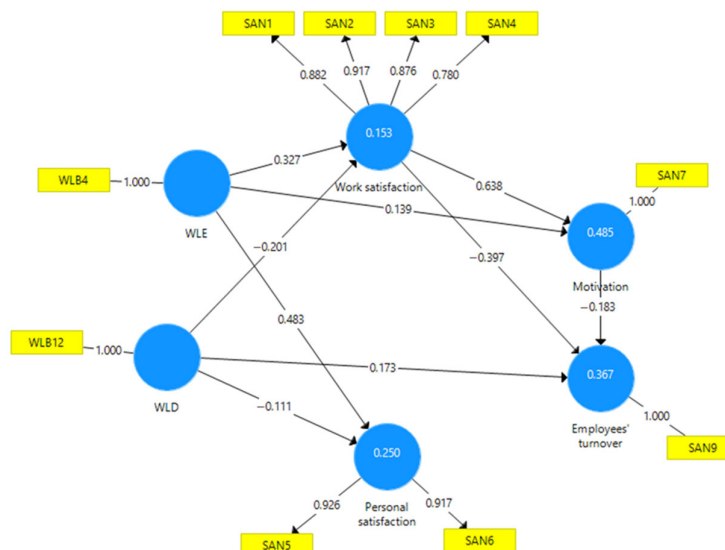


Figure 3. The applied model built using SEM-PLS. Source: Developed by the authors on the basis of collected data using Smart PLS v.3.

The validity and reliability of the model are highlighted in Table 3. According to Hair et al. [73], the model is valid and reliable if the latent variables record values of Cronbach's alpha over 0.7, composite reliability over 0.8, and average variance extracted over 0.6. Therefore, the applied model had excellent validity and reliability.

Table 3. Validity and reliability of the applied model.

| | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Re- liability | Average Variance Ex- tracted (AVE) |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Employee turnover | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Motivation | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Personal satisfaction | 0.822 | 0.918 | 0.849 |
| WLD | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| WLE | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Work satisfaction | 0.887 | 0.922 | 0.749 |

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of collected data using Smart PLS v.3.

Studying path coefficients for the applied model (Table 4), we found that the balance between professional and private life positively and significantly influences both work satisfaction (0.470) and personal satisfaction (0.359). Furthermore, F squared, which illustrates the size effect, records high values (over 0.15), and influences these two variables (0.289 and 0.151, respectively). Furthermore, the disequilibrium between work and private life has a negative but weak influence on personal satisfaction (−0.126) and an average positive influence on work satisfaction (−0.125). These results confirm the validity of hypothesis 1 (H1).

Table 4. Path coefficients.

| | Original Sample (O) | t-Statistics | p-Values | F-Squared |
|--|---------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| Motivation → Employee turnover (H3) | −0.183 | 2.585 | 0.010 | 0.044 |
| WLD → Employee turnover (H3) | 0.173 | 3.767 | 0.000 | 0.080 |
| WLD → Personal satisfaction (H1) | −0.111 | 2.340 | 0.020 | 0.000 |
| WLD → Work satisfaction (H1) | −0.201 | 3.549 | 0.000 | 0.056 |
| WLE → Motivation (H2) | 0.139 | 2.401 | 0.017 | 0.054 |
| WLE → Personal satisfaction (H1) | 0.483 | 9.076 | 0.000 | 0.432 |
| WLE → Work satisfaction (H1) | 0.327 | 5.700 | 0.000 | 0.327 |
| Work satisfaction → Employee turnover (H3) | −0.397 | 5.664 | 0.000 | 0.163 |
| Work satisfaction → Motivation (H3) | 0.638 | 9.485 | 0.000 | 0.432 |

Source: Developed by the authors on the basis of collected data using Smart PLS v.3.

Analyzing the data in Table 4, we also noticed that the equilibrium between professional and private life (WLE) has a positive influence, average in intensity on motivation (0.150), confirming the validity of hypothesis 2 (H2). Furthermore, researching the validity of hypothesis 3 (H3), we found that the disequilibrium between professional life and private life (WLD) influences the intention to leave the organization (path coefficient: 0.138). At the same time, the equilibrium between professional and private life (WLE) exerts an influence in decreasing the employees' turnover intention through increasing work satisfaction (path coefficient: −0.434) and motivation (path coefficient: −0.101). Table 5 shows the specific indirect effects of WLB on employee turnover.

Table 5. Specific indirect effects.

| | Original Sample (O) | t-Statistics | p-Values |
|---|---------------------|--------------|----------|
| WLE → Work satisfaction → Motivation → Employee turnover (H3) | −0.038 | 2.308 | 0.021 |
| WLD → Work satisfaction → Motivation | −0.128 | 3.002 | 0.003 |
| WLE → Work satisfaction → Motivation | 0.209 | 4.679 | 0.000 |
| WLD → Work satisfaction → Employee turnover | 0.080 | 3.248 | 0.001 |
| WLE → Work satisfaction → Employee turnover (H3) | −0.130 | 3.716 | 0.000 |

| | | | |
|--|--------|-------|-------|
| WLE → Motivation → Employee turnover (H3) | −0.026 | 1.673 | 0.095 |
| Work satisfaction → Motivation → Employee turnover | −0.117 | 2.513 | 0.012 |
| WLD → Work satisfaction → Motivation → Employee turnover | 0.024 | 1.854 | 0.064 |

Source: Developed by the authors on the basis of collected data using Smart PLS v.3.

On the basis of the data presented in Tables 4 and 5, we can confirm the validity of hypothesis 3 (H3). The disequilibrium between professional and private life (WLD) increases employee turnover intention, while the equilibrium between professional and private life (WLE) decreases turnover through improved job satisfaction and motivation.

5. Discussion

Reviewing the literature, we found a series of papers highlighting the positive influences of WLB on employee satisfaction and motivation, starting from a positive mood that beneficially affects the availability of work (work engagement) on three essential dimensions: force, dedication, and absorption [74]. In addition, WLB increases work commitment which will make work exciting and enjoyable [75], satisfy employees [76], and make them ready for new challenges [77], leading to an improvement in organizational performance [78] and increased loyalty to the organization [79]. Our research shows that WLB benefits job satisfaction, motivation, and employee loyalty, and that companies must take every action to support this work. Bukowska et al. [10] showed that there are several ways in which WLB can be improved: flexible forms of work through different work regimes, granting leave and benefits, providing support for the care of children or the elderly, involvement in social activities of employees, management career, and limiting the extra time worked by an employee.

The COVID-19 crisis is a Black Swan event that has affected all aspects of human society, politically, economically, and individually, severely affecting micro and small enterprises [80,81]. Our research results show that work–life balance has changed significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic and negatively affected job satisfaction, increasing employee turnover. The total amount of work has increased in all countries and regions during the lockdown. Andrew et al. [82] stated that household responsibilities have increased in lockdown, especially among women working from home. However, Sevilla and Smith [83] showed that the distribution of hours spent on households was balanced during the pandemic. Del Boca, Oggero, Profeta, and Rossi [84] found that women's housework hours have increased sharply, while men have seen increased overtime at work or home. Another worrying consequence of the lockdown imposed to limit the spread of the virus was highlighted in the study conducted by Codagnone et al. [85] in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The analysis of the questionnaire responses of the more than 10,000 participants aged 18 to 75 showed that the risk of stress, anxiety, and depression caused by economic vulnerabilities and exposure to economic shocks is very high. On the other hand, the conclusion of the study by Beck and Hensher [86] in Australia was that working from home was a positive experience for employees who received help from the employer at a higher level than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

A critical issue needs to be considered on the WLB following the change in the work regime in the pandemic: overwork of employees, leading to dissatisfaction. Eurofound and the International Labor Office [87] have shown that flexible working styles can increase workers' stress and interfere with privacy. In addition, the flexibility of working time and working from home blurs the boundaries between time spent working and time spent on leisure and hinders the achievement of WLB, leading to a more extended work schedule.

Takami's research [88] suggested that the increase in overtime and home hours has affected leisure time compared to pre-pandemic levels. A phenomenon noted by Takami [88] was the increase in hours spent on household chores and childcare. This trend has been found in both men and women. This phenomenon has led to changes in the allocation of time spent at home, from recreation hours to household chores. However, these

changes in nonworking hours were only temporary; as they returned to regular activity, they tended to return to the original situation.

The results of our research showed that satisfaction does not increase when work involves overtime. The introduction of the work regime at home overlaps with the increasing overtime phenomenon since the boundaries between working and free time are blurred. From the results of our research, maintaining WLB can be achieved if employees are allowed to control their work time autonomously and are not stressed with additional tasks.

A related WLB concept encountered in the literature is integrating professional and private life [89,90]. However, the concept of integration between professional and private life organically concerns the two fields (professional and private). In contrast, WLB views the two areas (professional and private) as two components that need to be balanced, without overlapping [91].

The interface established in an individual's life between work and family activity has been an object of study of organizational psychology, which traditionally divides an individual's life into two areas, work and private life, which can influence each other [92]. The scientific work on the balance that is established between the two components, work and private life, fits into two currents of thought: one that shows that a state of balance between the two areas of an individual's life leads to satisfaction on both plans and, implicitly, a high level of motivation and performance in professional activities [2,93]; the second current of thinking, considers that the two areas are incompatible, with active involvement in both roles leading to stress and tension, giving rise to the conflict between work and private work and family life [94]. In our paper, we aim to reconcile the two currents of thought. The empirical study showed that balancing work and private life could increase personal and professional satisfaction and motivation and decrease employee turnover.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

There is a relationship between the workplace and WLB during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reaching WLB has become much more difficult during the pandemic. One-third of the respondents selected in the empirical study cannot satisfactorily juggle activities in various areas of their lives. Although some workers have experienced new work regimes, such as working from home, flexible programs that allow individual adjustment of work time, and work organization based on tasks and goals regardless of working time, these solutions have not improved the WLB of respondents.

The empirical study analyzed the relationship linking WLB, personal and professional satisfaction, motivation, and employee turnover. The results of testing and validating three hypotheses confirmed that work–life equilibrium has a positive and significant effect on personal and professional satisfaction, generating a high degree of motivation and sustaining performance, while the disequilibrium between work and private life leads to a degree environment of job dissatisfaction and an increasing tendency to drop out. The crisis generated by COVID-19 has threatened the work–life balance in various ways, but measures taken by the government to help enterprises, both financial and legislative, have eased the pandemic.

5.2. Practical Implications

The paper offers some practical implications concerning the effects of WLB on professional and personal satisfaction giving the COVID-19 pandemic. First, organizational leaders need to pay attention to the work satisfaction of their employees, as the degree of satisfaction is affected by an imbalance between work and private life. Stress and pressure generated by overtime or required work in nonstandard regimes (flexible work organization or switching to teleworking) can interfere with WLB, resulting in dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, and an increased tendency to drop out.

As a result of the need for WLB, companies are forced to react in a more and more differentiated and heterogeneous manner concerning working time preferences and life choices for their employees. These considerations apply to employees in a position of

power over the company (the labor force available in the labor market is insufficient, or the employees have the skills companies need). Moreover, employees must often be prepared to give up something (usually financial resources) to benefit from free time spent with the family.

Some employers use flexible working time scheduling as a tool for attracting and retaining employees, but also to increase work satisfaction and job productivity. On the other hand, organizations usually use flexible working hours to cover their production needs. This leads to a contradictory situation; although, in principle, flexible working hours can be used to solve family problems, their unpredictable and temporary nature, especially when set at the discretion of supervisors, creates problems in ensuring WLB. Furthermore, although some organizations try to show that the flexibility of working time generated by organizational needs is practiced to support employees in ensuring an efficient balance of time, this flexibility does not always coincide with employees' wishes. In Romania, the labor market became more flexible during this period. The government has facilitated work from home, including in the public sector. Companies could also change employment contracts regarding working time as a size and flexible schedule. This flexibility has made it easier for small and medium-sized companies to get through the COVID-19 crisis.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

The paper performed a cross-sectional analysis, a reflection of the moment the questionnaire was prepared. Future research must have a longitudinal character that will compare employees' perceptions. In future research, we will also consider the variable represented by the work regime, distinguishing employees who went into the telework regime, those who worked in hybrid mode, and those who remained in the classic work regime (in physical form). An exciting research direction will be to measure satisfaction and the level of performance and motivation differentiated according to these work regimes.

6. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly catalyzed substantial transformations in organizational work patterns globally. As governments and health authorities implemented strict measures to contain the spread of the virus, organizations were compelled to adapt swiftly and reconfigure their operational strategies. This unparalleled crisis has forced businesses to revolutionize how work is conducted, presenting challenges and opportunities for maintaining a healthy work–life balance (WLB) amidst turbulence [88].

The present study represents a significant contribution to understanding work–life balance and its profound impact on employee performance. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), we conducted an empirical analysis involving a sample of 452 employees in Romania. This rigorous examination allowed us to explore the intricate relationship between work–life equilibrium or disequilibrium and various critical outcomes, including professional and personal satisfaction, employee motivation, and turnover intention.

The findings of our study provide unequivocal evidence that work–life balance plays a pivotal role in influencing employees' levels of satisfaction in both their professional and their personal domains. When individuals achieve a balance between these aspects of their lives, they report heightened satisfaction in both areas. Furthermore, our research revealed that work–life balance substantially impacts employee motivation. Employees who perceive a sense of equilibrium between work and personal life exhibit elevated motivation levels, enhancing their performance and productivity. This finding underscores the instrumental role of work–life balance in nurturing employees' internal drive and fostering their unwavering commitment to work.

Additionally, our study identified a significant association between work–life balance and turnover intention. Employees who experience work–life disequilibrium, characterized by an imbalance between their professional and personal lives, are more

likely to contemplate leaving their respective organizations. In contrast, those who attain a balance are more inclined to remain, resulting in a notable reduction in employee turnover. These findings highlight the criticality of prioritizing work–life balance initiatives to retain valuable talent within organizations.

Overall, our study underscores the indispensable role of work–life balance in shaping employee outcomes. The results underscore the importance of cultivating a supportive work environment that effectively empowers employees to balance their professional and personal lives. By recognizing and addressing the challenges associated with work–life balance, organizations can promote employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and motivation and, ultimately, reduce turnover rates. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between work–life balance and employee wellbeing, providing a foundation for developing effective policies and practices that promote a harmonious integration of work and personal life.

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