

**WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A Q-METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF FEMALE
MANAGERS' PERSPECTIVES WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN STATE-OWNED
ENTERPRISE**

By

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SCOPE OF THE DISSERTATION

- The dissertation consists of 4 Chapters, including:
 - a) Chapter 1: Scientific orientation to the study
 - b) Chapter 2: A Literature Review
 - c) Chapter 3: Research
 - d) Chapter 4: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

EDITING AND REFERENCE STYLE

- A referenced list is provided at the end of this dissertation containing all sources used.
- The dissertation has been edited and referenced according to the requirements of the American Psychological Society (APA).

DECLARATION

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Work-life balance: a Q-methodological exploration of female managers' perspectives within a South African state-owned enterprise.

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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SUMMARY

This dissertation provides an analysis of the work-life balance experiences of women in managerial positions in a South African state-owned enterprise. It explores how these women cope with the demands and expectations of their work and non-work roles, and how they perceive and manage the conflicts and synergies between them.

The research made use of Q-Methodology as the main approach of the study. The sample consisted of 40 women who held managerial positions in different departments within a South African state-owned entity. Data were gathered using a card sorting technique and post-Q sorting interviews as the follow-up to the sorting outcome. Analysis was done using Q-Methodology software, an online approach to collecting and analysing data. Eight themes regarding these female leaders' work-life balance emerged.

Recommendations for the organisation, the managers, and the employees who are interested in improving work-life balance experiences of women in managerial positions are then made.

KEYWORDS:

work-life balance, women managers, gender, work-family conflict

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CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

This chapter introduces the importance of work-life balance while highlighting the challenges faced by women in organisations trying to balance their career progression with the needs of the family. Furthermore, this chapter considers this research study's rationale, problem statement and the paradigm perspectives. In addition, the chapter also contains the aim of this research project, the problem statement and the paradigm perspectives used. The research method is defined which includes the applicable design, sample sizes, data collection strategies, data collection and analysis to ensure the quality of data for research. Lastly, the chapter layout of the dissertation is defined.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the participation of women in the South African labour market has evolved significantly, driven by socio-economic factors such as increased access to higher education and the necessity for dual-income households (Mussida & Patimo, 2021). While these advancements have opened more opportunities for women, they continue to face substantial challenges in balancing career ambitions with family responsibilities (Berk & Gundogmus, 2018). Women often bear a disproportionate share of unpaid household work and caregiving, even in dual-earner families, which hinders their professional growth (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). Despite policy efforts to address gender inequalities, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles across various sectors, including business, government, and academia (Mussida & Patimo, 2021; Jones, 2018).

Historically, research has indicated that women's career growth is more closely tied to family responsibilities than men's, with motherhood often complicating their professional advancement (Zhao et al., 2011). For example, studies found that women without children were more likely to be employed than mothers, while men's employment remained largely unaffected by fatherhood. Additionally, Jones (2018) argued that despite modern technological advancements offering greater workplace flexibility, female executives continued to face unique work-life challenges that their male counterparts did not.

However, more recent research suggests some shifts in these dynamics, although challenges remain. For instance, younger generations are gradually adopting a more equitable division of household responsibilities, though this has not fully eliminated the career disadvantages women face due to family obligations (Mussida & Patimo, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further reshaped the work-life balance, with increased adoption of remote work. While this has created more flexible working environments, women continue to shoulder a larger share of domestic work, even when working from home (Craig & Churchill, 2021). These ongoing disparities suggest that while technological advancements have improved workplace flexibility, they have not fully addressed the gendered division of labour, and women still face obstacles in their career advancement.

Work-life balance (WLB) programmes have emerged as a critical strategy to address these gender-based challenges. These programmes include policies such as flexible working hours, parental leave, on-site childcare, and telecommuting options, designed to help employees manage both professional and personal responsibilities (Daverth et al., 2016). Countries like Sweden and Norway, for example, have introduced extensive WLB policies, including generous parental leave and flexible schedules to promote gender equality in both the workplace and at home (Moss, 2019). Similarly, companies such as Google and Salesforce, have implemented comprehensive work-life balance (WLB) programmes to help employees manage professional and personal responsibilities. Google offers flexible working hours, remote work options, and wellness programmes that include mental health support and fitness classes, enabling employees to effectively balance work and family obligations (Pandey, 2023). Similarly, Salesforce provides resources such as the "Leader's Guide to Work-Life Integration," which empowers employees to set boundaries and prioritise personal well-being, thereby reducing job-related stress and enhancing overall employee satisfaction (Salesforce, 2023).

Despite the benefits, implementing WLB programmes presents significant challenges and costs for organisations. Offering policies such as on-site childcare and flexible working hours can be costly, particularly for smaller businesses with limited resources (Feeney & Stritch, 2019). Additionally, many organisations still adhere to a traditional "ideal worker" model, where success is measured by long hours and constant

availability (Moalusi & Jones, 2019). This cultural barrier makes it difficult for WLB policies to be fully integrated into the workplace (Reid, 2017). Furthermore, women who take advantage of these flexible options may still be perceived as less committed to their careers, which can hinder their progression into leadership roles (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite substantial research on work-life balance (WLB) and its positive effects on employees, much of the existing literature has historically overlooked the gender-specific challenges that women face in the workplace. Emslie and Hunt (2009) argue that traditional research on work and family life often relies on outdated gender roles, portraying men as primary providers and women as family caretakers (Acker, 1990; Lewis & Humbert, 2010). Although this perspective has been challenged over time, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles across industries. For example, women occupy only 31% of senior leadership positions globally, with particularly low representation in industries like energy, manufacturing, and financial services (World Economic Forum, 2023). This underrepresentation is not only a result of limited access to leadership opportunities but also tied to the unique work-life challenges women face, particularly balancing career and family responsibilities.

Further exacerbating this issue is the gendered expectation that women should take on most caregiving and household duties, often at the expense of their professional advancement. Recent studies, such as McKinsey's 2023 report, highlight that despite the growing availability of flexible work arrangements, women, especially mothers, continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work. This imbalance often forces women to make greater career sacrifices than their male counterparts, leading to the "Leaky Pipeline" phenomenon, where women gradually withdraw from leadership tracks to manage family obligations (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023). Even when flexible work is available, there remains a bias that women who take advantage of these policies are less committed to their careers, further limiting their promotional opportunities (McKinsey, 2023).

This issue is particularly pronounced within this state-owned enterprise, where formal WLB policies are often lacking. In this organisation, flexible work arrangements exist

informally but are not supported by a structured policy, leading to inconsistent implementation. Many managers fear that allowing employees to work from home will result in decreased productivity and accountability, reflecting a lack of trust in the workforce (Singh & Singh, 2021). Furthermore, the slower pace of change in government institutions, combined with the high job security offered in the public sector, often reduces the urgency to adopt innovative WLB practices (ILO, 2021). Managers frequently apply discretion when granting flexible work arrangements, leading to unequal access to WLB benefits across different departments and levels of seniority.

Given these challenges, this study seeks to explore how female managers in a South African state-owned enterprise experience work-life balance. Specifically, the research aims to understand how the absence of formal WLB policies impacts women's ability to navigate their professional and personal lives, and how these conditions affect their career progression within a government organisation. By highlighting the unique barriers faced by female managers, the study aims to provide insights into the broader implications of work-life balance policies, or the lack thereof, in public sector enterprises.

Quantitative research methods are a good way to compile large amounts of data and methodically draw conclusions from the analysed information. Conversely, this also leaves the researcher with a limited capacity to explore subjective opinions, thoughts, and emotions of participants, a challenge that can be overcome by using qualitative research methods. The use of Q-Methodology for this research project, therefore, allows the researcher to combine techniques from both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand and explore the work-life challenges female managers have to overcome in their careers through various life stages they encounter. Thus, this problem is explored from a qualitative research methodology using quantitative analysis techniques.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

1.3.1 General Aim

- The general aim of this study is to explore the perspectives of female managers on work-life balance (WLB) within a state-owned enterprise in the finance sector. Specifically, it seeks to understand the unique challenges these women face in balancing professional and personal responsibilities in the absence of formal WLB policies. The study highlights how the lack of structured WLB support, coupled with managers' discretion and fears about productivity, impacts women's career progression and well-being. By focusing on these issues, the research aims to provide insights into how WLB practices, or their absence, affect gender equity in public sector leadership.

1.3.1.1 Research Questions

1. How do women in leadership positions perceive and experience work-life balance?
2. What recommendations can be made to improve the work-life balance experiences of women in managerial positions?

1.3.2 Theoretical Aims

The theoretical aims of the study are:

- To conceptualise the construct of a work-life balance; and to
- To theorise about the construct of a work-life balance of women employees.

1.3.3 Empirical Aim

The empirical aims of the study are:

- To explore female managers' perspectives of work-life balance; and
- To make recommendations based on the findings of the study.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale of this study is to explore the perspectives of female managers regarding work-life balance (WLB) in a state-owned enterprise in the finance sector. Research indicates that gender disparities persist in leadership roles, particularly in sectors with limited formal WLB policies, which can hinder women's professional development (World Economic Forum, 2023). The focus is on the experiences of female managers regarding WLB in a state-owned enterprise. It is important to excavate the experiences and perspectives of female managers as the information is critical in identifying potential gaps in the current WLB policies, which could then be addressed by Human Resources and organisational leaders to improve gender equality in career advancement. The insights gained from this study aim to foster improvements in WLB initiatives, making them more aligned with the actual challenges women face in the workplace. The goal is to inspire organisational changes that promote an inclusive environment, allowing female managers to succeed both professionally and personally without sacrificing one for the other (ILO, 2021).

1.5 THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVES

This section explains the paradigm perspectives of this research. First, the meta-theoretical concepts are explained. This is followed by the theoretical and the research paradigms.

1.5.1 The metatheoretical perspective

This study is conducted within the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology. Cherry (2018) defines Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) as applied psychological theories and principles within an organisation with the focus on studying worker attitudes and behaviour. The notion of IOP also serves to create new knowledge and information to provide solutions that solve critical challenges within socio-economic conditions that affect the success of organisations (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). The application of the IOP field implements psychological principles and new research knowledge to solve modern-day problems within the working

context. The field of IOP mainly relies on applying psychological principles and research, paradigms, and models to support the further enhancement of individual and group behaviour to promote greater organisational performance (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010; Van Zyl et al., 2016). Within this broader field of IOP, the title of this study can be located within the subfield of career psychology. Career psychology concerns itself with the theory, science and practice of career-related issues such as career planning and career decision-making to facilitate individuals' career development and advancement (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022).

The title also falls within the wellness and wellbeing sub-fields of industrial and organisational psychology. As previously stated, employees spent a great deal of their time in organisations, and it is crucial that organisations take the initiative by introducing policies and procedures that support employee wellbeing. Wellbeing refers to the holistic state of an individual's physical, mental, and emotional health, characterised by positive functioning and overall life satisfaction (Danna & Griffin, 2021). In organisational settings, it includes aspects like job satisfaction, stress management, and maintaining work-life balance, all of which contribute to employee performance and productivity.

Gibson et al., (2018) define career development as processes and factors that impact an individual's vocational interest and career occupations regarding career stage considerations and workforce trends. The workplace is an important place where individuals spent an incredible amount of their time, pursuing their career goals and shaping their career trajectories.

1.5.2 The theoretical paradigm

The Humanistic lens

Humanism centres on the belief that individuals should have the autonomy to shape their own life journeys and bear responsibility for their choices, reflecting the intrinsic values of dignity, freedom, and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Maslow, 1943). This approach posits that overcoming challenges through continuous growth and

development leads to self-fulfilment and self-actualisation (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Huang et al., 2019).

Throughout various life stages, individuals encounter challenges and needs in both career and personal life. Work-life balance (WLB) refers to an individual's ability to maintain control over personal and professional development while meeting familial responsibilities. The process of self-actualisation involves growth and learning, reaching one's potential by exercising autonomy and control over career and personal decisions. For women, achieving WLB requires balancing career ambitions with personal obligations, alongside the necessary institutional support to navigate diverse stages of career development (Galambos & Straznicka, 2018; Kalliath & Brough, 2018).

The humanistic perspective offers valuable insights into WLB. Firstly, it emphasises that women should have the freedom and autonomy to make their own choices regarding work and personal lives, such as setting flexible work schedules and taking necessary time off (Kossek et al., 2021; Galambos & Straznicka, 2018). Secondly, it advocates for women's ability to pursue aspirations in both professional and personal contexts, including taking on challenging roles, advancing in their careers, and pursuing further education (Helgesen & Johnson, 2019). Thirdly, humanism underscores the importance of dignity and respect in the workplace, ensuring women are free from discrimination or harassment and that their contributions are valued (Rudman & Mescher, 2019).

1.5.3 Research paradigm

1.5.3.1 Positivism and interpretivism

The most widely used research paradigms also include positivism and interpretivism. The positivist paradigm relies mostly on the statistical analysis of a population sample that is generalised to the broader population group (Beck & Polit, 2003). The positivist approach to research relies on empirical evidence via direct observation or senses (Beck & Polit, 2003). It depends on the credence that, (i) the knowledge obtained is

realistic, (ii) it works from a broader understanding of a topic in general, and (iii) it seldom reflects on the 'why' element of research (Beck & Polit, 2003).

In contrast, the interpretivist paradigm relies on the complexity of human beings, shaping their own meaning of reality and truth as experienced by each individual. Therefore, emphasis is placed on understanding this experience through the thoughts of the participant and gaining insight into the subjective truth or meaning they attribute to their experience of life (Beck & Polit, 2003).

1.5.3.2 *The constructivist paradigm – within the interpretivist scope*

This research study was based on the Constructivist paradigm, the aim of which is to state: "The situation in which individuals perceive, interpret, and explain the same object differently despite the sensation" (Ültanir, 2012, p. 196). Constructivist theory, therefore, rationalises that people try to continuously make sense of the world they live in by assigning certain subjective meanings to what they experience (Creswell, 2007). Constructivism, therefore, defines reality as a construct of human thought as reality is based on subjective opinion (Andrew et al., 2011). This is further based on Relativism in the sense that reality is neither singular nor based on any absolute truth (Patel, 2015). Therefore, the researcher usually tries to understand the context of the social world by viewing and analysing people's experiences and subjective viewpoints (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Wahyuni, 2012). The idea of this study is to analyse the respondent's own words and ideas regarding their subjective experience of work-life balance in the workplace.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.6.1 Research approach

- This study was designed by using **Q-methodology**, which is described as the study of human subjectivity using quantitative techniques such as correlation and factor analysis (Brown, 1980). In some academic circles, Q-methodology is viewed as a mixed-method methodology to research (Ramlo, 2016) to objectively study subjectivity (Ramlo & Newman, 2011). However, this research

project operates from the premise that Q-methodology is a qualitative research approach underpinned by the theoretical assumptions of constructivism (Brown, 1996).

- It can be asserted that this study explores the participants' experiences and perceptions using objective methods such as factor analysis to report the findings). To explain the research approach adopted in this study, two important terms and how they manifest in the study are briefly described, namely, the ontological and epistemological grounding of the study.
- **Ontology (or What is reality?):** This study is based on relativism, which states that reality is neither singular nor based on absolute truth as perspectives often differ from person to person. Therefore, based on participants' subjective experience of work-life balance, several perspectives were expressed (Patel, 2015).
- **Epistemology (How would reality be defined?):** The experience is intended to uncover the underlying meaning, activities, events, and perspectives of each participant who formed part of the project (Patel, 2015). This was done by the researcher to experience the world through the eyes of each participant as knowledge is gained via the personal experience of each participant.

1.6.2 Research strategy

This mixed method research study employed the use of (i) interviews and (ii) a literature review to develop a concourse, (iii) a Q-sort technique, and (iv) a post Q sort to collect data. (v) The analysis was done with a statistical program called PQmethod and was matched with participant statements to better understand the results obtained. The results are presented in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

1.6.3 Research method

1.6.3.1 *Research setting*

This research project was conducted within a state-owned enterprise within the finance sector, across various functions of the enterprise. Participants were invited to take part in the on-line Q-sort process and interview from an offsite location using Microsoft Teams, mainly to encourage anonymity and better protect their identity and to comply with the government restrictions on physical contact during COVID-19. To further protect the participants, an offline recorder was used, and no meeting was recorded online. Each participant was asked to find a comfortable space where no one will bother them to share their viewpoints.

1.6.3.2 *Sampling*

- Purposive sampling was chosen specifically to align to the objective of the study, as a particular group of participants were required to accurately reflect on the problem at hand (Henning et al., 2004).
- The organisation employs more than 10 000 employees, with around 64% being female. There are about 1 700 managers in total in this organisation of which females represented around 40% of those managers. The list of employees/potential participants was obtained via the research committee of the organisation. A formal request with ethical clearance from the University of South Africa was submitted to the committee. The committee provided a list of all female managers within the organisation.
- As far as possible the candidates were chosen from various ethnic backgrounds. Several levels of management (Manager and Senior Manager) were included in the sample. Employees were divided according to race and management level, to try and ensure fair representation based on the demographics of the country. A formal invitation was sent to chosen participants that included the purpose of the study, the ethical clearance from the University, the permission to conduct research from the organisation and the research permission form that all participants agreed to when taking part in

the study. A confidentiality clause was included to ensure all participants that identities were to be protected when taking part in the study.

- The researcher calculated the number of female employees on each management level and used this as a percentage guide for the number of employees required on each level.
- While the researcher tried to ensure a fair representation where possible, the final forty candidates were selected from the sample of two hundred and fifty employees based on their willingness and available time to take part.
- Owing to the availability of the participants, the researcher did not have to implement any additional methods (e.g., snowball sampling) to obtain further participants.
- The Table 1.1 below shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 1.1

Participant demographical data

Identifier	Race	Division	Manager Level
LYUUTO	White	Information Technology	Senior
7VUCACF	White	Human Resources	Senior
9649WBIS	African	Human Resources	Middle
1UQK	African	Research	Middle
YV2AX	White	Operations	Middle
6T3I6F	Coloured	Data Analytics	Middle
0MSAUSL	African	Operations	Senior
ALPJ	Indian	Human Resources	Senior
D1YOG	White	Information Technology	Senior
OLZY8Y	White	Human Resources	Middle
RMU4IMY	White	Finance	Middle
PK8E9	African	Corporate Planning	Senior
QF9WOKR	African	Operations	Senior
DRG4	African	Operations	Middle
JZGK7U	White	Human Resources	Senior
S71OPO0Y	Indian	Operations	Middle

XSX7	African	Legal	Middle
20JZBWR	Indian	Human Resources	Senior
1NWS2U0G	African	Business Support	Senior
FBLI	Coloured	Business Support	Middle
6PS8E	African	Human Resources	Senior
U03WROML	White	Operations	Middle
U59JQ	White	Legal	Senior
A2WEWF	White	Operations	Senior
W05D8Y9	White	Data Analytics	Middle
EXZ0H	White	Audit	Middle
FCMWK5	African	Legal	Senior
B3GI310U	White	Human Resources	Senior
KPOK6	African	Customer Service	Senior
YT5SU0GV	African	Data Analytics	Senior
GKPRL	Indian	Operations	Middle
ZUJSYE0L	White	Data Analytics	Middle
MOE6	White	Audit	Middle
CBV9V	African	Research	Senior
ITCDP7	African	Policy	Middle
19RP42	African	Development	Middle
KWTGQSP	African	Communications	Middle
XA2Q	White	Operations	Middle
LJ34	African	Communications	Middle
WBH0038E	White	Operations	Middle

1.6.3.3 *Data collection methods*

Data collection involved several steps:

- Collecting the statements for the study (also referred to as the concourse).
Secondary data including literature written on this topic (Brown, 1993) was used for the concourse creation. From the literature reviews, the concourse was primarily divided according to the topics within the literature review, which included questions on “Work-Home interaction, “Career Development” and “Leadership within the organisation”.

- Structured sampling was used to select sixty (60) statements to form the Q-set (Stainton Rogers, 1995).
- The Q-set was reviewed by topic experts who provided insight and feedback on the selected statements to be included in the sorting process. This process further ensures content validity (see validity below).
- Q-Sorting: During the final phase, the candidates were instructed to place statements on a Q-sort grid. Statements to the far right were perceived as mostly in agreement while far left were mostly in disagreement with the statement. The middle statement was regarded as neutral. The range started at -6 (for disagreement) to +6 (agreement). Participants were asked to think about the topic of work-life balance, and then arrange the statements according to perceived most positive to most negative. An example of the process was displayed, and the candidate was given as much time as need to complete the Q-sort. The following instructions were given to candidates as part of the Q-sort process:

"Please take the time to work through the following range of statements. Start off by reading what this research topic is about. After you are done, read through each of the following statements you see on the cards in front of you. You will see 3 stacks of card, each coloured based on your pre-sort. You need to rank your statements, according to your pack, on your left, middle and right side, starting from +6 (where you feel this highly relates to you) to -6 (where you feel this does not relate to you at all). You can go with your feeling, there are no right or wrong answers (Watts & Stenner, 2012). On the screen, arrange your cards into the specific blocks (range from -6 to +6) from your specific ranking you feel comfortable with. You can move cards around while doing the Q-sort even if they are from a different stack of cards. Once done, I will be in contact to schedule an interview".

example of a Q-sort ranking is shown in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1

An example of a Q-sort ranking

	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
	41	01	39	53	23	02	34	10	35	57	05	50	29
	44	31	18	43	12	30	56	03	59	09	28	40	47
(2)	16	14	60	15	45	46	11	58	22	25	52	(2)	
	(3)	51	21	32	36	55	13	42	04	33	(3)		
		(4)	17	24	48	49	51	26	37	(4)			
			(5)	06	38	08	20	19	(5)				
				(6)	(6)	27	(6)	(6)					
						07							
						(8)							

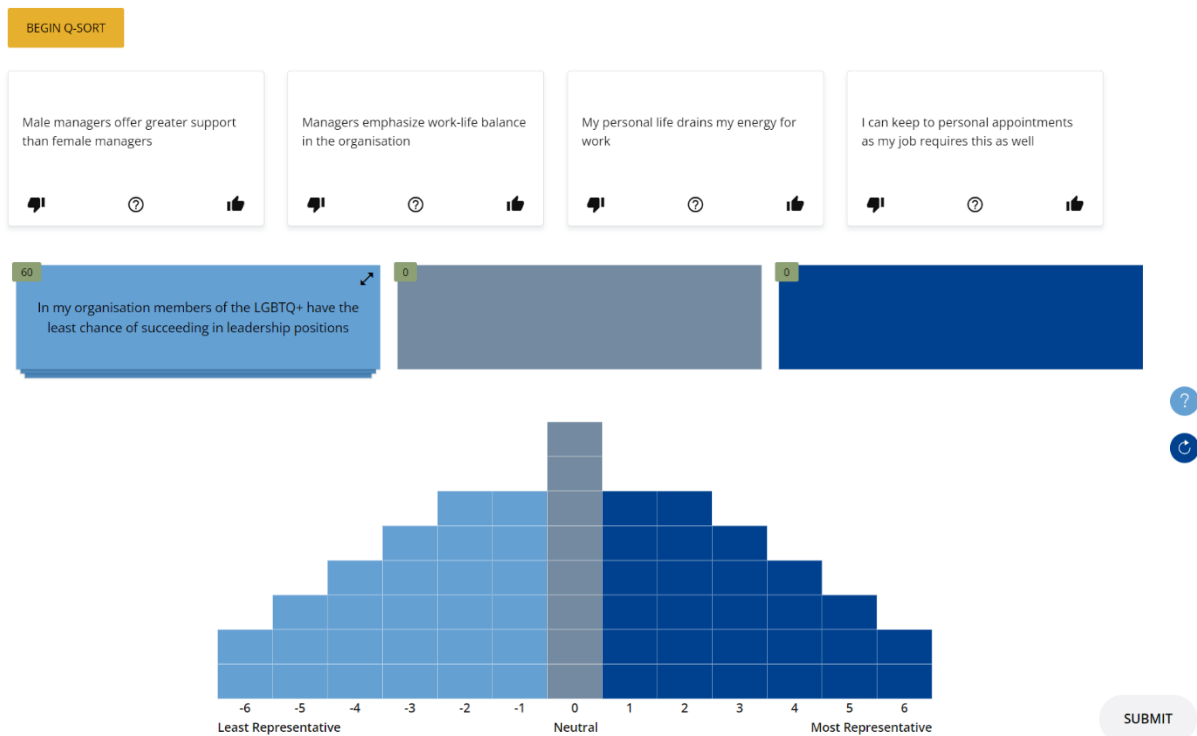
← MOST DISAGREEMENT MOST AGREEMENT →

(adapted from Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The online programme looked slightly different and is shown below in figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2

Q-Method software – online Q-sort procedure



Card stacks in light blue was a pre-sort of cards which participants disagreed with. The grey stack represents neutral cards, and the dark blue stack represents statements participants agreed with. The pre-sort was done to make the final card shuffle easier for participants. While the pre-sort was done in advance, participants could move cards around from any stack and on the pyramid according to their views.

1.6.3.4 Recording of data

The data was recorded automatically by QMethod software and downloaded into a file which was added into PQMethod. Interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams and an offline recorder. All recordings were backed up on a moveable drive to avoid loss.

1.6.3.5 Data management

All data obtained were securely stored on an encrypted USB device, to which only the researcher had access. A backup of the files was stored on the computer of the researcher, encrypted with a password. This ensured that no one besides the researcher had access to the files. The data will be kept for a maximum of 5 years, should a review take place, or an audit verification of findings is needed. Thereafter the researcher will permanently destroy all raw data sets, including any participant identifiers and only keep analysed data.

1.6.3.6 Data analysis

The data obtained from the Q-sort process were analysed using PQMethod. This software is specifically designed for Q-studies. A windows version of the program was downloaded and used for the purpose of this project. The data set from the online Q-sort results were coded in the correct format (identifiers added anonymously) and added for Q-Factor analysis to identify a specific pattern of response. The results are discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

1.6.4 Ethical considerations

1. The researcher read through and established the requirements drafted in the Research policy on Ethics from the University of South Africa. The researcher followed these ethical guidelines throughout this research project.
2. The rights of all participants were protected in accordance with the confidentiality agreement signed prior to the commencement of the research and in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act No. 4 of 2013 (POPIA) of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2013).
3. No identifiers were included in the final article. No mention of the organisation was made in this study. All participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality of both their identities and any information obtained during the research study.
4. Permission for this study was obtained from the University of South Africa, relating to set standards that should be followed throughout the study.
5. Permission for the study was also obtained from the organisational research committee, based on the premise that the identity of the organisation will be protected, no data sets of clients will be used, and a copy of the article will be submitted once the research article was concluded.

1.6.5 Proposed chapter layout

- Chapter 1: Scientific orientation to the study
- Chapter 2: Literature review
- Chapter 3: Research article
- Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter addresses the theoretical aims of the study. Specifically, the chapter conceptualises the construct of work-life balance and theorises about the impact of work-life balance on female managers within work organisations.

2.1 Defining Work-Life Balance

2.1.1 A background on Work-Life Balance

The term Work-Life Balance (WLB) has often been a focal point of programmes that involve an individual engagement in "work and non-work roles" (Sirgy & Lee, 2016). It reflects the fulfilment and level of role satisfaction and the compatibility of the role to the individual's values and priorities. It is, therefore the individual's efficiency and contentment with the various work and family roles that are consistent with their values during a specific point in time (Sirgy & Lee, 2016). This raises the consideration of the approach to work-life balance as values are an internal system that guide the choices and behaviour of the individual. Therefore, it is crucial to determine such values and incorporate them into an adapted social structure. The WLB also plays an important role in achieving life fulfilment and has been shown to influence the experience of job satisfaction and organisational commitment while enhancing overall employee wellness (Lunau et al., 2014; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Recent studies identify various factors influencing work-life balance (WLB), such as job satisfaction, flexible work arrangements, technological integration, organisational structure, opportunities for growth and promotion, work overload, job demands, and supervisor support (Smith & Jones, 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). The growing need to balance professional and personal commitments has led employers to recognise evolving work-life expectations. In response, organisations have implemented diverse programmes to improve employee retention and employability, particularly among women (Brown, 2021; Lee et al., 2020).

2.1.2 The theoretical background of Work-Life Balance

Work-life research has been examined through multiple academic theories, including Boundary Theory, Compensation Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, Systems Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Michel et al., 2018). Among these, Role Theory has been particularly influential in understanding work-life dynamics. It posits that effectively managing multiple roles requires maintaining clear boundaries between tasks and responsibilities to prevent interference (Kahn et al., 1964). Additionally, Role Theory argues that social environments shape behavioural expectations, defining roles or statuses that foster predictable behaviours in specific contexts (Hindin, 2007; Hunter, 2001).

Organisational Role Theory extends this framework, focusing on individuals' interactions with roles within organisations. Expectations for these roles arise from both social contexts and informal group dynamics (Hindin, 2007). Social Role Theory highlights behavioural differences and similarities based on gender, reflecting traditional divisions of labour where women are often seen as caregivers and men as providers (Eagly & Wood, 2018; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). However, advocacy for greater equality has increasingly challenged these norms, promoting equitable gender roles and workplace dynamics (Smith & Brown, 2019).

In the 21st century, women have entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, leading to transformations within organisations (Sidhu & Saluja, 2018). However, these shifts have also introduced significant stress as dual-income households struggle to balance work and family commitments (Darcy et al., 2018; Sundaresan, 2018). Women often bear a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, which can make achieving work-life balance more challenging for them compared to men (Lyness & Judiesch, 2019).

2.1.3 Criticism of Work-Life Balance

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) has become central in discussions about employment and well-being, representing an ideal state where individuals harmonise

work demands with personal responsibilities. However, scholars have critiqued the term for its ambiguity, practicality, and underlying assumptions (Louden, 2018).

One prominent critique is the lack of a clear definition for WLB, which is often conflated with related concepts such as work-family balance or personal-professional integration (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). The term commonly implies an ideal equilibrium between work demands and personal needs, a notion viewed as oversimplified and misleading (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Furthermore, WLB is not a static concept; it evolves alongside cultural norms, economic trends, and individual values, making it inherently subjective (Hirschi et al., 2019). Personal interpretations of "balance" differ greatly, influenced by factors such as life stage, career aspirations, and social roles (Smith & Brown, 2020). This critique highlights the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach to WLB. Instead, there is a need for more nuanced perspectives that account for individual contexts and the dynamic interplay between work and life demands (Smith & Brown, 2020).

2.1.3.1 Ambiguity and Unrealistic Expectations of Balance

One central critique of work-life balance (WLB) lies in its lack of a universal definition, often leading to confusion with related concepts such as work-family balance or professional-personal integration (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). The term "balance" implies a near-perfect equilibrium, a notion that oversimplifies the complexities of individual life contexts and is often unattainable (Smith & McKinlay, 2019). Scholars contend that WLB is not a static ideal but rather a dynamic construct shaped by cultural, economic, and personal factors, making it inherently subjective (Hirschi et al., 2019).

This subjectivity means that what constitutes WLB for one individual may vary significantly from another, depending on variables such as life stage, family structure, and societal norms (Jones et al., 2020). For instance, parents of young children may prioritise family time, while single professionals may focus on career advancement, further illustrating the challenge of applying a universal definition to WLB (Lee & Higgins, 2019).

2.1.3.2 The Problematic Notion of "Balance"

Another critique is that "balance" is often misinterpreted as a promise of equal satisfaction in work and personal domains, an ideal rarely achievable in practice. Social constructivist perspectives highlight that satisfaction within work-life balance (WLB) varies across individuals, genders, and cultures, making balance inherently subjective (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Hirschi et al., 2019). Framing WLB as an ideal equilibrium can create unrealistic expectations, potentially leading to frustration when individuals fall short of achieving this standard (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Consequently, scholars argue that WLB should be understood as a dynamic process of prioritising and managing commitments, rather than striving for an unattainable state of equilibrium (Jones et al., 2020).

2.1.3.3 WLB as Social Construct and Discourse

WLB has also been critiqued as a social construct that places the burden of achieving balance on individuals, while minimising systemic contributors to imbalance such as long working hours, inflexible schedules, and limited organisational support (Hirschi et al., 2019). Framing WLB as an individual responsibility risks absolving organisations from addressing structural barriers, shifting the focus to personal adjustment rather than systemic change (Fleetwood, 2018).

Moreover, organisations often position WLB policies as family-friendly initiatives, yet these frequently reinforce gendered caregiving expectations. Research shows that women are more likely to use WLB options due to caregiving roles, which can result in career penalties and limited advancement opportunities (Hirschi et al., 2019; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). This dynamic highlights how WLB strategies, while ostensibly inclusive, may inadvertently hinder gender equity by perpetuating caregiving as primarily a female responsibility.

2.1.3.4 Alternative Theories and Integrated Models of WLB

Recent research advocates for integration rather than strict balance in understanding WLB. Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that individuals

seek to allocate resources such as time and energy effectively across roles to minimise conflict. This approach emphasises role enrichment, where positive outcomes in one domain enhance another (Hirschi et al., 2019). Similarly, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) propose a dynamic, bidirectional model in which WLB arises from the interplay of work and personal roles, rather than achieving a fixed equilibrium.

2.1.3.5 Inclusivity and Minority Concerns

Traditional WLB policies often prioritise conventional family structures, benefiting middle-class, dual-income households while neglecting diverse family compositions. Employees without children, for instance, may perceive family-focused WLB policies as inequitable or exclusionary, as they cannot access the same benefits (Hirschi et al., 2019). Similarly, these policies can foster resentment among employees with lower work-family conflict, who may view resource allocation as unfair (Hammer & Perry, 2019).

WLB should be conceptualised as a flexible alignment of personal and professional goals, supported by inclusive organisational practices. Addressing structural barriers through adaptive strategies ensures that WLB frameworks acknowledge the needs of a diverse workforce and promote sustainable work-life satisfaction (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

2.1.4 Social Alienation due to Work-life Imbalance

Social alienation refers to disengagement and lack of involvement in life domains, negatively impacting life satisfaction (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). It is characterised by a loss of intrinsic motivation and energy in fulfilling social roles, leading to disconnection from both society and personal relationships (Hirschi et al., 2019). Work alienation undermines employee commitment and work effort (Tummers & den Dulk, 2018). A holistic approach to WLB must therefore incorporate employees' social needs, addressing alienation as part of broader organisational well-being strategies.

2.1.5 Contemporary Perspectives on Work-Life Balance: Key Insights and Impacts

Work-life balance (WLB) remains a critical topic in modern organisational and societal discourse, with recent studies offering nuanced perspectives across various contexts, emphasising its implications for gender dynamics, professional practice, organisational culture, and theoretical development.

2.1.5.1 Gender Dynamics and Emotional Factors

Aoyagi and Munro (2024) revealed the significant influence of gender-specific emotional factors on work-life balance. Their findings show that women exhibit a higher willingness to avoid extreme overtime and job transfers due to feelings of guilt. This underscores the unique challenges faced by women in reconciling workplace demands with personal responsibilities, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive WLB policies. These insights suggest that organisations must address emotional well-being alongside structural adjustments to support women's work-life integration effectively.

2.1.5.2 Organisational Support and Career Advancement

Sasmaz and Fogarty (2023) demonstrated the critical role of supervisor support in fostering a balanced work environment and enhancing career progression. Their study highlights that employees with supportive supervisors are more likely to perceive work-life balance positively, which in turn boosts professional growth opportunities. This finding emphasises the importance of leadership training and supportive managerial practices to create an enabling environment for employees to thrive professionally and personally.

2.1.5.3 Remote Work and Boundary Blurring

Mukhopadhyay (2023) examined the implications of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying both its benefits and challenges. While remote work offers flexibility, it also blurs the boundaries between professional and personal life, leading to increased stress and reduced life satisfaction. Strategies such as setting clear work hours and creating dedicated workspaces were found to alleviate these issues,

suggesting the need for organisations to provide guidance on boundary management for remote workers.

2.1.5.4 Socio-Economic Constraints in Developing Economies

Uddin et al. (2024) highlighted the impact of socio-economic pressures on WLB in developing economies. Their findings reveal that financial constraints and familial responsibilities often exacerbate work-related stress, disproportionately affecting lower-income individuals. This underscores the need for policy interventions that address socio-economic disparities, ensuring that WLB strategies are inclusive and equitable.

2.1.5.5 Theoretical Developments and Policy Implications

Khateeb (2021) provided critical reviews of WLB theories, highlighting their relevance in diverse cultural and organisational contexts. These theoretical insights offer valuable frameworks for understanding how WLB policies can be designed to address both individual and systemic challenges. By integrating Conservation of Resources Theory and other models, organisations can adopt a more holistic approach to balancing work and personal life.

2.1.6 Work-Life Policy: Theoretical Approaches to Work-Life Balance Policies

Den Dulk and Groeneveld (2012) identify two primary theoretical explanations for the adoption of WLB programmes. Neo-institutional theory posits that institutional pressures, such as legal regulations and evolving social norms, compel organisations to implement WLB policies. These pressures often arise from workforce demographic shifts, including increasing numbers of female and dual-earner households. Public sector organisations align strongly with this theory, as they are frequently required to uphold government standards, leading to more formalised WLB initiatives (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018).

In contrast, rational choice theory frames WLB policies as a strategic decision driven by cost-benefit analysis. According to this perspective, organisations adopt such policies when their benefits, enhanced productivity, reduced absenteeism, and improved employee retention, outweigh associated costs (Den Dulk, 2001). This

rationale often dominates the private sector, where economic imperatives determine the scope and nature of WLB initiatives. Consequently, private sector support for these policies may be conditional or limited, prioritising organisational interests over employee well-being (Darcy et al., 2012).

The effectiveness of WLB programmes, however, extends beyond their theoretical justification and relies heavily on organisational culture, formal policy frameworks, and managerial attitudes. Research suggests that even well-designed WLB policies may remain underutilised in environments that prioritise presenteeism, rewarding prolonged working hours over actual productivity (Haar et al., 2014). This culture can deter employees from leveraging WLB benefits, such as flexible working hours or leave options, due to perceptions that doing so signals a lack of commitment, thereby hindering career progression (Kelliher & Anderson, 2018).

Moreover, participation in WLB initiatives can inadvertently reduce employees' visibility to superiors, increasing the risk of career stagnation within both public and private sectors (Akanji et al., 2020). For example, Munsch (2021) found that WLB policies aimed at promoting gender diversity in South Africa were most effective when accompanied by cultural shifts and managerial support. Without these adjustments, WLB policies may fail or unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes, framing WLB as primarily a 'women's issue' (Lewis et al., 2019).

Although the public sector is often viewed as more supportive of WLB due to regulatory compliance and diminished economic pressures, its success varies significantly based on organisational culture and managerial practices (Feeney & Stritch, 2019). By contrast, the private sector tends to prioritise profitability, implementing WLB policies primarily when aligned with productivity or employee retention goals (Den Dulk & Groeneveld, 2019).

Conversely, public organisations may strive to model "ideal employer" behaviours by offering comprehensive WLB programmes to meet governmental and societal expectations (Den Dulk & Groeneveld, 2019). However, such programmes often face limitations, including insufficient resources and an absence of supportive organisational cultures necessary for effective implementation. These challenges

underscore the importance of embedding WLB policies within a broader organisational strategy that aligns institutional objectives with employee well-being (Den Dulk & Groeneveld, 2019).

2.2 Understanding work-life conflict

2.2.1 Work and Family Role Intersections change the numbering here to 2.2.1 and that of subsequent sub-headings

The interaction between professional responsibilities and familial obligations often results in role conflicts, where demands from one sphere reduce the time and energy available for the other. Such inter-role strain has been a focal point of work-life conflict research, revealing the pervasive impact of overlapping responsibilities across employment sectors (Pluut et al., 2018). This interplay can significantly challenge employees' ability to balance competing priorities effectively, making work-life conflict a critical issue for both individuals and organisations.

2.2.2 Bidirectional Nature of Work-Family Conflict

Work-life conflict is bidirectional; pressures from the workplace can negatively affect family life, while domestic issues may spill over into professional settings, undermining job performance (Haar et al., 2014; Vaziri et al., 2020). This reciprocal influence underscores the importance of addressing both work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts as distinct yet interconnected phenomena. Each direction has unique antecedents and outcomes, significantly influencing employee well-being, organisational commitment, and overall productivity (Pluut et al., 2018).

2.2.3 Role Spillover and Work-Life Conflict

"Role spillover" describes the transfer of stressors or responsibilities from one domain to another, which can either enhance or hinder an individual's performance in their secondary role (Kinnunen et al., 2020). Negative spillover, such as stress from work affecting family interactions, is particularly common among employees with inflexible schedules, role overload, or demanding jobs (Demerouti et al., 2019). Positive spillover, although less frequent, occurs when skills or resources gained in one domain benefit the other, emphasising the need for organisational policies that promote such enrichment (Pluut et al., 2018).

2.2.4 Work-Life Conflict and Role Overload

Role overload, a major contributor to work-life conflict, occurs when excessive demands in both work and family roles exceed an individual's available resources (Greenhaus & Powell, 2017). This strain often results in diminished performance across domains, as limited time and energy are distributed among competing priorities. Prolonged role overload can lead to burnout, reduced organisational commitment, and impaired family relationships (Haar et al., 2014).

2.2.5 Variation in Work-Life Conflict Across Contexts

The prevalence and impact of work-life conflict vary significantly across demographic, organisational, and societal contexts. Factors such as job type, organisational culture, and broader societal values play a crucial role in shaping employees' experiences of work-life conflict (Vaziri et al., 2020). Moreover, country-specific norms and policies influence how effectively work-life conflict is managed. Supportive cultural and legislative environments can mitigate the strain associated with competing demands, fostering healthier work-life integration (Pluut et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Conflict and Negative Role Spillover versus Enrichment and Positive Spillover

2.2.2.1 Work-Family Conflict and Negative Role Spillover

Work-family conflict arises when the demands of work and family roles are incompatible, resulting in stress and strain for employees. The scarcity hypothesis explains this by asserting that individuals have a finite pool of resources, such as time and energy, which, when overextended, leads to role conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict can be categorised into three types:

1. **Time-Based Conflict:** This occurs when extensive hours dedicated to work limit the time available for family obligations, depleting energy and other resources. For instance, long working hours may prevent employees from participating in meaningful family activities (Pluut et al., 2018).

2. **Strain-Based Conflict:** Stress accumulated in one role spills over into another, manifesting as irritability, anxiety, or mental fatigue, which hinders performance in both domains (Haar et al., 2014).
3. **Behavior-Based Conflict:** Conflicting expectations across roles create tension, such as when assertiveness in the workplace clashes with nurturing behaviors expected at home (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Recent research highlights that these conflicts can significantly predict psychological strain, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction, with new frameworks developed to measure such tensions in modern work-family dynamics (Carlson et al., 2017).
4. **Negative role spillover** is associated with burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and adverse mental health outcomes. Research suggests that work-to-family conflict, particularly time and strain-based conflict, tends to have more severe consequences than family-to-work conflict, with greater implications for employee well-being and productivity (Kinnunen et al., 2020).

2.2.2.2 Work-Family Enrichment and Positive Role Spillover

In contrast to conflict, work-family enrichment occurs when resources gained in one domain positively impact the other. For example, skills acquired at work, such as time management, may enhance family life, while emotional support at home can improve workplace performance (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Positive role spillover facilitates overall satisfaction and work-life harmony. Work-family enrichment is enabled by organisational support mechanisms, which include:

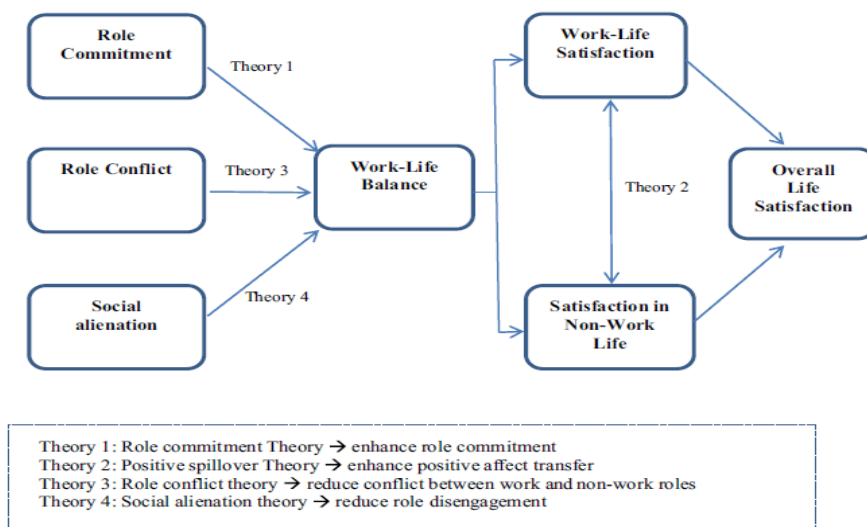
1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Flexible hours and remote working options allow employees to manage both work and family responsibilities effectively, reducing time-based conflict (Allen et al., 2020).
2. **Parental Leave Policies:** Comprehensive leave policies, including shared parental leave, enable employees to meet caregiving responsibilities without compromising career progression. However, the effectiveness of such policies depends on an organisational culture that encourages their use by both genders (Kossek et al., 2020).

3. Childcare Support: On-site childcare and subsidies for external childcare alleviate stress for working parents, improving their ability to manage work and family obligations (Hammer & Perry, 2019).
4. Wellness Programmes: Initiatives that promote mental and physical well-being, such as counselling services and health incentives, enhance employees' capacity to balance competing demands effectively (Pluut et al., 2018).

These WLB benefits empower employees to transfer resources and positive energy between work and family domains, fostering work-family enrichment. However, their effectiveness is heavily dependent on an organisational culture that normalises the use of such benefits, especially for women. Studies indicate that formal policies alone are often insufficient if employees, particularly women, perceive negative career implications from using these benefits due to the "ideal worker" stereotype (Kelly et al., 2010). This stereotype assumes an ideal employee is always available, leading women to avoid using family-friendly benefits for fear of being viewed as less committed (Abele & Resch, 2010; Matuschak & Matusik, 2012).

Figure 2.1

Life satisfaction model of Work-Life Balance



Source: from Sirgy, M. J., & Lee, D. J. (2016). Work-Life Balance: A Quality-of-Life Model. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 11(4), 1059–1082. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-015-9419-6>

Adapted
Applied Research in Quality of Life

The Table 2.1 below further classifies individuals into the four different types of WLB.

Table 2.1

Classifying individuals with four types of Work-Life Balance

Type of individual	Degree and scope of engagement in life domains	Role enrichment	Role conflict	Life satisfaction
Fully engaged individuals	Total engagement in various social roles in terms of satisfaction, perceived importance, and time and energy investment	High level of role enrichment	Very low level of role conflict	High level of life satisfaction
Partially engaged individuals	Total engagement in restricted social roles in terms of satisfaction, perceived importance, and time and energy investment	Moderate level of role enrichment	Moderate level of role conflict	Moderate level of life satisfaction
Engaged-but-conflicted individuals	Overload in certain social roles creating conflict in others in terms of satisfaction, perceived importance, and time and energy investment	Low level of role enrichment	Very high level of role conflict	Low level of life satisfaction
Disengaged individuals	Lack of engagement in any social role in terms of satisfaction, perceived importance, and time and energy investment	Very low level of role enrichment	Apathy, no conflict	Very low level of life satisfaction

Source: Adapted from Sirgy, M. J., & Lee, D. J. (2016). Work-Life Balance: A Quality-of-Life Model. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 11(4), 1059–1082. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-015-9419-6>

2.3 THE ROLE OF GENDER IN WLB

Gender norms often stem from cultural expectations that assign specific roles to men and women, both at work and at home. Social role theory suggests that gendered expectations arise from societal norms, where women are frequently cast as caregivers and men as providers (Eagly & Wood, 2016). This dynamic underpins the motherhood norm, where women are primarily viewed as responsible for family caregiving and unpaid household labour, especially in childcare (Fujimoto et al., 2013). The concept reinforces stereotypes that caregiving is a female responsibility, potentially sidelining men from equal involvement in family life, which contradicts the growing discourse on shared parental responsibilities (Sidhu & Saluja, 2017).

2.3.1 The “Ideal Worker” and Gender Bias

The concept of the “ideal worker” defines societal expectations of employees as always committed, available, and prioritising work over personal obligations (Kelly et

al., 2010; Reid, 2017). However, this model introduces bias by undervaluing caregiving roles, often fulfilled by women, while rewarding extended working hours, which exacerbates work-family conflict (Reid, 2017). Recent research highlights that this dynamic remains persistent; women are disproportionately penalised in career advancement due to their caregiving responsibilities, while men face stigma when attempting to engage in caregiving roles (Vial et al., 2018).

Organisational cultures that prioritise presenteeism continue to fuel this imbalance, with detrimental effects on work-life balance and mental health (Cobb et al., 2024). In South Africa, 43% of women report experiencing work-family conflict compared to only 28% of men, illustrating the gendered nature of these pressures (Geldenhuys et al., 2018). These trends underscore the ongoing need for equitable workplace policies that address systemic biases in the perception of the "ideal worker".

2.3.2 Legal Frameworks versus Organisational Culture

South Africa's labour laws advocate for gender equality and set standards for working conditions. However, organisational cultures often perpetuate traditional gender roles, favouring male employees who align with the "ideal worker" stereotype, characterised by full-time availability and prioritisation of work over personal life (Abele & Resch, 2010).

Many organisations implement work-life balance policies, such as flexible working hours, parental leave, and remote work, to alleviate work-family conflict. However, these policies may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes by primarily targeting female employees, thereby limiting their career growth opportunities (McDonald et al., 2005). Although work-life programmes are theoretically open to both genders, fewer than 15% of men utilise parental leave, citing concerns about being perceived as less committed to their careers (Mandel & Lazarus, 2020). The "mommy track," a term describing the career path often taken by women who need flexibility for family obligations, exemplifies this challenge. For South African women, balancing career demands and family responsibilities often results in reduced advancement prospects, as these part-time or flexible arrangements are frequently coupled with decreased access to career development opportunities (Fujimoto et al., 2013).

Recent studies indicate that despite progressive legislation, women in South Africa continue to face significant challenges in the workplace. A report by the Labour Research Service (2021) highlights that women perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid labour, averaging 3.1 hours daily compared to men's 1.1 hours, which affects their participation in the formal workforce. Additionally, cultural norms and traditional practices often hinder women's career advancement, as they are primarily seen as caregivers within the family, while men are viewed as breadwinners (Floro & Komatsu, 2011). This dynamic reinforces gender stereotypes and limits women's opportunities for professional growth.

In South Africa, women make up more than half of the population (51% or 30 million women). However, they remain under-represented in senior management positions across all sectors of the economy. Women are under-represented on corporate boards and in top management roles, indicating that gender equality is still far from being achieved (Joubert & Associates, 2019). This under-representation persists despite legislative measures aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace.

Furthermore, societal perceptions and stereotypes continue to hinder the career advancement of women to senior leadership positions. Factors such as a lack of mentorship, masculine corporate cultures, leadership identity distortions, inadequate training and development, and poor work-life balance contribute to this issue (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). These challenges underscore the need for more effective implementation of gender equality policies and a shift in organisational cultures to support women's career progression.

2.3.3 Work-Life Balance Programs and Gendered Consequences

Work-life balance policies, such as flexible working hours, job-sharing, and remote working, are designed to help employees manage family responsibilities. However, these initiatives often inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles by primarily targeting women, leading to their confinement in part-time positions that may hinder career advancement (Lewis et al., 2017; Lott, 2020). This dynamic perpetuates the

"mommy track," where career flexibility for women comes at the expense of advancement opportunities (Fujimoto et al., 2013; Cobb et al., 2020).

Additionally, men underutilise work-life balance policies due to concerns about appearing less committed to their careers, further entrenching gender norms and increasing disparities (Lott & Chung, 2016). South African organisational cultures often favour male employees who fit the "ideal worker" stereotype, characterised by full-time availability and prioritisation of work over personal life, exacerbating work-family conflict and limiting women's career progression (Geldenhuis et al., 2018). The gendered substructure of organisations, unseen organisational practices that embed gender roles, often enforces traditional roles, perpetuating unequal wage distribution, hierarchical segregation, and predefined gender-based occupations (Acker, 2012).

2.3.4 The Burden of Balancing Work and Family

Women's dual roles as career professionals and caregivers place considerable pressure on their ability to meet the demands of both spheres, contributing to work-family conflict. Work-life programs that allow flexibility may still be hampered by workplace cultures that idealise employees with limited family responsibilities, reinforcing the notion of "doing it all" at the cost of well-being and job satisfaction (Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021). Despite policies that promote balance, women in high-demand careers often find themselves sacrificing career growth for caregiving duties, an imbalance exacerbated by implicit expectations and stereotypes about gender roles (Sidhu & Saluja, 2017).

2.3.5 Gender and the Covid-19 pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic recession in South Africa, more women felt the impact on their state of employment than men. Women, often a reserve buffer for employment and family income, are more likely than men to give up careers for the benefit of the family (Bassier et al., 2023). When schools were closed and children were forced to do homeschooling or find additional measures of education this became largely a burden for working women. This is often a challenge men do not experience. The research shows that this could potentially limit women's prospects of promotion and

earning over a lifetime if workers continually experience earning losses during their career span, as finding a new job with the same responsibility, earning potential and career opportunity is extremely difficult (Davis & Von Wachter, 2011). The pandemic also showed that working mothers will always be disproportionately affected and vulnerable to career damage when major crises like the pandemic hit unless increased support can be offered for working mothers (Heggeness, 2020). Further, working mothers reported greater work stress due to fear of job insecurity caused by remote working conditions (Sandoval-Reys et al., 2021).

In terms of the remote working conditions brought on by the pandemic many employees who worked from home needed to find creative ways to work in their various roles within an organisation (Sandoval-Reys et al., 2021). The rise of the pandemic forced organisations to deal with employees working remotely, including the use of various techniques to increase productivity and output. During this time, however, the research shows a positive correlation between job satisfaction and remote working conditions which helpfully affected employees both in terms of time management and cost-saving mechanisms (Scholtz, 2023). At this stage, mothers reported greater work satisfaction in balancing work and life domains. Although some reported an increase in household stress (managing children at home), this is considered a unique event, and the circumstances should be taken into context of the event (Scholtz, 2023).

2.4 Work-life Balance and Women in Leadership

2.4.1 Barriers and dilemmas for women in leadership

In recent decades, women have made significant strides in education and workforce participation. Globally, women's labour force participation rate stands at 47%, compared to 72% for men (World Bank, 2022). In South Africa, women's labour force participation increased across all age groups between the second quarters of 2022 and 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 2023).

Despite these advancements, women remain under-represented in management positions worldwide. As of 2021, women held approximately 28.2% of managerial

positions globally (Statista, 2024). In the UK, women filled 45% of executive leadership roles in 2023, yet top-paid positions remain male-dominated, with women's representation in the highest pay quartile steady at 25% (Reuters, 2024).

This gender disparity is deeply rooted in a complex interplay of societal factors, organisational cultures, and individual biases. One of the most persistent barriers to women's advancement is the 'glass ceiling', a metaphorical term describing the invisible barriers that prevent women from rising to the top of their professions. Despite possessing the necessary qualifications, experience, and skills, women often face subtle yet pervasive obstacles, including stereotypical perceptions, unconscious biases, and a lack of role models and networks, which hinder their progression into senior leadership roles (Catalyst, 2023).

In addition to the glass ceiling, women also face the 'concrete ceiling', a more tangible and impenetrable obstacle that prevents them from reaching the highest echelons of corporate leadership (Biletta et al., 2018). The concrete ceiling is characterised by limited access to resources and support, work-life balance challenges, and the "queen bee" phenomenon (Biletta et al., 2018). The "queen bee" syndrome describes the tendency of women in leadership positions to distance themselves from other women to protect their own status and advancement (Adams & Eagly, 2007). This behaviour can create a hostile and isolating environment for other women, making it difficult for them to build alliances, access mentorship, and advance their careers (Adams & Eagly, 2007). The impact of the queen bee phenomenon can be detrimental to both individual women and organisations (Adams & Eagly, 2007) since by the exclusion and undermining other women, queen bees limit the potential for collaboration, innovation, and overall organisational success (Adams & Eagly, 2007). Furthermore, their actions can reinforce gender stereotypes and perpetuate the cycle of underrepresentation in leadership (Adams & Eagly, 2007).

Management roles are further defined within the scope of social role theory and leader organisation theory. As previously stated, women are more likely to engage in traditional caregiving roles, leading to the assumption that women are kinder, warmer and fulfil the dedication to family roles. Men, on the other hand, occupy higher status roles than women, leading to the stereotype that men are more assertive, and

dominant. Male characteristics are perceived as being more successful in leadership roles (Lemoine et al., 2016; Wood & Eagly, 2012).

Hart (2016) also suggests that women view leadership as a “man’s space”, due to feeling more pressure to engage in other activities apart from normal work. This tends to lead them to take on positions and work described as “institutional housekeeping” (p. 607). Women state that promotion in careers is based to some extent on gender for those with greater networks and more aligned to the “boys club” (p. 608). Women also feel that becoming pregnant sends a negative signal that they do not take their careers seriously (Hart, 2016).

One of the primary challenges faced by pregnant women is the perception that motherhood is incompatible with a demanding career, leading to stereotyping and discrimination (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Women who become pregnant may be perceived as less committed to their work, less reliable, and less ambitious, which hinders their opportunities for advancement (Barsh & Chaudry, 2009). This perception is often exacerbated by the lack of supportive workplace policies, such as adequate parental leave and childcare options, which can make it difficult for women to balance work and family responsibilities (Catalyst, 2023). Beyond stereotyping and discrimination, pregnant women may also encounter subtle forms of bias and exclusion in the workplace. They may be overlooked for promotions, assignments, and training opportunities, and their contributions may be undervalued or dismissed (Catalyst, 2023). This can lead to feelings of isolation, disengagement, and even resentment, further hindering their career advancement.

Furthermore, pregnancy can aggravate the existing gendered division of labour, where women are disproportionately responsible for childcare and domestic work (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This can lead to a double burden for pregnant women, who must juggle the demands of their jobs with the increased responsibilities of motherhood. This additional workload can make it difficult to maintain the same level of productivity and commitment as their male counterparts, further reinforcing negative stereotypes about their ability to succeed in demanding leadership roles. The impact of pregnancy on women's careers is not merely individual; it also has broader implications for organisations. However, the discouragement of talented women from pursuing

leadership roles, means that organisations may miss out on a valuable pool of talent and diverse perspectives. This can lead to reduced innovation, productivity, and overall organisational success (Catalyst, 2023).

What can further drive social identity and psychological barriers for women who participate in positions of power is that women do not plan career progression in the same style as men (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2006). Women's motivation relates more to 'developing myself' and driving 'my inner resources' as opposed to the idea of the pursuit of power (Lee & Cheon, 2009). Women, having a greater family commitment than men, must commit to the role of childcare, leading to a possible scenario of choosing their career to support that of the spouse (male working in a managerial role). Even if women find alternatives for childcare, greater flexibility is often not a perk managerial level employees can enjoy (Lee & Cheon, 2009), resulting in a choice between career progression and family responsibility.

Since the rise of various economic problems and Covid-19, a further strain has taken place within the labour market. In the second quarter of 2021, women accounted for forty three percent of total unemployment, a shrinkage of zero point four percent of those in managerial positions, sixty six point nine percent were men compared to thirty three point one of women (a slight rise from 2018). Women are still overly represented within domestic work, clerical and technical occupations while men dominated the rest of the segments. 31% of all people who had work (2021) were employed within elementary and domestic occupations (StatsSA, 2021).

2.4.2 Women and Leadership Capability

The 2019 study by Zenger and Folkman used a large dataset of 360-degree assessments from over 60,000 leaders (40,184 men and 22,600 women) to evaluate leadership competencies. In this analysis, women were rated higher than men on 17 out of 19 key leadership skills, covering dimensions like resilience, self-development, driving results, integrity, and collaboration. Notably, men only outperformed women in technical or professional expertise and strategic perspective, which tend to be roles where men are more frequently represented at higher levels, potentially influencing these results.

The assessment involved feedback from peers, subordinates, and supervisors, creating a well-rounded perspective on perceived leadership effectiveness. Interestingly, self-ratings in the study revealed a significant difference in confidence: younger women rated themselves lower than men of the same age, though confidence levels aligned around age 40. Over time, women’s confidence in their capabilities grew significantly more than men’s, with women’s self-assessed confidence gaining nearly 29 percentile points from early to later career stages, compared to men’s modest 8.5 percentile increase. This suggests that while men often display more confidence in their early careers, women’s confidence, and leadership effectiveness, continues to rise with experience.

The study’s large sample size and 360-degree feedback method provide robust data, though it also shows that underrepresented female leaders in senior strategic roles might influence findings on strategic competencies. This study sheds light on how self-perceptions and external evaluations of leadership can diverge based on gender, with implications for how organisations might support women’s confidence and provide equitable advancement opportunities. Table 2.2 below shows the difference between the the competencies scored for men and women.

Table 2.2

Measuring leadership competency between men and women

Capability	Women’s percentile	Men’s percentile
Takes initiative	55.6	48.2
Resilience	54.7	49.3
Practices self-development	54.8	49.6
Drives for results	53.9	48.8
Displays high integrity and honesty	54.0	49.1
Develops others	54.1	49.8
Inspires and motivates others	53.9	49.7
Bold leadership	53.2	49.8
Builds relationships	53.2	49.9
Champions change	53.1	49.8
Establishes stretch goals	52.6	49.7
Collaboration and teamwork	52.6	50.2
Connects to the outside world	51.6	50.3

Communicates powerfully and prolifically	51.8	50.7
Solves problems and analyzes issues	51.5	50.4
Leadership speed	51.5	50.5
Innovates	51.4	51
Technical or professional expertise	50.1	51.1
Develops strategic perspective	50.1	51.4

Source: Adapted from Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2019). *Research: Women Score Higher Than Men in Most Leadership Skills*. Accessed online at <https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills>

In terms of modern-day leadership style, women display higher levels of transformational leadership than their male counterparts. Women are further rated by peers and managers to be better overall leaders than their male counterparts (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). However, women still face unconscious bias that they do not belong in senior managerial positions. In the appointment of leaders and equally competent applicants an inclination still leans towards hiring male employees as a safer choice of employment than women (Zenger & Folkman, 2019) due to the concern of their family requirements, as informed by the “ideal worker” tendency.

Further, men and women in senior management positions expressed mixed views on work-life balance (WLB) practices, with concerns about presenteeism (the expectation to always be visibly present in the office) and long work hours commonly associated with leadership roles. WLB practices, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, parental leave, and wellness programmes, aim to help employees manage personal and professional obligations. However, despite the benefits, these practices can have complex implications for perceived job performance and career progression, particularly in high-stakes roles (McDowall & Kinman, 2021).

For instance, men in senior roles generally felt a greater obligation to work extended hours to meet the demands of their positions, aligning with traditional expectations of leadership availability. In contrast, women in similar positions expressed a preference for flexible hours to accommodate work-life responsibilities, yet they remained concerned about the potential career risks associated with utilising these WLB options. Both genders agreed that participating in flexible work arrangements could negatively impact perceptions of their commitment and job performance, with women reporting

heightened concerns that engaging in WLB practices might hinder their advancement opportunities or reinforce biases about their dedication to the role (McDowall & Kinman, 2021).

This tension around WLB practices in senior management highlights a significant barrier to gender equity, as the expectation of presenteeism and long hours can disproportionately affect women who are more likely to balance caregiving responsibilities alongside their careers.

The research points to a changeover in organisational culture, by introducing work-life practices that demonstrate how to use it more effectively. This requires a change in the mindset of managers who engage in work-life programmes and aiding managers who have to engage in longer working hours but need alternative working arrangements (Drew & Murtagh, 2005). As described in work-life policy creation, the idea of “model employer” relies on the championing of work-life programmes, both for employees and managers. There should be a clear drive from leadership to accept and drive all forms of work-life programs and demonstrate that no penalty will be given for anyone participating in them.

2.5 Leadership and Career Life Stage: Navigating Role Transitions and Gendered Expectations

Career development is a dynamic process, with distinct life stages impacting how individuals approach professional growth. For women, career progression often intersects with complex life-stage factors, such as family responsibilities, societal expectations, and gendered organisational norms, which can create unique challenges and career decisions compared to their male counterparts (Darcy et al., 2012). Life-stage theories such as Super’s Career Life Stage Model provide a framework for understanding how career priorities evolve over time, though they often overlook gender-specific challenges, particularly for women balancing caregiving responsibilities with professional ambitions (Super, 1980).

2.5.1 Early Career: Focus on Challenge and Skill Development

In early career stages, individuals typically prioritise learning opportunities and challenging work, striving to establish a professional identity and skillset (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). For women, this phase may coincide with societal pressures to establish both career and family roles, and this dual focus can be demanding. The Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM), which considers the needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge at different life stages, suggests that during early career years, women often seek meaningful work that aligns with their values and fosters skill growth (Sullivan et al., 2009). However, young women in male-dominated fields, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), may also encounter early career barriers, including tokenism and isolation, which can undermine professional confidence and growth (Hart, 2016).

2.5.2 Mid-Career: Balancing Professional Ambitions and Family Roles

Mid-career is often the phase where work-family conflict peaks for women, especially as this period frequently aligns with family-building years. Many mid-career women face dual pressures of caregiving and professional responsibilities, with research showing that gendered expectations can exacerbate stress and career stagnation. Studies highlight that mid-career women are often disadvantaged by the timing of key career milestones—such as promotions or tenure decisions—which can overlap with family caregiving responsibilities (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013). The “biological time clock” and “career time clock” tend to collide at this stage, forcing many women into part-time roles or flexible arrangements, which may provide work-life balance but limit career advancement and visibility within organisations (Rhoads & Rhoads, 2012).

In such situations, many women adopt the boundaryless or protean career approaches, opting for roles that offer flexibility and personal alignment rather than traditional hierarchical advancement. Protean career models encourage self-directed growth and adaptability, but these approaches may fail to address the systemic challenges that women encounter, such as implicit biases and limited access to mentorship, which can persist despite individual adaptability (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

2.5.3 Late Career: Authenticity and Redefining Success

As women transition into late career stages, priorities often shift toward authenticity and self-fulfilment, with many redefining successes on their terms. During this stage, women frequently seek roles that allow greater alignment with personal values and provide the freedom to pursue interests beyond career advancement. The KCM suggests that the emphasis on authenticity is paramount in late career stages, and many women pursue positions that allow greater work-life harmony, mentorship opportunities, and organisational influence, valuing autonomy over hierarchical progression (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

This period can also be a stage where women experience a resurgence in confidence, particularly as they leverage accumulated skills and insights. Research indicates that women's self-assessed confidence tends to increase significantly over time, with older women leaders often rating themselves higher in leadership effectiveness than their male counterparts. This shift underscores the importance of organisational policies that support mentorship and flexible, non-linear career paths, allowing women to contribute based on their expertise and interests rather than adhering to traditional timelines and roles (McDowall & Kinman, 2021).

2.5.4 Implications for Organisations and Policy

Understanding these career life stages is essential for organisations aiming to support women in leadership effectively. Integrating flexible policies that accommodate different life-stage needs can help retain talented women throughout their careers. Moreover, adopting career models like the Kaleidoscope Career Model can guide employers in creating supportive environments that recognise life-stage challenges and promote a balanced approach to leadership development, fostering diversity and equity at every stage.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The literature review has provided a comprehensive overview of the main topics and themes related to the study's aims and research questions as outlined in chapter 1. It

has explored the historical and contextual factors that influence the career development and choices women make. This includes the barriers and challenges they face in the workplace. It also examines the relevant theoretical frameworks and models that explain how women navigate their work and life domains, such as the kaleidoscope career model and boundary theory. Further, it has highlighted the gaps and limitations in the existing literature, such as the lack of empirical evidence on the subjective experiences and perceptions of women employees regarding work-life balance, and the need for more cross-cultural and diverse perspectives.

The literature review has thus set the foundation for the empirical phase of the study. In the next section, Q-methodology will allow the researcher to identify the different viewpoints and patterns of preferences that exist among the participants, as well as the underlying factors and dimensions that shape their work-life balance. The literature review has also informed the development of the Q-method concourse, which is the set of statements that represent the range of opinions and perspectives on work-life balance. Based on the review of literature, this researcher will use this to inform patterns and opinions made in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN EXPLORATION OF FEMALE MANAGERS' PERSPECTIVES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN A STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISE: A Q METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Abstract

Orientation: Research has continually focussed on the difficulty women experience managing work and non-work roles. Various contributing factors impact the perception of work-life balance and the approach to providing support within organisations. This study focuses on the perspectives of work-life balance from female managers within a state-owned enterprise.

Research Purpose: This research project aims to explore the perceptions of work-life balance from female managers in a state-owned enterprise, to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges women face regarding work-life balance.

Motivation for the study: Women still face significant problems managing work and non-work role demands. The perceptions of work-life balance especially in male-dominated roles continuously provide challenges across certain organisations and departments.

Research approach, design, and method: A qualitative approach was used using Q-Methodology. Data was gathered using a concourse of statements and a card sorting technique, including semi-structured interviews as the follow-up to the sorting outcome. Forty participants took part in this study. Analysis was done using Q-Methodology software, an online approach to collecting and analysing data.

INTRODUCTION

With growing numbers of women entering the workforce the concept of work-life balance has been the focus of research during the last few decades (Aarde & Mostert, 2010). Many changes occurred within the South African work context, especially related to workforce demographics, the role women and men play in the family, the interaction between work and non-work domains (Segal, 2013), and the COVID-19 pandemic that has forced organisations to re-invent current ways of working. Despite the significant increase of women in the workforce and the promotion of women into leadership positions, the notion of men as primary breadwinners and women as caretakers of the family remain strong (Louden, 2018).

While the rise of technology and the virtual way of working makes it possible to create a more flexible way to interact with work and family life domains, there have been challenges with blurred boundaries and more complex family life domains (Louden, 2018). This is premised on the notion that female participation in the workforce is growing while women are still responsible for the largest share of household responsibilities (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Long working hours, increased workload and role demands (leadership positions) influence an individual's ability to manage work and home demands (Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

Research purpose and objectives

The change in the world of work during the last few decades has allowed greater opportunities for women to participate in the labour market (Berk & Gundogmus, 2018). There are limited research studies that have focussed on the role that gender plays when defining work-life balance needs (Berk & Gundogmus, 2018; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015, Seierstad & Kirton, 2015; Spilman, 2015). Research further shows that women are underrepresented on management and executive levels due to various gendered career obstacles and traditional family role constraints that influence their ability to manage work and life domains (Eurofound, 2018; Graham et al., 2017). Some organisations mostly implement only statutory requirements (maternity leave and parental leave), and therefore women find it difficult to reach their full potential during each work-life stage (Graham et al., 2017).

Therefore, the study's general aim is to explore the experiences of work-life balance from female managers within a state-owned enterprise to gain a deeper understanding of women's challenges regarding their leadership role.

Literature Review

The following section explains the theoretical concept of (i) work-life balance, (ii) work-life conflict, (iii) the role of culture in terms of gender and spousal support, (iv) the various career life stages of women in work-life balance and leadership positions.

The theoretical concept

Work-life balance has become a focal point for human resource professionals who seek to balance employees' needs within their personal or home context while also delivering adequate performance standards to drive organisational success (Addirahman et al., 2018). Recent research has shown the positive relationship between work-life balance and employee performance (Addirahman et al., 2018; Sirgy & Lee, 2016).

The core concept of work-life balance is the notion of steadiness versus conflict (Chang et al., 2010). The term 'work-life balance', therefore, comprises the pursuit of a sense of stability across all domains of life and often refers to individual engagement within work and non-work roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2016). Although the term is often described as finding a balance between work and non-work roles, it is not aimed at spending an equal amount of time within each domain. Rather, it is all about finding equilibrium and contentment with work and non-work roles that are consistent with individual needs and values during a specific time (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Sirgy & Lee, 2016; Loudon, 2018).

Theoretically, work-life balance has been viewed through the lens of multiple theories that include the Boundary theory, Conservation of Resource theory, and Role theory. These are outlined below:

- (i) **Boundary theory** focuses on limitations or borders to manage or segment demand between family and work commitments (Louden, 2018). The more work-life elements are integrated, the more blurred the boundaries become, indicating that while an individual can be physically in one role, mentally they are occupied with other role obligations (Winkel & Clayton, 2010; Brue, 2018). Greater focus is placed on the most critical role at that specific point in time, and the most time and effort will be redirected to ensure the protection of the most valued domain (Brue, 2018; Winkel & Clayton, 2010).
- (ii) **Conservation of resource theory (COR)** suggests that individuals need to protect and preserve resources that will drive the success of goal achievement (Brue, 2018). This theory describes the interaction between resources and obligations, for example, social support, the impact of spill-over (both from work-family interaction and family-work interaction) and integration between work and family domains (Bolino et al., 2015). This is especially relevant for women in leadership roles, in terms of a lack of resource support from a spouse in dual-earner families, family-based conflict spill-over, and maintaining a balance of support for family needs during working time (Matthews et al., 2010).
- (iii) **Role theory** describes norms, social expectations, and psychological interaction of role expectations. This theory proposes that behaviour is shaped by social surroundings and expectations based on societal, organisational, or social status (Hindin, 2007; Hunter, 2001; Kahn et al., 1964). From an organisational perspective, individuals interact within a defined manner based on the role expectation they are in (Hindin, 2007).

While work-life balance can sometimes be portrayed as the pursuit of balance, both from work and non-work roles, the term has also been criticised as being oversimplified (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). The criticism includes (i) **inconsistency in the concept of measurement**, where work-life balance is not properly distinguished from other concepts (Louden, 2018); (ii) **theoretical understanding**, where the impression of satisfaction is achieved when time is equally spent in both domains, or greater satisfaction is achieved when more time is spent in one domain than another (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Louden, 2018); (iii) **discourses** that suggest individuals are solely responsible for the management of work-life balance that ignore

cultural, social, societal and organisational norms (Gregory & Milner, 2009; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Louden, 2018); and (iv) **implementation fears**, where flexible arrangements, failure to meet the needs of employees, and the continuation of the outdated view of the 'ideal worker' continuously affects employee wellness (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Louden, 2018). It can in this case also include neglect of the inclusion of minority groups by being more designed for middle-class, heterosexual, dual-earner families (Gatrell et al., 2013).

Work life conflict

When work demands interfere with family-life demands, employees may feel overwhelmed and have trouble managing their time. This can lead to job stress, which has been defined as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the demands of work are greater than the resources that an individual has to deal with them" (Yuile et al., 2012, p. 2). Other consequences of work-life conflict can include reduced work productivity, poor work performance, absenteeism, low job satisfaction, reduced organisational commitment, poor mental and physical health, divorce or separation and difficulty balancing work and family life (Haar et al., 2014).

- **Work-family conflict** has been studied from various perspectives, such as individual, family, and organisational levels. At the individual level, work-family conflict is associated with negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. At the family level, work-family conflict can lead to marital dissatisfaction, parenting stress, and family conflict (Louden, 2018). At the organisational level, work-family conflict can lead to decreased productivity, absenteeism, and turnover (Mostert, 2008, Talukder, 2019). Work-family conflict forms part of the role-scarcity principle which refers to fixed resources (time and energy) available from an individual resource pool. While work and family domains are mutually exclusive from one another, the pressure of trying to balance individual domains can result in conflict, role overload, and an attempt to restore balance by combining roles and finding unique approaches to deal with the conflict experiences (Byron, 2005; Louden, 2018; Niedhammer et al., 2012).

- On the other hand, **work-family enrichment** and its positive spill-over have been found to increase job satisfaction, work performance, and life satisfaction. Work-family enrichment is often achieved using work-family policies and practices (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Powell & Greenhaus, 2004). These policies and practices can be used to create a work environment that is supportive of employees' family commitments to better manage work and family responsibilities (Chan et al., 2017). Examples of such policies and practices include flexible work arrangements, family-friendly leave policies, and family-supportive benefits.

The benefits that allow female workers to experience work-family enrichment and positive spill-over are more likely due to their increased resources. The positive relationship between work-to-family enrichment and work support has been found to increase job satisfaction and work performance (Marais et. al, 2014; Jaga et. al, 2013) and life satisfaction and well-being (Powell & Greenhaus, 2004). Overall, work-family enrichment and positive spill-over can benefit both the work and family domains in terms of increased job satisfaction, work performance, and life satisfaction. Female workers, who have increased resources in their work domain, are more likely to experience benefits from the positive effects of work-family enrichment.
- **Work-life balance**, however, is not an objective split between time within work and private domains but rather focuses on **the individual assessment** of balance according to an individual's needs. While work-life balance has been criticised for its lack of an encompassing definition, oversimplified approach, and miscommunication of the term 'balance', it is important to note that the term balance itself is subjective and should not be interpreted as the same for all individuals (Caproni, 2004; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Stamarski & Hing, 2015) Researchers have therefore suggested that the subjective nature of work-life balance is a dynamic and constantly changing process and the concept should be respected as such (Potgieter & Barnard, 2010; Stamarski & Hing, 2015). In other words, work-life balance is not a static state that can be achieved and then maintained, but rather a process that requires ongoing effort and adjustments in line with current needs, goals, and expectations. As such, individuals must be willing to make changes to their work and non-work roles to maintain the desired balance.

The role of culture, gender, and spousal support

External factors can lead to disparities in the work-life balance between different groups of people and can also influence the way individuals perceive and experience work-life balance (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Herman & Lewis, 2012). Research has shown that work-life balance is affected by the organisational context, in terms of the availability of family-friendly policies, flexible working arrangements and supportive supervisors (Grawitch & Barber, 2010) It is also affected by the broader societal context, such as the economic climate, labour market policies and gender roles (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Herman & Lewis, 2012).

Support from family and organisational culture further influences individual work-life balance satisfaction. Some organisations have implemented various policies and support for work-life balance initiatives that have failed to address gender stereotypes and therefore the assumption of the 'ideal worker' sometimes translates to complete devotion to work that is only accomplished by those who have no additional family commitments, long working hours and which is a commitment only for **senior-level** employees. This creates additional boundaries for women managing work and life domains who are expected to be adequate in both. This phenomenon is often referred to as an 'invisible process' which is deeply rooted in organisational culture and belief (Fujimoto et. Al, 2013; Hari, 2017; Lewis, 2009; Reid, 2017).

Acker (2012) also refers to an invisible 'gendered substructure' that creates role assumptions for men and women that focus on traditional assumptions of masculinity and femininity. This can include the wage gap difference, sex-based job segregation, job design (based on the traditional male), power and decision-making (boards and directors with overwhelming male dominance) and gendered expectations that leave very little room for work-family negotiations. In fact, while organisations believe policies and work are designed for gender-neutral or asexual workers, the traditional structure of work is actually based on employees who have few obligations outside of the work role.

In reality, spousal support and organisational culture can have a direct influence on an individual's work-life balance satisfaction. On the one hand, spousal support can

provide a sense of security and support for women who are making career decisions and work-life balance choices. Organisational culture, on the other hand, can have a more pervasive influence on work-life balance by perpetuating the ideal worker norm and creating a culture of long hours, adverse career consequences and gendered stereotypes. According to researchers, women significantly experience more conflict in work-family roles than men due to traditional gender roles and ideal expectations of what work-life balance should entail. They experience difficulty finding a career that allows women to integrate work and family requirements (Louden, 2018, Toffoletti & Starr, 2016).

Women in leadership

Women have been, and still are, under-represented in management positions. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including unconscious bias, structural barriers, and a lack of access to mentorship and networking opportunities. Research has further identified other factors, including gender-based stereotypes, unequal distribution of care responsibility and non-supportive managers (Biletta et al., 2018). Social Role theory and Leader Organisation theory explain the perception of women in management roles to be that women are thought to be more oriented towards caregiving roles, while men are considered more assertive and dominant. These stereotypes have led to the belief that men are more suited to leadership positions (Lemoine et al., 2016; Wood & Eagly, 2012). Additionally, as women are more likely than men to work in lower-paying, female-dominated occupations they are less likely to hold positions of power and authority.

The term 'glass ceiling' or 'cliff', first used in the 1980s, describes the invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing to top leadership positions in the workplace. The phenomenon refers to women placed in leadership positions during times of crisis, often due to the lack of other qualified candidates. Female leaders are then left to deal with the negative consequences of the crisis, such as declining performance, a lack of resources, and limited support (Biletta et al., 2018). This can lead to female managers failing in their roles, while their male counterparts are supported and given a better chance of success (Biletta et al., 2018). The glass cliff can be a result of cultural and institutional bias, such as a lack of mentorship and unequal access to resources. As a

result, female leaders are more likely to be put in precarious leadership positions and experience greater difficulty in achieving success (Biletta et al., 2018).

The perceived prejudice creates a feeling of being unwelcome and unsupported in their work and career goals and leads to the perception among women that they cannot rise through the ranks, which leads to career stagnation and a feeling of exclusion (Hart, 2016). Hart (2016) further suggests that women often see leadership as a 'man's space' and take on roles often referred to as 'institutional housekeeping' that offer greater support for other activities apart from normal work (Hart, 2016 p. 607).

Ridgeway, (2004) makes the point that women have been socialised to act in a certain way and as a result do not challenge the status quo. This can impede their career progression, as the reluctance to take on positions of power could be seen as due to a challenge to men in the workplace. This is further compounded by the fact that the workplace is still dominated by men, with a reluctance to change and accept the idea of women in positions of power (Lee & Cheon, 2009). Consequently, this male dominated traditional power base in the workplace can lead to a lack of available mentors for women, as well as less opportunities for their development (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2006). Overall, the lack of career progression for women is mostly due to a combination of traditional social, psychological, and structural factors.

Research Design

Overview of Q Methodology

Q-methodology was originally developed by William Stephenson to objectively study human subjectivity. It is based on factor analytic theory to perform a systematic scientific study of subjectivity in humans (Brown, 1993). This relies on a forced sorting technique for participants to prioritise their beliefs based on the importance of their subjective experience on the topic at hand.

Research Approach

This study adopted Q methodology which some researchers believe that it is strongly rooted in qualitative and constructivist assumptions but uses quantitative techniques such as correlation and factor analysis (Moalusi, 2020; Stenner, 2009). The argument to be advanced here is that whatever human subjectivity or social phenomenon is explored, it can only be understood from the subjective point of view of the research participants (the social actors). Despite the use of statistics or quantitative techniques, the thrust of the exploration is to understand and explain the social world from the viewpoint of the managers and not from the viewpoint of the researcher (Goldman, 1999; Tuli, 2010;)

Other researchers categorise Q methodology as a mixed method approach (Ramlo & Newman, 2011; Stenner, 2008). The participants rank the statements about a phenomenon such as work-life balance to reveal their individual and subjective experiences on the subject. However, the sorted statements are also subjected to statistical analysis, making the approach mixed method. Regardless of the categorisation of Q methodology as anchored on interpretive and constructivist meta-theoretical assumptions or being a mixed method approach, the role of statistics or numbers is subdued and relatively unimportant (Brown, 1980).

In this research participants sorted cards containing statements about work-life balance, to reveal (individually and subjectively) how they experienced work-life balance. The data in the form of the sorted cards were then analysed using quantitative techniques such as correlation and factor analysis. However, the factors that emerged represented the female managers' experiences regarding work-life balance and are therefore subjective (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) which is the relativist ontological position of the study (Patel, 2015). Epistemologically, the study operated from the premise that knowledge is softer and subjective as it is based on female managers' work-life balance experiences. Data were only collected from the experiences of the female managers.

Research Strategy

The researcher applied a Q-sorting of the cards and used follow-up interviews with the participants to collect data for a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences

of work-life balance. Data analysis was done with a statistical program called PQmethod. The results are presented later in this chapter.

Research Questions

1. How do women in leadership positions perceive and experience work-life balance?
2. What recommendations can be made to improve the work-life balance experiences of women in managerial positions?

Sampling

Purposive Sampling is a method is based on non-probability sampling and is chosen specifically to align to the objective of this study, as a particular group of participants were required to accurately reflect on the problem at hand (Henning et al., 2004). Through purposive sampling the researcher ensured that the P set comprised diverse female managers in leadership positions who were theoretically relevant to the issue under investigation. The organisation employs more than 10 000 employees, with some 60% being women. There were around 1 700 managers and senior managers in total in this organisation of which women represented around 40%. A formal request with ethical clearance from the University attached was sent to the committee. The Committee provided a list of all female managers within the organisation.

From the list, the researcher selected 40 participants to partake in the formal Q-sort process (see data collection below). Based on research, a sample of 40 participants provided adequate data for the project (Brown, 1980).

The researcher employed a systematic approach to selecting participants, ensuring diversity across multiple demographics and career stages. Participants were drawn from various ethnic backgrounds and management levels, specifically Middle Management and Senior Management, to achieve a balanced representation. The initial sample aimed for 40 participants, with proportional quotas set for management levels (40% Senior Management and 60% Middle Management). Ethnic representation goals were set at 78% African, 8% White, 6% Coloured, 6% Indian,

and 2% Other. However, the final sample consisted of individuals who consented to participate, acknowledging that while efforts were made to meet these proportions, the researcher worked within the constraints of participant availability.

Potential participants were invited through formal invitations, which detailed the study's purpose, included ethical clearance documentation from the University, organisational research permissions, and the research consent form. All participants were required to agree to the terms outlined in the consent form, which included a confidentiality clause to protect their identities.

The Q methodology data collection process begins with the selection of a sample of participants with relevant knowledge and experience about the topic of interest. A set of items is then developed that (i) reflect different perspectives about the topic and that (ii) can be ranked by the participants (also referred to as the *concourse*). The participants are asked to rank the statements (card sorting) into piles according to their point of view (from disagree to agree). Participants are also asked to explain their sorting decisions to capture the nuances of their perspective (follow-up interview on the specific sorting of cards). The sorted data are then analysed using a statistical technique, such as factor analysis, to identify and compare the different perspectives.

Approach to Q Methodology

The following seven steps were followed in the study as outlined below (Webler et al., 2009):

1. The building of a *concourse* using information derived from from existing literature.
2. The development of a defined Q set based on the number of statements needed for the study (the researcher listed as many statements as possible and then cut them down to the most relevant statements, relying on the views of experts in the field of study – usually a sample of 40 – 60)
3. Selection of a P set (sample of participants) using purposive sampling to fit the inclusion criteria of the study.
4. The P set then sorted, and rank ordered the statements under a condition of instruction from 'most agree' to 'most disagree'.

5. The use of a post-sort interview to give participants an opportunity to explain the reasoning for sorting cards in a specific manner.
6. Analysis of data using correlations and factor analysis to explore patterns and factors that emerge.
7. In the final step, the researcher describes what each factor represents, which factor was achieved by comparing the positions of statements and explores the post-sort interview as well as the literature on the findings.

Research Method

This part of the research contains the research setting, the roles of the researcher, the sampling method used, the data collection procedure, the recording of data, data quality and integrity as well as data analysis and findings.

Research Setting

The research study focussed on a specific organisation in government and relied on a specific context for the selection of participants. All participants were women employed in a leadership role in various departments within the organisation from middle management and upwards. It was not region-specific, and participants were selected from all regional footprints of the organisation.

Establishing the role of the researcher

Prior data collection approval was granted by the organisation to conduct the study. Subsequently, the researcher then obtained an ethical clearance from the university research ethics committee. The researcher supplied the organisation's research committee with a list of names of all candidates who fit in the inclusion criteria. An invitation letter soliciting participation in the study and an informed consent form were then to send to potential participants in the study. Based on the South African government's Covid-19 regulations, the used digital platforms to aid in the data collection for the study as well as the required follow-up interviews. The researcher scheduled a suitable date and time with the female managers who consented to participate in the study.

Developing the Concourse (Q-Set)

A concourse is a collection of subjective opinions, encompassing everything from a range of constructs, such as artwork, music, or even descriptions of behaviour and personality traits. The researcher developed a concourse comprising items from existing literature and media reports on work-life balance (secondary sources) (McKeown & Thomas, 1988; Stephenson, 1953; Valenta & Wigger, 1997). The researcher aimed to ensure that the concourse reflected the range of perceptions on work-life balance (Brown, 2004).

A structured approach was used to develop the Q set, ensuring that the sub-issues within the topic of work-life balance were comprehensively represented. This approach follows the guidelines outlined by Brown (1980) and adheres to a systematic process for constructing Q sets as used in previous studies (Paige & Morin, 2014; Kirschbaum et al., 2019; Damio, 2016; Bryant et al., 2021).

The initial draft of the Q set was developed using a deductive method, guided by the research questions and a thorough review of existing literature on work-life balance. Statements were carefully selected to reflect the multidimensional nature of the topic, ensuring that a broad spectrum of perspectives and sub-issues was included. Specifically, the selection process focused on identifying statements that captured observable behaviours, attitudes, and subjective experiences relevant to work-life balance. These were derived from peer-reviewed articles, existing frameworks, and previous empirical studies on the subject. Three hundred statements were created for the purpose of the study.

To provide clarity and organisation, the statements were grouped into three components or themes: (1) challenges related to work demands, (2) family obligations, and (3) individual coping strategies.

- Challenges related to work demands included statements reflecting long working hours, job stress, employer expectations, and role overload.

- Family obligations captured themes around caregiving responsibilities, societal expectations of parenting roles, and family conflict.
- Individual coping strategies explored approaches such as time management, seeking support systems, and engaging in self-care practices.

This thematic organisation aligns with recommendations by Stephenson (1953) and Valenta and Wigger (1997), ensuring comprehensive coverage of the most relevant sub-issues within the research topic. Additionally, grouping the statements into themes facilitated a balanced representation of the topic and ensured that no single dimension overshadowed the others.

To refine the Q set, the statements were reviewed by the study supervisor and two psychologists with expertise in work-life balance. The reviewers assessed the relevance, clarity, and balance of the statements, ensuring that the Q set comprehensively captured the intended scope of the study. Changes and adjustments were made iteratively based on their feedback until a final set of 60 statements was established. In this study, 60 statements were deemed appropriate because they allowed for the inclusion of the most critical elements of work-life balance while ensuring participants could effectively engage with the Q sorting task. This number aligns with Brown's (1980) recommendations, which suggest that Q sets typically include between 40 and 80 statements, depending on the complexity of the topic. Each statement was assigned to one of the three components, maintaining equal representation of the themes to support structured sorting and analysis.

This systematic development process ensured that the Q set was both theoretically grounded and practically relevant, providing a robust foundation for the subsequent stages of the study.

Participants and sampling method

A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used to ensure that the study had a more diverse range of views. The participants were divided into three groups, namely executive leaders, senior managers, and middle managers. The researcher made

effort to obtain a diverse P-set to get as many diverse views as possible. Forty participants volunteered and consented to participate in the study.

Table 3.2

Demographics of participants

Identifier	Race	Division	Manager Level
9649WBIS	African	Human Resource	Middle
1UQK	African	Research	Middle
YV2AX	White	Operations	Middle
6T3I6F	Coloured	Data Analytics	Middle
OLZY8Y	White	Human Resource	Middle
RMU4IMY	White	Finance	Middle
DRG4	African	Operations	Middle
S71OPO0Y	Indian	Operations	Middle
XSX7	African	Legal	Middle
FBLI	Coloured	Business Support	Middle
U03WROML	White	Operations	Middle
W05D8Y9	White	Data Analytics	Middle
EXZ0H	White	Audit	Middle
GKPRL	Indian	Operations	Middle
ZUJSYE0L	White	Data Analytics	Middle
MOE6	White	Audit	Middle
ITCDP7	African	Policy	Middle
19RP42	African	Development	Middle
KWTGQSP	African	Communications	Middle
XA2Q	White	Operations	Middle
LJ34	African	Communications	Middle
WBH0038E	White	Operations	Middle
LYUUTO	White	Information Technology	Senior
7VUCACF	White	Human Resource	Senior

0MSAUSL	African	Operations	Senior
ALPJ	Indian	Human Resource	Senior
D1YOG	White	Information Technology	Senior
PK8E9	African	Corporate Planning	Senior
QF9WOKR	African	Operations	Senior
JZGK7U	White	Human Resource	Senior
20JZBWR	Indian	Human Resource	Senior
1NWS2U0G	African	Business Support	Senior
6PS8E	African	Human Resource	Senior
A2WEWF	White	Operations	Senior
FCMWK5	African	Legal	Senior
B3GI310U	White	Human Resource	Senior
KPOK6	African	Customer Service	Senior
YT5SU0GV	African	Data Analytics	Senior
CBV9V	African	Research	Senior
U59JQ	White	Legal	Senior

Data collection methods

The 40 female managers were asked to rank-order a set of sixty statements related to work-life balance within the organisation, according to their level of agreement or disagreement, using a forced-choice distribution.

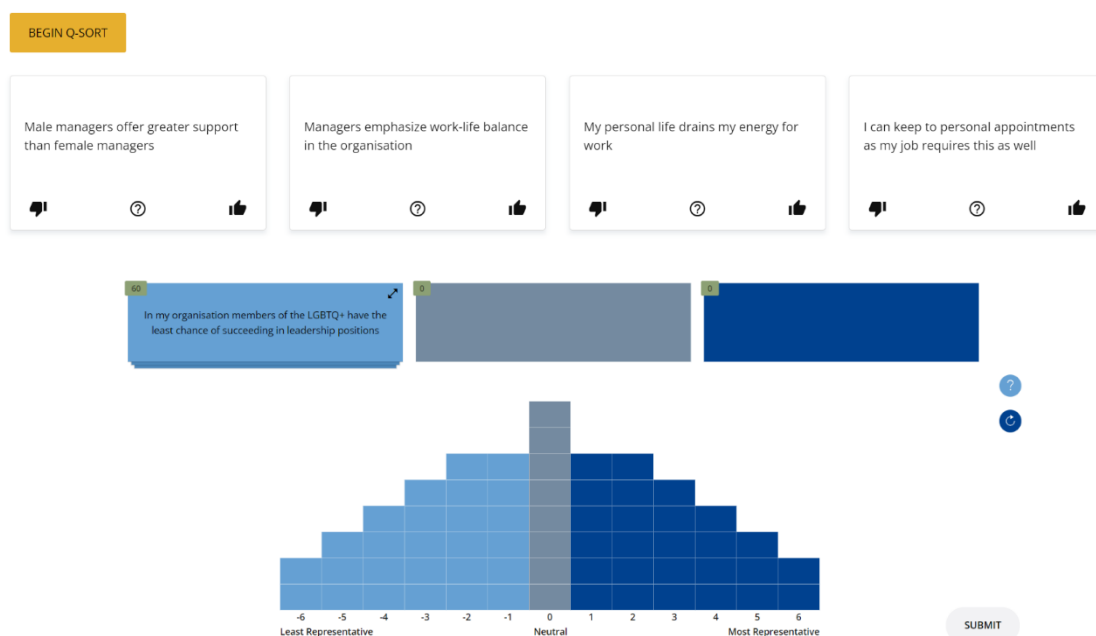
An online platform, called QMethod Software was used to gather the participant information and sorting of the cards. This followed the Covid-19 protocols as well as the geographically spread location of the participants. The researcher used Microsoft Teams (Virtual) sessions with each participant and took them through the sort by sharing their screen and viewing as they did the sort.

Participants were tasked to pre-sort statements according to their preference to make the final sort easier. In the pre-sort stage, participants had to read each statement and give a thumbs-up, thumbs-down or question mark. Each of these actions divided the statement into a group of cards (less representative in light blue, neutral in grey and

representative in dark blue). Once completed, the Q-sort procedure began, and from the deck of cards, participants had to place each card according to their preference in a block. While the pre-shuffle was done to make it easier, participants were allowed to move cards to opposite ends as well as different rankings after it was placed. The images below show the procedure:

Figure 3.1

Q-Method Software used for placing the cards in the pyramid



After the Q-sort had been completed by all participants, this researcher approached all candidates for a follow-up interview to assess why certain cards were placed in different locations. Only cards between +4 to +6 (most representative) and -4 to -6 (least representative) were reviewed. Where more insight was needed, scores in the neutral ranges were also explored. The interviews were recorded and transcribed based on the consent supplied by all participants. All forty participants took part in the interview process.

The next step involved preparing the data for input into PQmethod. While QMethod software automatically records the answers and prepares the data for analysis, PQMethod requires the researcher to manually input every Q-Sort done by participants. Both programs were used to analyse the data to ensure data reliability.

The online Q-sort data was extracted from QMethod software and read into PQMethod. From here, the data were double-checked for any mistakes. Once complete, the data were ready to be analysed by both software.

Data recording

The study followed ethical guidelines, and all participants provided their informed consent for audio recording of their interviews and taking field notes during the process as well as participating in the Q-sort procedure. The Q-sorting data was captured with the QMethod software and transcription was done by the researcher as the main data is sourced from the Q-sort procedure. The accuracy and reliability of the transcriptions were ensured by cross-checking the transcriptions with the audio recordings (Kvale, 1997). In addition, field notes were taken to capture any non-verbal cues or additional information observed during the interviews. These field notes were then used to complement and validate the transcriptions during data analysis the assist with understanding the factors that were revealed during the data analysis stage of the Q-sort process.

Ensuring data quality and Integrity

Participants were selected based on their familiarity with the principles of the study and for having a significant stake in the outcome of the study to ensure that the views expressed by all participants were relevant and meaningful. All the statements in the process were written clearly, unambiguously and standardised to ensure that all were understood in the same way by all participants and ambiguous statements were rephrased. To ensure all statements were related to the topic, the statements were reviewed by the Academic supervisor as well as two additional Senior Organisational Psychologists that understand the topic and field very well.

The participants were selected based on the range of views needed for this study. While the researcher sorted candidates into groups to ensure a fair selection was made, the final 40 participants were chosen for their availability to take part in the project. All candidates were provided with the same instructions, themes and meaning of statements before the start of the project. The data was analysed in a systematic manner using QMethod Software and PQMethod.

Appropriate statistical techniques were used based on the requirement of the study, as explained above. The data were double-checked for anything that might have been missing, and for the outliers and patterns that showed the themes of the data. Finally, the results of the study were analysed using the integrated software of QMethod software as well as PQmethod to ensure data reliability. The results were compared to ensure the findings were the same from different software.

Three factors emerged from the analysis. These factors were labelled as follows:

Factor 1 – “Adequate personal life support”

Factor 2 – “Hectic workload interfering with social activities”

Factor 3 - " Gendered Barriers and Organisational Biases”

Research Findings

QMethod Software

QMethod Software automatically calculates the data based on the input of the researcher. The selection included what statistical method of analysis should be selected, the options were Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Centroid Factor Analysis (CFA). Based on the requirements of the study, as previously described, PCA was used. The next step is reviewing the eigenvalue and deciding how many factors are required based on the results. Afterwards, the data can be rotated either with varimax or hand rotation. Based on the requirements of the study, varimax rotation was used. After all the steps are completed, the data is automatically calculated and presented within an Excel sheet for analysis. While the data is analysed using this software and PQ-Method, for the aim of the study, the process of PQ-Method will be discussed.

The findings have been organised into the following seven sections below: Correlation Matrix; Factor Analysis, Eigenvalue and Parallel Analysis; Factor Loadings; Factors one to eight; Consensus statements; Distinguished statements; Findings related to the research question.

Correlation Matrix

The initial step in Q methodology analysis involves examining Q-Sorts using the PQMethod software. This process begins with the computation of a correlation matrix, which identifies the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between each participant's Q-Sort and those of other participants (Brown, 1980). The software applies principal component analysis (PCA) to generate this correlation matrix, facilitating a comparison of the various Q-Sorts. The matrix contains correlation coefficients that range from -1.0 to +1.0, where +1.0 signifies a perfect alignment between two Q-Sorts, and -1.0 indicates a completely opposite sort. These coefficients provide a clear representation of the relationships between participants' subjective perspectives (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Table 3.3 shows the correlation matrix for factor 1 to 3.

Table 3.2

Correlation matrix for factors one to three

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	1.00	0.06036	0.35083
Factor 2	0.06036	1.00	0.39197
Factor 3	0.35083	0.39197	1.00

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax Rotation

Notes: n = 40 Q sorts. * $p \leq .05$

Factor exploration and analysis

Q-factor analysis is a method of analysis where the focus is on the correlations between individuals, rather than variables. The goal is to determine which sets of people cluster together based on their views and perspectives. Q factors load on individuals rather than on tests, which is why it is sometimes referred to as inverse factor analysis as noted by Kline (1994).

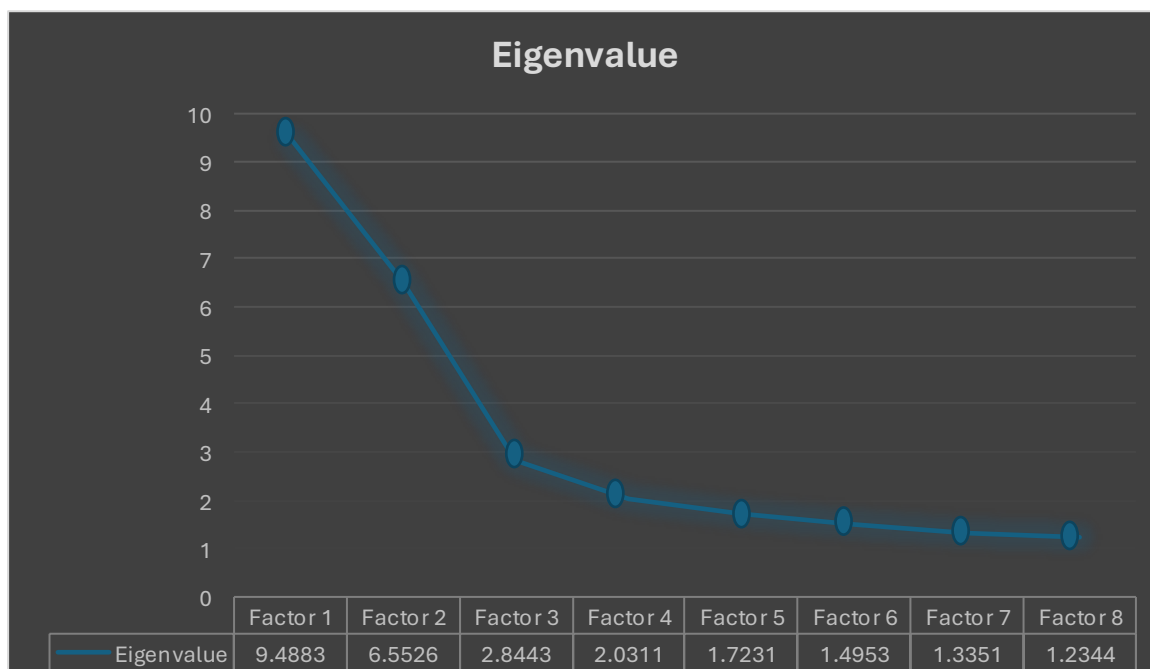
The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was undertaken to identify primary factors or dimensions that influenced the female managers' choices and patterns of sorting. The PCA is a statistical technique that can be used to reduce the complexity of data by transforming a large set of variables into a smaller set of uncorrelated variables, called principal components.

Following the interview, the Q sorts were analysed using a Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation. Brown (1980) explains that in Q methodology, factors are extracted to obtain only the common or interesting factors. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 are considered significant, while those with less than this amount are regarded as insignificant and not worth further investigation. Eigenvalues represent the sum of squared factor loadings for each factor, and the percentage of total variance accounted for by each factor is equal to the eigenvalue divided by the number of individuals whose responses have been factored. Unlike traditional R-method studies that group survey questions, Q-Method factor analysis groups participants based on how closely related their sorts are to each other. A factor emerges when highly corresponding sorts are clustered together.

After the factor analysis process started, the unrotated factors displayed 8 factors with an eigenvalue of above 1. McKeown and Thomas (1988) state that factors below a score of 1.0 produce inconclusive results, therefore, all additional factors (after the 8) were ignored. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the eigenvalue for factor one to eight. All eight factors below demonstrate an eigenvalue of above 1.

Figure 3.2

Eigenvalue for factor one to eight



Parallel Analysis

Parallel analysis addresses the critical methodological decision of how many factors to retain in a study. The decision is pivotal because retaining too few factors can result in the loss of significant information, while retaining too many can lead to focusing on minor, potentially meaningless factors. Both scenarios can distort the factor structure and complicate the interpretation of results (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Velicer et al., 2000).

Parallel analysis helps mitigate issues by comparing the eigenvalues from the actual data with those obtained from randomly generated data sets of the same size and number of variables. This comparison helps to identify the number of factors that account for more variance than would be expected by chance, thus providing a more accurate reflection of the underlying data structure (Horn, 1965; Zwick & Velicer, 1986).

Parallel analysis reflects a sounder approach to the selection of variables in exploratory factor analysis (EFA). It provides an objective, statistically robust method for determining the number of factors to retain by comparing the eigenvalues from the actual data with those from randomly generated data sets of the same size and number of variables (Hayton et al., 2004). This technique mitigates the risks of over- and under-extraction of factors, leading to more reliable and interpretable results (Horn, 1965; Zwick & Velicer, 1986). Table 3.3 below shows the results of parallel analysis.

Table 3.3

Parallel analysis for the factors

Factor	Actual EV	Mean EV	95th Percentile EV
1	9.48695	3.01191	3.30361
2	6.55184	2.72364	2.92095
3	2.84443	2.51702	2.68491
4	2.03574	2.3472	2.48496
5	1.7233	2.19414	2.327

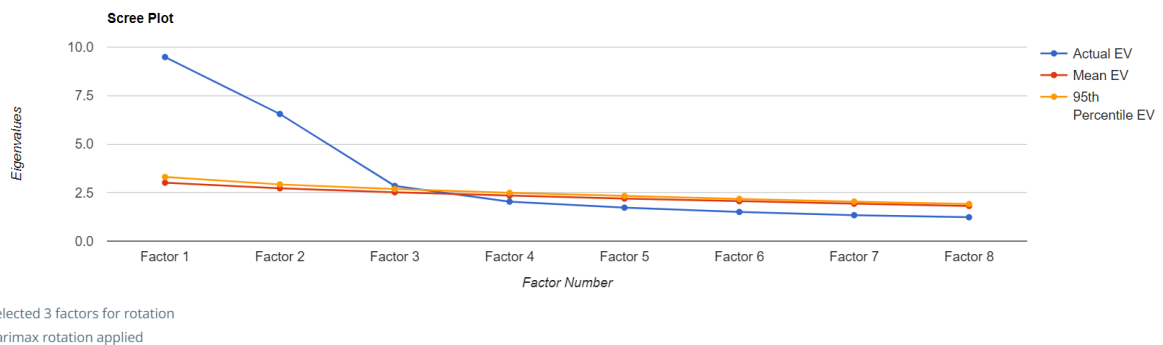
6	1.5018	2.05625	2.17388
7	1.33536	1.92908	2.03637
8	1.22982	1.81242	1.91348

While the average eigenvalues from random data can be used, utilising the 95th percentile provides a more conservative and statistically rigorous approach. The 95th percentile refers to the value below which 95% of the eigenvalues from the random data sets fall. This means that there is only a 5% chance that an eigenvalue from the random data will exceed this threshold purely by random variation (Hayton et al., 2004). Based on table above, the actual EV for factors 1 to 3 is higher than the 95th percentile, while factors 4 to 8 is lower than the 95th percentile, therefore, rotation and inclusion was only done for factors 1 to 3. Figure 3.3 below shows the comparison between eigenvalue and 95th percentile of eigenvalue.

Figure 3.3

Scree Plot and Factor Rotations

SCREE PLOT & FACTOR ROTATIONS



A total variance score among all 3 factors represented 47% of the findings. Each factor can be explored below in Table 3.4

Table 3.4

Explained variance for unrotated factors one to eight.

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
% Expl. Var.	24%	16%	7%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%

Factors 1 to 8 factors represented 67% variance of the findings while factor 1 to 3 represents 47.4% variance. Factor one representing 24%, factor two representing 16.3% and factor three representing 7.1%. For a significance level of $p < 0.05$, factor one had fifteen loadings, factor two had fourteen loadings, factor three had nine loadings.

Factor Loading

To identify and distinguish the emerging factors, Varimax rotation with three factors was conducted to analyse the data. Varimax rotation allows each Q-sort to load onto a factor with a certain correlation score. The Q-sorts were forced choice with a normal distribution, a mean value of 0.00, a standard deviation of 3.114 and a standard error of 0.447. Table 3.6 below shows the factor loadings after the rotation was completed.

Table 3.5

Factor loadings of participants' Q-Sorts

QSORT	Identifier	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	0MSAUSL	0.34989	0.38991*	0.07703
2	19RP42	0.28857	0.32886	0.24757
3	1NWS2U0G	0.21292	-0.05557	0.59065*
4	1UQK	-0.52363*	0.18848	-0.00951
5	20JZBWR	0.72094*	0.12215	0.31417
6	6PS8E	0.66741*	-0.00362	0.39334
7	6T3I6F	-0.02236	0.06676	0.70437*
8	7VUCACF	-0.13089	0.69857*	0.36858
9	9649WBIS	-0.59194*	0.33362	0.22403
10	A2WEWF	0.68815*	0.20785	0.255
11	ALPJ	0.79775*	-0.04417	0.0678
12	B3GI310U	0.78427*	0.15836	0.1097
13	CBV9V	0.62408*	-0.08602	0.10498
14	D1YOG	-0.10986	0.78141*	0.01502
15	DRG4	0.69054*	0.48719	-0.04496
16	EXZ0H	0.01854	0.65379*	-0.14345
17	FBLI	-0.46028*	0.06737	0.10089
18	FCMWK5	-0.22046	0.37333	0.34483
19	GKPRL	-0.2265	0.61004*	0.04463
20	ITCDP7	0.11209	0.41243	0.69211*
21	JZGK7U	0.82541*	0.05926	-0.08275
22	KPOK6	0.7438*	-0.15993	0.14646

23	KWTGQSP	0.11319	0.45543*	0.19566
24	LJ34	0.57657*	0.37071	0.40729
25	LYUUTO	0.52999*	-0.12712	0.47858
26	MOE6	0.11919	0.59563*	-0.16067
27	OLZY8Y	-0.17055	0.60228*	0.14527
28	PK8E9	0.03035	0.22007	0.54112*
29	QF9WOKR	-0.26662	0.67124*	0.18324
30	RMU4IMY	0.19141	0.55328*	0.17262
31	S71OPO0Y	-0.03749	0.59299*	0.28628
32	U03WROML	-0.01495	0.35755	0.41949*
33	U59JQ	0.57458*	0.21963	-0.11207
34	W05D8Y9	0.4474	0.29231	0.56374*
35	WBH0038E	-0.182	0.11606	0.62192*
36	XA2Q	0.1685	0.48418*	-0.01734
37	XSX7	0.02835	0.58997*	0.35307
38	YT5SU0GV	0.42334	-0.19978	0.60175*
39	YV2AX	0.2735	0.33272	0.51044*
40	ZUJSYE0L	0.17585	0.4963*	0.2545

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax Rotation

Notes: n = 40 Q sorts. * $p \leq .05$

Confounding factors represent participants loading on more than one factor. In a Q methodology study examining different perspectives on a particular issue, a confounding factor could be the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as age or gender (for instance, if certain age groups or genders tend to sort the items in a particular way, this could affect the results of the study and make it difficult to determine the true underlying factors or dimensions that are driving the participants' opinions or perspectives) (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this study however, no participant loaded on more than one factor, therefore no confounding factors occurred.

Examination of the Individual Factors

The following section will discuss the eight factors that emerged from the statistical analysis. In this section, the factors are displayed, named, and addressed with the qualitative post-sort interview data as well.

Factor 1: “Adequate personal life support”

Table 3.7 below displays the statements for participants loading onto factor one. The z-score, also known as the standard score, indicates the number of standard deviations that a data point or value is away from the mean of a distribution. It represents how far a data point is from the mean in terms of the standard deviation of the distribution. A positive z-score means the data point is above the mean, while a negative z-score means the data point is below the mean (Navidi, 2015). Table 3.7 has been arranged according to the z-score (1.6499 for representative to -1.5012 for least representative). Factor one has an eigenvalue of 9.4883 and explains 24% of the variance. Note that only the highest scores on the extreme sides are displayed in the below table on each side.

Table 3.6

Z-score and card position for factor 1

Card	Statement	Z-Score
35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments	1.64997
26	The organisation provides coaching and mentoring for female leadership to aid in career development	1.52699
33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work	1.44507
28	Women are promoted to senior managers based on skill and experience	1.44754
8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties	1.45886
24	The organisation promotes women leaders?	1.28429
37	I am able to juggle personal and work requirements easily	1.31072
17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood	1.31127
21	I have better self-confidence at work because my home life is well organised	1.36781

40	I do not have enough time to engage with family and partake in exercise/hobbies	-1.29839
47	Women are promoted to senior leadership roles when the chance of failure is higher	-1.22687
36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations	-1.14474
13	I have limited time to engage in family/social activities due to work commitments	-1.09678
34	My personal life drains my energy for work	-1.31973
9	I am irritable at home because my workday was demanding	-1.31874
10	I do not fully enjoy the company of my spouse/family/friends due to a demanding workday/week	-1.31564
32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance	-1.50126

Fig. 3.3 below represents the sorting for participants who demonstrated a significant loading on Factor 1. Participants of this sort reflected having a strong personal life support that enables positive work-balance experience.

Figure 3.4

Factor 1 model sort

Not Representative						Neutral						Representative	
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	
32	34	40	20	50	16	44	27	7	2	24	33	26	
12	9	47	18	56	59	46	52	30	55	37	28	35	
	10	36	11	31	43	45	53	51	54	17	8		
		13	38	42	15	57	4	25	22	21			
			41	48	58	29	39	1	19				
				60	49	6	23	5					
						3							
						14							

Table 3.8 below shows the highest and lowest sorted cards where participants loaded on factor one. The statements placed on the extreme ends indicates participants with

a loading on Factor 1. Statements from the representative (extreme end) side relate to participants with higher support in their personal life.

Table 3.7

Factor one: Extreme positive and negative statements

Score	Card	Statement
+6	26	The organisation provides coaching and mentoring for female leadership to aid in career development
+6	35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments
+5	33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work
+5	28	Women are promoted to senior managers based on skill and experience
+5	8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties
+4	24	The organisation promotes women leaders
+4	37	I am able to juggle personal and work requirements easily
+4	17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood
+4	21	I have better self-confidence at work because my home life is well organised
-4	40	I do not have enough time to engage with family and partake in exercise/hobbies
-4	47	Women are promoted to senior leadership roles when the chance of failure is higher
-4	36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations
-4	13	I have limited time to engage in family/social activities due to work commitments
-5	34	My personal life drains my energy for work
-5	9	I am irritable at home because my workday was demanding
-5	10	I do not fully enjoy the company of my spouse/family/friends due to a demanding workday/week
-6	32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance
-6	12	I have to cancel appointments due to personal or work obligations?

Participants in this factor included:

- Gender: All females.
- Race: 7 African, 5 White, 2 Indian, 1 coloured.
- Level: 10 on Senior level, 5 on middle management level.

- Field: 6 from Human Resources, 1 from Information Technology, 2 from Operations, 1 from Communications, 2 from Research, 1 from Customer Service ,1 from Legal and 1 from Business support.

Fifteen of the forty participants loaded significantly on Factor 1 (37.5% of participants) with an eigenvalue of 9.4883 for this factor. Participants that loaded onto this factor “Support in personal life enhances the experience of work-life balance” ranked their cards (+6, +5, +4) in a position that indicates they felt they had good support in their personal lives, which influences the experience of work-life balance. The highest ranked card is: “I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments” (card 35) and “My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work” (card 33). This showed that most participants experienced excellent support in their home life, while the other positive cards (8 and 17) indicated that they have support from their spouse in domestic duties as well as a positive mood/experience at home.

The theme of Factor 1 underscores how support in personal life significantly influences work-life balance for participants. Both personal and professional dynamics, including spousal and familial support, organisational flexibility, and managerial attitudes, contribute to this experience. Insights gathered from interviews demonstrate that effective work-life balance stems from a combination of strong personal support systems and adaptable organisational policies, aligning with recent literature on this topic.

Spousal and Family Support as a Foundation for Balance

Spousal and family support emerged as a cornerstone for maintaining work-life balance. Participants frequently highlighted how sharing domestic responsibilities and emotional support at home relieved pressure and allowed them to focus on professional goals. For example, Participant **A2WEWF** stated, “*My husband is very, very supportive. I always joke and say, well, he is my housewife,*” illustrating the equitable division of domestic labour.

Similarly, Participant **DRG4** attributed their ability to manage demanding work responsibilities to household support, stating, *“From my side, I have busy bees in the house. So, I definitely get that support; otherwise, I wouldn't have made it”*. This finding aligns with research by Malgorzata and Akram (2019), who argue that spousal support directly reduces work-life conflict, particularly for women in leadership roles. In cases where participants might lack family support, work-life balance could become challenging. As Participant **JZGK7U** noted, *“If I was on my own, it would definitely be difficult. I've got no family, so it would be a problem”*.

This reinforces findings by Van der Lippe et al. (2018), who emphasised the importance of a supportive family structure in mitigating work-life stress. Spousal/family support can particularly enhance a better work-life balance experience for women when managing domestic duties while advancing a career (Galinsky & Kim, 2018; Matthews & Hayness, 2006).

Organisational Flexibility as a Facilitator of Balance

Organisational flexibility, particularly through hybrid work arrangements post-COVID-19, played a vital role in improving participants' work-life balance. Many participants indicated that hybrid working allowed them to manage their time more effectively. For instance, Participant **CBV9V** explained, *“I can exercise for 30 to 45 minutes in the morning before work because my work routine is flexible... This gives me a good balance in terms of juggling work and personal commitments”*.

Similarly, Participant **DRG4** highlighted the benefits of remote work, stating, *“Previously, I would have to bring my child to the office and let her wait in the car until I was done. Now, I can pick her up and still continue to work from home”*. These findings are consistent with research by Chung et al. (2021), which revealed that remote and flexible working arrangements significantly enhance work-life integration, particularly for women with caregiving responsibilities.

However, participants also expressed concerns about the inconsistency of such flexibility. While Participant **ALPJ** acknowledged their manager's support, noting, *“If I need to do something in the morning or late afternoon, she does give me a few minutes*

or half an hour,” others felt flexibility was contingent on individual managers’ discretion. This reflects research by Allen et al. (2021), which emphasises the need for formalised work-life balance policies to ensure equitable access to flexible arrangements across organisations.

Psychological Benefits of Personal Support

A recurring theme in participants' narratives was the psychological upliftment derived from a fulfilling personal life. This connection between personal support and workplace productivity is well-documented in recent studies. Participant **B3GI310U** encapsulated this sentiment by stating, *“My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work. If things are sorted at home, I can focus on work”*. Similarly, Participant **A2WEWF** explained, *“If I don’t have to stress about my home life, and everything is organised, I can only focus on my work”*. This aligns with research by Shockley et al. (2019), which found that individuals with strong personal support systems report higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout.

Challenges in Work-Life Balance Policies

While participants acknowledged some organisational initiatives to support work-life balance, such as wellness programmes, many felt that these efforts were insufficient. For instance, Participant **CBV9V** noted, *“As long as there's a policy with COVID, I think they started maybe supporting work-life balance, but it's not consistently applied”*. Others criticised the lack of formalised policies. Participant **JZGK7U** commented, *“There are wellness programmes, but I think they only scratch the surface. Policies should provide more structured support”*. These concerns echo findings by Allen et al. (2021), who argued that organisations often rely too heavily on informal or ad hoc support mechanisms, which can exacerbate disparities in access to work-life balance resources.

Maternity Leave and Organisational Support for Senior Managers

An important dimension within Factor 1 relates to participants’ views on organisational policies, such as maternity leave, and the implications for work-life balance. Many

participants placed **card 41** ("career will be set-back after maternity leave") in the high negative zone, suggesting this was least representative of their experience. This finding contradicts existing literature that highlights the challenges maternity leave can pose to career progression due to the 'ideal worker' concept, which assumes constant availability and prioritisation of work over personal responsibilities (Kossek et al., 2021).

Participant **KPOK6** explained, *"It's not true because you get maternity leave, which is a government policy. And if you have children, it doesn't mean the organisation won't allow you to work or to progress with your career. They allow many young mums progression in their job working within the organisation"*. Others agreed, emphasising that maternity leave was a right guaranteed by government policy and widely respected in their institution. These findings suggest that when robust government policies are implemented and supported by organisations, perceptions of discrimination related to maternity leave can be minimised. However, the absence of such systemic policies in less regulated industries could perpetuate negative career impacts, as suggested by research by Fuller and Hirsh (2019).

While maternity leave was not perceived as a significant barrier to career advancement in this organisation, participants noted other challenges impacting work-life balance, particularly for senior managers. Several participants highlighted extended work hours and after-hours commitments, which blurred the boundaries between work and family life.

Participant JZGK7U described this dynamic, sharing, *"Managers send emails at five in the morning or over the weekend. There's a sense of expectation that you'll have seen it... It's contradictory to promoting work-life balance"*. Similarly, **Participant CBV9V** mentioned, *"Occasionally, additional work outside normal hours disrupts my home life. When it happens, it's up to me to manage the disruption"*. Post-pandemic practices also introduced mixed experiences. Participants noted that while hybrid working arrangements initially facilitated work-life balance, organisational trust in remote productivity seemed to wane. Employees were called back to the office on a rotational basis, reducing flexibility and exacerbating workload challenges for those in senior roles. This aligns with research by Allen et al. (2021), who observed that while

remote work policies enhanced work-life balance initially, a lack of organisational trust in long-term flexibility often undermined these gains.

Factor 1 underscores the importance of personal support systems in enhancing work-life balance, while highlighting the gaps in formal organisational support. The findings point to the need for targeted interventions, including:

- **Developing Comprehensive Work-Life Balance Policies:** Organisations should introduce formal policies that complement personal support systems, such as flexible work arrangements and family-oriented benefits.
- **Encouraging Spousal and Family Engagement for all managers and employees:** Initiatives that promote shared domestic responsibilities and recognise the role of family support can further enable employees to balance their professional and personal lives.
- **Fostering Managerial Awareness and Training:** Equipping managers with the tools and training to provide consistent and equitable support can mitigate the reliance on informal, inconsistent practices across teams.

Factor 2: “Hectic workload interfering with social activities

Fourteen of the forty participants (35%) loaded significantly on Factor 2 ($p < 0.05$) with an eigenvalue of 6.55. A correlation coefficient of -0.04943 indicates that there is a very weak negative relationship between Factor 1 and Factor 2. This means that as Factor 1 increases, Factor 2 tends to decrease slightly, and vice versa. However, the strength of this relationship is very weak, meaning that it is not very reliable. None of the participants loading on factor one loaded onto factor two. The standard score (z-score) ranges from 2.0221 (most representative) to -1.8314 (least representative). The z-score, like in the previous factor, indicates the direction the statements deviate from the distribution mean. Factor 2 explains 16% of the variance.

The Z-scores for Factor 2 is listed in table 3.9:

Table 3.8*Z-scores and card position for factor 2.*

Card	Statement	Z-Score
19	I take work seriously as I have to do the same at home	2.02215
14	I normally have to work more than the required working hours in a day	1.68732
13	I have limited time to engage in family/social activities due to work commitments	1.49375
17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood	1.60772
35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments	1.55256
8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties	1.35938
11	My work schedule makes it difficult to fulfil domestic obligations	1.35103
33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work	1.30318
56	That organisation does not offer any work-life balance programmes	1.29372
2	After a pleasant working day/week, I feel more in the mood to engage in activities with my spouse/family/friends	1.15678
15	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties	1.12765
54	There are work-life policies in the organisation that supports work-life balance	-0.98365
55	The Organisation allows me to plan my working day, focusing on work done, not hours spent at the office	-1.10543
7	I have enough time in my day to manage work and partake in exercise/hobbies	-1.16613
16	I am solely responsible for domestic duties at home	-1.20591

20	I find it difficult to concentrate on work as I am preoccupied with family concerns	-1.15658
32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance	-1.15067
39	I have enough time in my day to engage with my family and partake in exercise/hobbies	-1.69965
51	The organisation facilitates work-life balance which aid in managing work and personal life requirement (51)	-1.47808
53	Managers emphasize work-life balance in the organisation	-1.23983
6	My workload does not keep me busy after hours	-1.76025
36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations	-1.83145

Figure 3.4 below indicates the model sort for factor two.

Figure 3.5

Model sort for factor 2

Not Representative						Neutral						Representative	
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	
6	39	7	18	4	3	1	25	9	2	8	13	19	
36	51	16	34	23	26	5	30	10	15	11	17	14	
	53	20	49	37	28	22	42	12	21	33	35		
		32	54	47	41	24	45	38	40	56			
			55	48	43	27	46	59	58				
				52	50	29	57	60					
						31							
						44							

Table 3.10 below lists the highest and lowest ranked cards in the ranking for Factor 2. Cards placed at extreme levels are most representative of the views of the participants that loaded onto this factor. The possibility is that the organisation does not prioritise work-life balance, hence hectic work schedules/workload that interfere with family/social life.

Table 3.9

Extreme positive and negative statement for factor 2

Score	Card	Statement
+6	19	I take work seriously as I have to do the same at home

+6	14	I normally have to work more than the required working hours in a day
+5	13	I have limited time to engage in family/social activities due to work commitments
+5	17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood
+5	35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments
+4	8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties
+4	11	My work schedule makes it difficult to fulfil domestic obligations
+4	33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work
+4	56	That organisation does not offer any work-life balance programmes
+3	2	After a pleasant working day/week, I feel more in the mood to engage in activities with my spouse/family/friends
+3	15	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties
-3	54	There are work-life policies in the organisation that supports work-life balance
-3	55	The Organisation allows me to plan my working day, focusing on work done, not hours spent at the office
-4	7	I have enough time in my day to manage work and partake in exercise/hobbies
-4	16	I am solely responsible for domestic duties at home
-4	20	I find it difficult to concentrate on work as I am preoccupied with family concerns
-4	32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance
-5	39	I have enough time in my day to engage with my family and partake in exercise/hobbies
-5	51	The organisation facilitates work-life balance which aid in managing work and personal life requirement (51)
-5	53	Managers emphasize work-life balance in the organisation
-6	6	My workload does not keep me busy after hours
-6	36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations

Participants in this factor included:

- Gender: All female
- Race: 4 African, 8 White, 2 Indian

- Level: 4 on Senior level, 10 on middle management level
- Field: 2 from Human Resources, 1 from Information Technology, 5 from Operations, 2 From Audit, 1 from Legal, 1 from Data Analytics and 1 from Finance.

Organisational Structure and Its Impact on Work-Life Balance

Fourteen participants (35%) significantly loaded on Factor 2, which highlights a challenging organisational culture characterised by heavy workloads, lack of flexibility, and limited prioritisation of work-life balance. Participants noted that the organisation's practices, particularly its inability to implement effective work-life balance programmes, often blurred the boundaries between work and personal life. For example, Participant **GKPRL** reflected, *"I feel like I'm on call 24/7. Even during weekends, there's an expectation to respond to emails and attend meetings."*

The post-COVID shift exacerbated this issue, as some employees, such as Participant **7VUCACF**, stated, *"People are working all the time without breaks; there is no clear boundary between office hours and personal time."* These perspectives align with research indicating that a lack of organisational support for work-life balance can lead to employee burnout and diminished job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2021). Hammer et al. (2020) emphasise that clear policies around flexible work arrangements are essential to maintain employee well-being in high-pressure environments.

Heavy Workloads and Domestic Interference

The high workload emerged as a critical theme in this factor. Participants consistently reported that their work schedules interfered with domestic obligations and limited time for hobbies or social interactions. Participant **D1YOG** shared, *"I've been in numerous positions where I had no support staff, which severely impacted my health. There were periods where I worked 18 hours a day without a break."* This lack of resources or staffing not only adds stress but also reflects insufficient organisational planning.

Additionally, Participant **RMU4IMY** noted, *"My work schedule often requires me to work late hours, especially since system implementations must happen after regular*

hours. *This means I have limited time to engage with my family.*” Such scenarios reinforce findings from Grzywacz and Marks (2000), who argue that excessive workloads can significantly spill over into personal domains, reducing overall life satisfaction.

The Role of Managerial Discretion in Shaping Work-Life Balance

Managerial attitudes and practices also played a pivotal role in participants' experiences of work-life balance. Several participants suggested that the absence of formal work-life policies led to inconsistent application of flexibility. Participant **QF9WOKR** remarked, *“There’s no respect for personal time. Meetings are scheduled after hours, and there’s an implicit expectation that we’ll work weekends.”* Similarly, Participant **KWTGQSP** stated, *“There’s guilt if you step away from your desk for something like going to the gym during the day — it stems from a lack of trust by management.”* These sentiments highlight the critical role managers play in fostering work-life balance. According to Kossek et al. (2021), managerial training on boundary management can mitigate these challenges, ensuring employees feel supported in their efforts to balance work with personal responsibilities.

Support from Family as a Buffer

While the organisational environment presented significant challenges, participants consistently identified family support as a vital resource in maintaining some level of balance. Participant **S71OPO0Y** shared, *“My family stepped in during COVID when work became overwhelming. It’s still exhausting, but their support helps me manage both domains.”* Similarly, Participant **OMSAUSL** emphasised, *“Having a supportive husband and children at home makes it easier to cope with the stress from work.”* These reflections echo findings by Shockley et al. (2019), who demonstrated that strong familial support systems can buffer the negative effects of work-life conflict, particularly in environments with poor organisational support.

Perceived Inflexibility and Organisational Barriers

Several participants highlighted that while the organisation explored potential work-life balance initiatives, such efforts were either ineffective or non-existent. Participant **GKPRL** stated, *“The organisation has explored options like day-care facilities but never implemented them. Flexibility is entirely manager dependent.”* Similarly, Participant **RMU4IMY** observed, *“pre-COVID, there was no flexibility for working mothers; rigid policies meant juggling personal commitments within narrow parameters.”* This lack of formal policies directly contradicts recommendations by Greenhaus and Powell (2006), who argue that structured work-life programmes are essential for reducing work-family conflict and enhancing employee satisfaction.

Factor 2 underscores the tension between professional and personal demands in organisations with limited work-life balance support. The findings highlight the need for systemic changes, including:

1. Implementing structured work-life balance policies that emphasise flexibility and boundary setting.
2. Training managers to support employees in achieving balance without guilt or distrust.
3. Increasing organisational resources to prevent overburdening employees, particularly in middle management roles.

Factor 3: " Gendered Barriers and Organisational Biases"

Nine of the forty participants (22.5%) loaded significantly on Factor 3 ($p < 0.05$) with an eigenvalue of 2.8444. A correlation coefficient of -0.00573 (factor 1 and 3) and -0.0194 (factor 2 and 3) indicates that there is a very weak negative relationship between the factors. None of the participants loading on factor one and two loaded onto factor three. The standard score (z-score) ranges from 2.0221 (most representative) to -1.8314 (least representative). The z-score, like in the previous factor, indicates the direction the statements deviate from the distribution mean. Factor 3 explains 16% of the variance.

Table 3.10*Z-scores and statement position for factor 3.*

Card	Statement	Z-Score
8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties	2.0242
37	I am able to juggle personal and work requirements easily	1.6363
17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood	1.58976
19	I take work seriously as I have to do the same at home	1.4493
45	It is difficult to advance in a male-dominated career within the organisation	1.4858
2	After a pleasant working day/week, I feel more in the mood to engage in activities with my spouse/family/friends	1.30222
21	I have better self-confidence at work because my home life is well organised	1.2984
35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments	1.32706
60	The Organisation focus on time spent at the office, not work output	1.39198
4	I can keep to personal appointments as my job requires this as well	0.93128
33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work	0.9559
39	I have enough time in my day to engage with my family and partake in exercise/hobbies	1.12441
44	I have to perform better than a male to be considered for promotion (44)	1.137
59	There is no work-life support within the organisation	1.19298
10	I do not fully enjoy the company of my spouse/family/friends due to a demanding workday/week	-0.91348
11	My work schedule makes it difficult to fulfil domestic obligations	-0.94526
28	Women are promoted to senior managers based on skill and experience	-0.90054
36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations	-0.94476

53	Managers emphasize work-life balance in the organisation	-0.91914
20	I find it difficult to concentrate on work as I am preoccupied with family concerns	-1.38069
24	The organisation promotes women leaders?	-1.23236
32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance	-1.28593
54	There are work-life policies in the organisation that supports work-life balance	-1.13145
26	The organisation provides coaching and mentoring for female leadership to aid in career development	-1.40682
34	My personal life drains my energy for work	-1.3852
38	I struggle to juggle personal life requirements and work commitments	-1.43901
16	I am solely responsible for domestic duties at home	-1.58476
16	The situation at home makes me irritable at work	-1.83476
18	I am solely responsible for domestic duties at home	-0.91348

Figure 3.5 below provides the model sort for Factor 3.

Figure 3.6

A model sort for factor 3

Not Representative						Neutral						Representative	
-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	
18	26	20	10	9	3	6	12	1	4	2	17	8	
16	34	24	11	13	15	14	29	5	33	21	19	37	
	38	32	28	22	27	25	42	7	39	35	45		
		54	36	23	40	30	46	43	44	60			
			53	49	50	31	47	56	59				
				52	55	41	57	58					
						48							
						51							

Table 3.12 below shows the highest and lowest sorted cards where participants loaded on factor 3. The cards placed on the extreme ends indicates participants with a loading on factor 3. Cards from the representative (extreme end) side relate to participants with higher support in their personal life.

Table 3.11*Factor one: Extreme positive and negative cards*

Score	Card	Statement
+6	8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties
+6	37	I am able to juggle personal and work requirements easily
+5	17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood
+5	19	I take work seriously as I have to do the same at home
+5	45	It is difficult to advance in a male-dominated career within the organisation
+4	2	After a pleasant working day/week, I feel more in the mood to engage in activities with my spouse/family/friends
+4	21	I have better self-confidence at work because my home life is well organised
+4	35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments
+4	60	The Organisation focus on time spent at the office, not work output
+3	4	I can keep to personal appointments as my job requires this as well
+3	33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work
+3	39	I have enough time in my day to engage with my family and partake in exercise/hobbies
+3	44	I have to perform better than a male to be considered for promotion (44)
+3	59	There is no work-life support within the organisation
-3	10	I do not fully enjoy the company of my spouse/family/friends due to a demanding workday/week
-3	11	My work schedule makes it difficult to fulfil domestic obligations
-3	28	Women are promoted to senior managers based on skill and experience
-3	36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations
-3	53	Managers emphasize work-life balance in the organisation
-4	20	I find it difficult to concentrate on work as I am preoccupied with family concerns
-4	24	The organisation promotes women leaders?
-4	32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance
-4	54	There are work-life policies in the organisation that supports work-life balance
-5	26	The organisation provides coaching and mentoring for female leadership to aid in career development
-5	34	My personal life drains my energy for work
-5	38	I struggle to juggle personal life requirements and work commitments
-6	18	The situation at home makes me irritable at work
-6	16	I am solely responsible for domestic duties at home

Participants in this factor included:

- Gender: Female
- Race: 4 African, 4 White, 1 Coloured
- Level: 3 Senior, 6 Middle Manager
- Field: 3 Data Analytics, 3 Operations, 1 Corporate planning, 1 Business Support and 1 from Policy.

Factor 3 represents an intricate interplay between organisational gender biases, work-life balance, and individual strategies to cope with professional demands. Participants articulated a mixed experience of gendered career trajectories, where organisational support for women's advancement is inconsistent, and work-life balance is not universally prioritised. Participants loading onto this factor consistently highlighted key issues related to organisational support, managerial dynamics, and the impact of domestic life on career progression. Their narratives underscore how structural and cultural dynamics shape individual experiences of balancing professional and personal life.

Gendered Career Advancement

One dominant theme in this factor is the perception that gender impacts opportunities for career advancement. Several participants noted that advancement in male-dominated fields or organisations often requires women to demonstrate exceptional capabilities, as reflected in card 44: "I have to perform better than a male to be considered for promotion" (Z-score: 1.137). Participant W05D8Y9 commented, "*As a woman, we still do not also have the opportunities. It is still a male world. Even if you perform, there are not really opportunities*".

Another recurring perspective involved the systemic challenges of advancing in male-dominated sectors. Participant ITCDP7 reflected, "*There's still too much male representation in higher positions, which makes it harder for women to rise*". This suggests that organisational culture often favours male networks and entrenched norms that marginalise women in senior roles. Gendered workplace experiences are well-documented in contemporary literature. McKinsey & Company's 2020 report on

Women in the Workplace highlights persistent disparities in promotion rates, with women remaining underrepresented in senior management positions despite similar qualifications and aspirations to men (Krivkovich et al., 2020).

Domestic Support as a Career Enabler

Participants frequently emphasised the role of domestic support in managing work-life balance. Card 8: "I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties" received a Z-score of 2.024, indicating its critical importance in this factor. For instance, Participant YT5SU0GV noted, *"I am fortunate to have family members who assist with responsibilities, which makes it easier to focus on work"*. Similarly, Participant W05D8Y9 shared, *"My spouse is very supportive, and it makes a huge difference. Without this support, it would lead to additional pressure"*. Research underscores the transformative role of spousal and familial support in enabling work-life balance. According to Greenhaus and Powell (2017), individuals with strong domestic support networks report higher job satisfaction and better performance at work, as their emotional and physical burdens are shared. The significance of such support structures is particularly acute for women, who often face societal expectations to prioritise caregiving responsibilities.

Limited Organisational Work-Life Balance Policies

Despite individual domestic support, participants expressed frustration with the lack of formal work-life balance policies in their organisations. Card 59: "There is no work-life support within the organisation" had a Z-score of 1.192. Participant ITCDP7 remarked, *"Work-life balance is more of a personal responsibility; the organisation doesn't have policies to support it"*. Similarly, Participant W05D8Y9 reflected on the cultural limitations, noting that *"work-life balance is not an organisational ethos, but it depends on the manager's discretion"*. Organisational policies play a vital role in fostering work-life balance. According to Haar et al. (2014), workplaces that provide flexible arrangements and enforce boundaries on work hours see higher employee retention and morale.

Managerial Support in Shaping Work-Life Balance

Managerial discretion was identified as a key determinant of employees' work-life experiences. Participant YT5SU0GV observed, *"It's really down to the manager whether they allow flexibility or not. Some managers are more supportive than others"*. This is corroborated by W05D8Y9, who stated, *"It depends on the manager; my current manager is supportive, but it's not consistent across the organisation"*. Effective leadership is crucial for fostering inclusive and supportive workplace cultures. Managers who prioritise employee well-being and provide flexibility contribute to improved work-life balance (Hammer et al., 2016).

Perceptions of Tokenism in Leadership Opportunities

Participants noted that women are sometimes promoted to meet diversity targets rather than based on merit, as illustrated in Card 47: "Women are promoted to senior leadership roles when the chance of failure is higher" (Z-score: 0.192). Participant U03WROML shared, *"I felt I was moved into my position to improve gender stats. It wasn't because my manager thought I was the best fit"*. This sentiment reflects broader challenges of tokenism, where women are placed in leadership roles without adequate support or preparation. Tokenism has significant implications for workplace equity. Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism highlights how marginalised groups are often placed in symbolic roles without sufficient authority or resources, perpetuating systemic barriers rather than dismantling them.

Factor 3 highlights the critical intersection of gender, career progression, and organisational culture. Key themes include:

- The need for organisations to dismantle structural barriers that limit women's advancement.
- The importance of formal work-life balance policies to complement individual and managerial support.
- The necessity of addressing tokenism by ensuring women in leadership roles receive adequate resources and recognition.

Consensus statements

Consensus statements refer to statements that are shared by participants across all eight factors. These statements lack differentiation between any pair of factors.

Table 3.14 displays **consensus statements** that represent common experiences and perceptions shared across Factors 1, 2, and 3. These statements reveal agreement among participants, regardless of their factor loading.

Table 3.12

Consensus statements for factor 1, 2 and 3

Statement Number	Statement
35	I have support in my personal life that assists me in balancing work and personal commitments.
17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood.
2	After a pleasant working day/week, I feel more in the mood to engage in activities with my spouse/family/friends.
33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work.
20	I find it difficult to concentrate on work as I am preoccupied with family concerns.
34	My personal life drains my energy for work.
32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance.

Distinguishing statements

Distinguishing statements are characterised by their high ranking on a particular factor, compared to their relative ranking on the other factors. Such statements offer researchers an additional perspective that helps in comprehending the specific factor.

Factor 1: Support in Personal Life Enhances Work-Life Balance. These statements are uniquely representative of Factor 1 and differentiate it from Factors 2 and 3. Results are in table 3.15 below:

Table 3.13

Distinguishing statements for factor 1

Card Number	Statement
26	The organisation provides coaching and mentoring for female leadership to aid in career development.
28	Women are promoted to senior managers based on skill and experience.
24	The organisation promotes women leaders.
22	My employer provides equal opportunities for promotion for males and females.
54	There are work-life policies in the organisation that support work-life balance.
55	The Organisation allows me to plan my working day, focusing on work done, not hours spent at the office.
25	Women's career advancement is managed by the organisation.

Factor 2: Hectic Workload Interferes with Social and Family Life. The statements below characterise Factor 2 by emphasising the negative impact of work-related demands on personal life. Results are shown in table 3.16 below:

Table 3.14

Distinguishing factor for factor 2

Card Number	Statement
19	I take work seriously as I have to do the same at home.

14	I normally have to work more than the required working hours in a day.
13	I have limited time to engage in family/social activities due to work commitments.
11	My work schedule makes it difficult to fulfil domestic obligations.
58	Work-life balance is not a priority within the organisation.
40	I do not have enough time to engage with family and partake in exercise/hobbies.
15	I have limited time to engage in exercise/hobbies due to work constraints.

Factor 3: Balancing Gendered Career Dynamics and Work-Life Support. These statements highlight Factor 3's focus on gendered experiences and organisational barriers in leadership and work-life balance. Results are shown in table 3.17 below:

Table 3.15

Distinguishing factor for factor 3

Card Number	Statement
8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties.
45	It is difficult to advance in a male-dominated career within the organisation.
60	The Organisation focuses on time spent at the office, not work output.
59	There is no work-life support within the organisation.
44	I have to perform better than a male to be considered for promotion.
39	I have enough time in my day to engage with my family and partake in exercise/hobbies.
43	Male networks in the organisation limit opportunities for women to move into senior positions.

Discussion

Overview of the Study

This study explored the perceptions of work-life balance (WLB) among 40 female managers working in a state-owned enterprise. Participants represented diverse roles, and cultural backgrounds, providing a comprehensive lens into the WLB experiences within the organisation. Q-methodology served as the core research technique, combining structured Q-sorts with in-depth interviews to examine subjective viewpoints systematically. Statements for the Q-sorts were developed using frameworks and literature on WLB, alongside insights from prior interviews, ensuring relevance to both organisational and personal contexts.

The study aimed to address the research question:

1. How do women in leadership positions perceive and experience work-life balance?
2. What recommendations can be made to improve the work-life balance experiences of women in managerial positions?

Three distinct factors emerged from the analysis, each illustrating unique perspectives, challenges, and experiences. While some participants acknowledged organisational support for WLB, many described it as inconsistent or informal, often relying on managerial discretion. This resulted in varied experiences across the organisation and highlighted key differences between participants in senior and middle management roles.

Findings

Work-Life Balance as a Subjective and Dynamic Experience

The study found that WLB is a deeply personal experience shaped by individual contexts, organisational culture, and societal expectations. While some participants benefitted from strong personal support systems, others grappled with excessive work demands, organisational biases, and a lack of structured policies. These findings reflect earlier research by Greenhaus and Powell (2017), who argue that WLB is influenced by both individual coping strategies and systemic workplace factors.

Factor 1: “Adequate personal life support”

Participants in Factor 1 highlighted the critical role of personal support systems especially spousal and family support in enabling them to manage work and personal demands. Spousal involvement in domestic duties and the organisation of home life contributed significantly to positive work outcomes. The presence of these support systems created a "spill-over effect," with participants reporting increased energy, better moods, and improved self-confidence at work.

Support Systems Among Senior Leaders

This factor was predominantly characterised by senior leaders, with 84% of participants in this category. These individuals reported greater access to organisational resources such as mentoring, coaching, and leadership development programmes, which contributed to their ability to manage both work and personal commitments effectively. The availability of such resources appears to enhance their work-life balance (WLB) by alleviating professional pressures and promoting career progression.

Contemporary research corroborates these findings. Allen et al. (2020) highlighted that access to structured organisational support, such as leadership coaching and mentoring programmes, significantly enhances the work-life interface for managers. Similarly, Park et al. (2021) emphasise that senior-level employees are often better positioned to leverage organisational flexibility and resources, such as autonomy in decision-making and time management, which are critical for achieving WLB.

Senior leaders also reported benefits derived from personal support systems, particularly spousal and family involvement. This aligns with recent findings by Wang et al. (2022), which suggest that spousal support is a pivotal factor in enabling women to manage career and domestic responsibilities effectively. The spill-over effect of positive family dynamics into the workplace was evident, as participants noted that having a supportive home environment boosted their energy and focus on work.

Implications for Organisations

While personal support systems are invaluable, organisations must ensure that they are not overly reliant on employees' personal circumstances to compensate for structural gaps in WLB support. The findings reflect broader literature, such as Kossek

and Lautsch (2018), which advocate for the integration of personal and organisational resources as a sustainable strategy for improving WLB.

1. Coaching and Mentoring as Key Organisational Tools:

Participants frequently cited coaching and mentoring as instrumental in helping them navigate work-life challenges. Recent studies, such as Benson et al. (2019), highlight how structured mentoring programmes can empower women in leadership by building their confidence, enhancing their skillsets, and providing career guidance.

2. Reducing Reliance on Informal Support:

Organisations should formalise WLB support structures to reduce reliance on ad hoc or discretionary practices. McCarthy et al. (2022) found that when organisations implement formal policies, such as flexible scheduling or childcare support, employees report higher job satisfaction and lower stress levels. This suggests that while personal support systems remain critical, they must be complemented by robust organisational frameworks to create a more equitable and supportive environment.

3. Promoting Work-Life Synergy Through Organisational Initiatives:

The concept of work-life synergy, as discussed by Carlson et al. (2011), highlights that when organisations invest in resources such as leadership coaching and flexible policies, employees experience a sense of harmony between work and personal life. This approach moves beyond merely reducing conflict and focuses on fostering mutual enrichment between the two domains.

Factor 2: “Hectic workload interfering with social activities” with focus on organisational gaps

Participants loading on Factor 2 reported significant challenges in managing WLB, citing long working hours, limited time for family or leisure, and difficulties fulfilling domestic responsibilities. These participants were primarily middle managers, reflecting a disparity in access to resources and autonomy compared to senior leaders in Factor 1.

Key stressors included:

1. **Excessive work demands:** Participants frequently reported working beyond standard hours, which impeded family and social engagements.
2. **Lack of formal policies:** Organisational support for WLB was described as inadequate, with participants relying on ad hoc arrangements dictated by individual managers.
3. **Role conflicts:** Competing demands from work and home often left participants feeling overwhelmed and unable to perform optimally in either sphere.

The Role of Organisational and Social Support

Recent research reaffirms the importance of social and organisational support in mitigating work-family conflict. Shockley et al. (2021) found that access to workplace resources, including supportive managers, flexible policies, and organisational recognition of family responsibilities, significantly reduces the negative effects of work demands on family life. In the absence of such support, employees are more likely to experience burnout, dissatisfaction, and decreased performance.

Organisational support is particularly crucial in high-demand environments, as it can buffer employees against the adverse effects of work-family conflict. According to Jiang et al. (2020), organisations that fail to provide structured WLB policies risk creating an environment of perpetual stress and overwork, disproportionately affecting women who often carry the dual burden of work and family responsibilities.

Flexible Work Arrangements and Their Shortcomings

While flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are often seen as a solution to WLB challenges, participants reported mixed experiences. Some appreciated the ability to manage their schedules, highlighting the potential of FWAs to reduce work-life conflict. However, others criticised the inconsistent implementation of FWAs, which often depended on managerial discretion. This inconsistency created feelings of unfairness and led to perceptions that flexibility was a privilege rather than an organisational norm.

Currently, the organisation offers flexible working arrangements and certain leave options, including extended sick leave when standard sick leave is depleted. While

these policies provide some level of support, the lack of a unified and transparent framework for their implementation leads to variability in how they are applied across teams. Participants noted that this variability, often dictated by manager discretion, contributes to perceptions of inequity and erodes trust in organisational support for WLB.

Allen et al. (2021) highlight that FWAs, such as remote working or flexible hours, can reduce work-life conflict when implemented equitably. However, when poorly managed, FWAs may exacerbate disparities, particularly for women balancing career demands with caregiving responsibilities. Participants also observed that even with flexibility, there was often an implicit expectation to remain constantly available for work, undermining the intended benefits of FWAs. This aligns with Kossek et al. (2021), who argue that organisations must couple flexibility with clear boundaries and support systems to prevent role blurring.

Without clear policies and consistent implementation, FWAs can lead to blurred boundaries between work and personal life, increasing stress and dissatisfaction. Participants noted that beyond flexibility and leave policies, there were few additional resources to support WLB, such as employee assistance programs, formalised caregiving support, or mental health initiatives. Addressing these gaps requires a holistic approach to WLB, where flexibility is embedded as an organisational norm, supported by clear guidelines, manager training, and resources that extend beyond reactive measures like extended sick leave.

Key Organisational Gaps Identified by Participants

1. Excessive Workloads and Long Hours

Participants reported that excessive work commitments left them with little time for family, social activities, or self-care. Recent studies reinforce these experiences. Brough et al. (2020) found that high workloads and extended work hours are among the most significant predictors of work-family conflict, particularly for women in managerial roles. Prolonged exposure to such demands not only harms employees' personal lives but also negatively impacts their health and overall well-being.

2. Inadequate Organisational Policies

Participants expressed frustration with the lack of formalised WLB policies,

noting that support often depended on managerial discretion. This inconsistency created perceptions of inequality, with some employees receiving greater flexibility and support than others. Parker et al. (2022) argue that organisations must adopt formal, transparent policies to ensure consistent access to WLB resources across all levels of the workforce. These policies should address critical areas such as flexible scheduling, workload management, and caregiving support.

3. **Role Overload and Work-Family Conflict**

Role overload emerged as a central theme in this factor, with participants struggling to meet the competing demands of work and home life. Research by French et al. (2021) highlights that role overload is a key driver of work-family conflict, particularly for women in dual-career households. These findings suggest that organisations must actively address workload management and provide resources to alleviate employees' domestic burdens, such as childcare support or household assistance programmes.

Factor 3: Gendered Barriers and Organisational Biases

Factor 3 reflected the systemic challenges faced by female managers in navigating career advancement within a male-dominated organisational culture. Participants in this group highlighted issues such as gender biases in promotion, tokenism, and male-dominated networks limiting opportunities for women.

Key concerns included:

1. **Perceived Inequities in Promotion:** Participants noted that women often had to outperform male counterparts to be considered for leadership roles.
2. **Tokenism:** Some participants perceived that women were promoted to meet diversity quotas rather than based on merit, which undermined their confidence in the organisation's commitment to gender equality.
3. **Lack of Organisational Support:** Some participants voiced concern over the absence of comprehensive WLB programmes.

Research by Catalyst (2018) aligns with these findings, documenting the persistence of gender disparities in leadership, particularly in male-dominated industries. Kanter's

(1977) theory of tokenism further highlights how symbolic gestures, such as promoting women to meet equity requirements, fail to address deeper systemic biases.

To address the challenges faced by female managers in male-dominated organisational cultures, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. This approach must recognise systemic barriers and promote gender equity through actionable initiatives. The following recommendations are grounded in recent research:

- **Providing Women with Tools and Resources for Leadership Success**
Mentoring and sponsorship programmes tailored to women can equip them with the skills, networks, and confidence needed to navigate leadership roles. Structured mentoring has been shown to improve career progression and leadership efficacy, particularly for women in underrepresented fields (Chin et al., 2021).
- Additionally, providing training in areas such as negotiation, conflict resolution, and strategic leadership can help women overcome systemic challenges.
- **Creating an Inclusive Culture That Values Diverse Leadership Styles**
Many participants reported the need to "outperform" male counterparts to receive equivalent recognition, highlighting the pressure placed on women to conform to traditional leadership norms. Organisations must redefine leadership to value emotional intelligence, collaboration, and inclusive decision-making—qualities often associated with female leaders (Ragins et al., 2021).
- Training programmes to promote inclusive leadership styles among male and female managers alike can help dismantle stereotypes and foster an environment where diverse approaches are valued.

Comparative Insights Across Factors

The findings across the three factors reveal distinct experiences of work-life balance and organisational support, shaped by role level, gender dynamics, and personal circumstances.

1. Senior vs Middle Management

- **Factor 1:** Senior leaders benefited from greater autonomy, access to organisational resources, and mentoring opportunities, which enhanced their ability to manage work-life balance.
- **Factor 2:** Middle managers reported limited organisational support, excessive workloads, and a lack of autonomy, which exacerbated work-life conflict.
- **Factor 3:** Female managers in male-dominated roles, regardless of their level, faced systemic challenges, such as limited mentorship opportunities and perceptions of inequity in promotion.

These findings align with Kossek et al. (2021), who highlight the disparity in organisational resources and support between senior and middle management levels.

2. Gender Dynamics

Factor 3 uniquely highlighted the challenges faced by women in navigating male-dominated organisational cultures. Participants noted barriers such as male networks excluding women from opportunities, scepticism about merit-based promotions, and the expectation to outperform male colleagues to prove their worth.

While Factors 1 and 2 also revealed gendered experiences, these were less pronounced. The challenges identified in Factor 3 align with recent research by Smith et al. (2020), which found that women in leadership positions often face double standards in performance evaluation and career advancement.

3. Subjective Experiences of Work-Life Balance

Across all factors, work-life balance was perceived as a highly individualised experience, shaped by:

- **Personal Circumstances:** Factors such as spousal support, caregiving responsibilities, and family dynamics played a significant role in shaping WLB experiences.

- **Organisational Culture:** Participants emphasised the influence of workplace norms, such as the expectation for long hours or the undervaluation of emotional intelligence, on their ability to achieve balance.
- **Managerial Discretion:** The absence of formal WLB policies led to inconsistent experiences, with some participants benefitting from flexible arrangements while others were left unsupported.

Schieman et al. (2021) emphasise that organisations must account for these subjective experiences by creating flexible, inclusive systems that accommodate diverse needs and expectations.

Conclusion

This study has revealed critical insights into the experiences of female managers navigating work-life balance within a state-owned enterprise. The findings identified three key factors shaping these experiences: personal life support, the impact of demanding workloads on social and familial engagements, and the persistence of gendered organisational barriers.

The first factor highlighted the significance of robust personal support systems, such as spousal and familial contributions, in fostering a positive work-life balance. These support systems not only alleviated domestic burdens but also enhanced professional performance by providing psychological and emotional stability. This aligns with existing research on the positive spillover effects of personal life support but emphasises the unique importance of these systems within high-stress, leadership roles.

The second factor underscored the detrimental effects of excessive workloads on participants' personal lives, with blurred boundaries between work and home life resulting in significant role conflict. This finding reflects broader organisational challenges, particularly the lack of formalised work-life balance policies, which often leave employees dependent on managerial discretion for flexibility. Such inconsistencies exacerbate work-life tensions and highlight the urgent need for structured interventions.

The third factor revealed persistent gendered biases within the organisation, including disproportionate expectations for female managers and barriers to career

progression in male-dominated environments. These findings underline the deep-rooted cultural and structural issues that hinder gender equity in leadership and perpetuate traditional power dynamics.

Based on these findings, this study recommends the implementation of comprehensive work-life balance policies that prioritise flexible working arrangements and clear boundaries to prevent employee burnout. Managerial training should be introduced to ensure equitable application of these policies and to challenge unconscious biases that sustain gendered barriers. Additionally, leadership development initiatives, such as mentorship programmes and targeted career advancement opportunities for women, are crucial for fostering an inclusive organisational culture.

Overall, this research highlights the complex interplay of personal, organisational, and cultural factors influencing work-life balance for female managers. Addressing these dynamics requires systemic organisational change, combined with targeted strategies to empower female leaders and promote a supportive, equitable workplace environment. These efforts are essential for enabling women to thrive both professionally and personally, ultimately contributing to organisational success and societal progress.

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This chapter outlines the conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the study. The conclusion synthesises the main findings and addresses the research questions and aims. The recommendations propose actionable steps for organisations, women leaders, and future researchers to enhance work-life balance (WLB) and career management for women in leadership roles. Lastly, the limitations acknowledge the challenges and scope constraints of the study.

4.1 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of WLB among female leaders within a South African state-owned enterprise. The research sought to uncover the challenges they face and provide recommendations to enhance their WLB experiences, contributing to organisational growth and employee satisfaction. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do women in leadership positions perceive and experience work-life balance?
2. What recommendations can be made to improve the work-life balance experiences of women in managerial positions?

Adopting a qualitative approach, the study utilised Q-methodology, supplemented by interviews, to explore subjective viewpoints systematically. The findings revealed varied perspectives and experiences amongst the women in leadership positions and support the view that WLB is a dynamic and subjective concept, influenced by personal, organisational, and societal factors.

Key Findings

The findings revealed three factors that illustrate the diverse experiences of women in leadership positions:

1. Factor 1: Support in Personal Life Enhances Work-Life Balance

Participants in this group emphasised the role of personal support systems particularly spousal and familial support in creating a positive WLB experience. Senior leaders who loaded on this factor attributed their ability to juggle work and personal life to the presence of support structures at home and mentoring

opportunities provided by the organisation. This aligns with recent research, which highlights that strong personal support networks and organisational backing improve job satisfaction and reduce work-life conflict (Kalliath et al.,2022).

2. Factor 2: Organisational Challenges and Excessive Workloads

Middle managers in this group reported struggling to manage their work and personal responsibilities due to excessive workloads, inadequate organisational policies, and inconsistent implementation of flexible arrangements. These findings corroborate studies by Hammer et al. (2021), which emphasise that heavy workloads and a lack of institutionalised WLB policies exacerbate stress and reduce overall employee well-being.

3. Factor 3: Gendered Barriers to Leadership Progression

Participants in this group highlighted the systemic challenges faced by women in male-dominated industries, including inequitable promotion practices, perceptions of tokenism, and gender stereotyping. This mirrors the findings of Chauhan et al. (2022), who argue that organisational cultures steeped in patriarchal norms continue to limit women's opportunities in leadership roles.

The study underscores that WLB is not a fixed state, but a dynamic equilibrium shaped by individual characteristics, organisational practices, and societal norms. Participants frequently cited gender-related barriers, such as unequal opportunities for promotion and being assigned challenging tasks solely to meet equity targets. These experiences demonstrate how organisational gender dynamics influence career management and WLB outcomes.

Implications for Organisations

The study revealed that the current organisational environment often fails to address the unique challenges faced by women in leadership positions. While senior leaders benefitted from mentoring and autonomy, middle managers reported significant struggles, indicating an uneven distribution of resources and opportunities. This finding highlights the need for organisations to adopt a more holistic and inclusive approach to WLB and career progression.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study provide a framework for actionable recommendations aimed at improving WLB and career management for women in leadership positions. These recommendations are targeted at organisations, women leaders, and future researchers.

For the Organisation

1. Implement Comprehensive Work-Life Balance Policies

The Organisation should institutionalise clear and consistent WLB policies, including flexible work arrangements, family-friendly initiatives, and transparent career progression frameworks. Studies suggest that such measures reduce stress and improve retention among women leaders (Brue, 2018).

2. Address Systemic Gender Biases

Training programmes on diversity and inclusion should be mandatory, focusing on dismantling unconscious biases and promoting gender equity in hiring, promotions, and leadership opportunities (Ely et al., 2020). Leadership accountability in implementing these initiatives is critical.

3. Foster Mentoring and Coaching Programmes

Establish formal mentoring schemes to support women in navigating leadership challenges. Research shows that mentoring significantly enhances career satisfaction and leadership capabilities for women in male-dominated sectors (Afolabi et al., 2019).

4. Prioritise Workload Management

Organisations must ensure that workloads are distributed equitably, with systems in place to monitor and address excessive demands. This is essential to prevent burnout and promote a healthier work environment (Gomes et al., 2020).

5. Encourage Transparent Communication

Organisations should foster open dialogues about WLB expectations, ensuring employees feel supported in voicing concerns and seeking assistance. Clear communication channels can improve trust and employee engagement.

For Women Leaders

1. Leverage Personal Support Networks

Women leaders should actively seek and utilise support from family, peers, and mentors to balance their multiple roles. Evidence suggests that strong support networks improve resilience and work-life enrichment (Kalliath et al, 2022).

2. Develop Strategic Skills

Women should focus on building competencies such as negotiation, delegation, and boundary-setting to manage competing demands effectively. These skills are essential for sustaining career progression without compromising personal well-being.

3. Advocate for Organisational Change

Women leaders should collaborate with peers and senior management to advocate for policies and practices that address WLB challenges, ensuring their voices are included in decision-making processes.

4. Focus on Personal Fulfilment

Pursuing activities that contribute to personal satisfaction, such as hobbies and quality family time, can mitigate stress and enhance overall well-being (Gomes et al., 2020).

For Future Researchers

1. Expand Contextual Understanding

Future studies should explore WLB experiences in other industries and regions, particularly in developing countries, to build a comparative understanding of challenges and solutions.

2. Adopt Mixed-Methods Approaches

Combining qualitative and quantitative research can provide a more holistic perspective on WLB dynamics. Longitudinal studies are particularly valuable in capturing the evolving nature of WLB (Chauhan et al., 2022).

3. Examine Organisational Interventions

Researchers should evaluate the effectiveness of existing WLB policies and identify best practices for their implementation. This could involve examining

the impact of mentoring programmes, flexible work arrangements, and diversity initiatives.

4.3 LIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges several limitations, which may influence the generalisability and scope of its findings:

1. Sample Representation

The study focused exclusively on female leaders in a single state-owned enterprise in South Africa, limiting its applicability to broader contexts or male employees. Future studies should include diverse groups to provide a more comprehensive perspective.

2. Purposive Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, which may introduce selection bias and limit the diversity of viewpoints. Random sampling techniques could enhance representativeness in future research.

3. Self-Reported Data

The reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for social desirability and recall bias. Triangulating findings with organisational data or observational methods could improve reliability.

4. Context-Specific Findings

The findings reflect the unique organisational culture and societal context of South Africa, which may differ from other regions. Cross-cultural studies could provide a more global perspective on WLB.

Final Remarks

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on WLB and career management for women in leadership roles. By identifying key factors influencing WLB and offering actionable recommendations, it provides a foundation for organisations and researchers to address systemic challenges and foster inclusive, supportive work environments.

APPENDIX A: STATEMENTS OF THE CONCOURSE – refer to chapter one for designing of Q sort

Statement Number:	Statement
1	I come home cheerful after a normal day's work
2	After a pleasant working day/week, I feel more in the mood to engage in activities with my spouse/family/friends
3	I fulfil domestic obligations better due to things I have learned from work
4	I can keep to personal appointments as my job requires this as well
5	I manage my time more efficiently at home due to support from my work and manager
6	My workload does not keep me busy after hours
7	I have enough time in my day to manage work and partake in exercise/hobbies
8	I have support from my spouse/family in domestic duties
9	I am irritable at home because my workday was demanding
10	I do not fully enjoy the company of my spouse/family/friends due to a demanding workday/week
11	My work schedule makes it difficult to fulfil domestic obligations
12	I have to cancel appointments due to personal or work obligations?
13	I have limited time to engage in family/social activities due to work commitments
14	I normally have to work more than the required working hours in a day
15	I have limited time to engage in exercise/hobbies due to work constraints
16	I am solely responsible for domestic duties at home
17	After spending time with my spouse/family/friends I go to work in a positive mood
18	The situation at home makes me irritable at work
19	I take work seriously as I have to do the same at home
20	I find it difficult to concentrate on work as I am preoccupied with family concerns
21	I have better self-confidence at work because my home life is well organised

22	My employer provides equal opportunities for promotion for males and females
23	In my organisation, females are more likely to succeed in leadership positions
24	The organisation promotes women leaders?
25	Women's career advancement is managed by the organisation
26	The organisation provides coaching and mentoring for female leadership to aid in career development
27	Female managers offer greater support than male managers
28	Women are promoted to senior managers based on skill and experience
29	Women perform better in leadership roles than men
30	In my organisation members of the LGBTQ+ have an equal chance of succeeding in leadership positions
31	In my organisation, females are least likely to succeed in leadership positions
32	Problems with my spouse/family/friends affect my job performance
33	My personal life is fulfilling and drives energy for work
34	My personal life drains my energy for work
35	I have support in my personal life that assist me in balancing work and personal commitments
36	I am often late for work due to domestic obligations
37	I am able to juggle personal and work requirements easily
38	I struggle to juggle personal life requirements and work commitments
39	I have enough time in my day to engage with my family and partake in exercise/hobbies
40	I do not have enough time to engage with family and partake in exercise/hobbies
41	Your career will be set back if you have children/take maternity leave
42	In my organisation males are more likely to succeed in leadership positions
43	Male networks in the organisation limit opportunities for women to move into senior positions
44	I have to perform better than a male to be considered for promotion
45	It is difficult to advance in a male-dominated career within the organisation
46	Male managers offer greater support than female managers
47	Women are promoted to senior leadership roles when the chance of failure is higher
48	Women are more likely to fail at senior leadership levels
49	In my organisation males are least likely to succeed in leadership positions

50	In my organisation members of the LGBTQ+ have the least chance of succeeding in leadership positions
51	The organisation facilitates work-life balance which aid in managing work and personal life requirement
52	The company offers social benefits that add value to your life
53	Managers emphasize work-life balance in the organisation
54	There are work-life policies in the organisation that supports work-life balance
55	The Organisation allows me to plan my working day, focusing on work done, not hours spent at the office
56	That organisation does not offer any work-life balance programmes
57	There is limited support from the organisation to aid you in my work and life domains
58	Work-life balance is not a priority within the organisation
59	There is no work-life support within the organisation
60	The Organisation focus on time spent at the office, not work output

APPENDIX B: Q-ASSESSMENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Invitation to participate in research project. – Refer to ethical considerations in chapter 1.6

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted by Erich Weber (master's student in Industrial and Organisational Psychology) under the supervision of Prof. Kgope Moalusi, an Associate Professor in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa.

The research project explores female managers' perspectives on work-life balance within your current organisation. You have been selected to participate based on the criteria of the study, which requires a female employee in a management role between the ages of 25 and 65 and at least 12 months or more within the position of management.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study, and you can withdraw from the study before commencement. The study will be completely anonymous, meaning that only the researcher will know the participant, but all data will be linked to a pseudonym. If you choose to participate in this study, it will take up no more than 60 minutes of your time.

The findings of this study could potentially change how we view work-life programs in the organisation and what needs currently exist in the organisation to enhance/establish such programs. No foreseeable experiences will cause any negative consequences by engaging in the study; however slight discomfort might be experienced. The researcher(s) undertake to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of their possession and to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to avoid any data breaches.

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes after which they will be permanently destroyed (all electronic copies of data will be destroyed). You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the study.

The research was reviewed and approved by the Unisa CEMS/IOP Research Ethics Review Committee. The primary researcher, Erich Weber can be contacted during office hours at 0833843738 or by email at xxxxxx

Your participation in the research process will be extremely valued. If you agree to proceed, please kindly send an email to xxxxxx, confirming that you agree to participate. The researcher will provide you as a participant with a detailed guide on how to complete the process (Q-Methodology), which will be done online. Further, the informed consent document together with research approval, both from UNISA and the organisation will be added.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this process.

Regards

Erich Weber

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM – Q SORT – refer to ethical considerations in chapter 1.6

Dear Participant

The following details are provided to you about the nature and purpose of this study. If you fully accept and agree with all the below-listed points, please sign the form, and write today's date. Once you have agreed to participate in the **Q-sort process**, you will be contacted by the researcher. After the Q-Sort process is complete, a further 10 to 20 minutes will be required for a post sort interview.

1. The research will be conducted by Erich Weber. The researcher is an employee of the organisation and currently a master's student in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa. The research will be used to complete a dissertation of limited scope within the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology – specifically career psychology and employee wellbeing.
2. The study will focus on female managers' perspectives of work-life balance within the organisation. All information collected during the Q-sort process will aid in describing current challenges and experiences regarding work-life programs and family life balance. The research can potentially aid in addressing current work-life programs or adapting new programs based on information obtained.
3. The participants selected to participate are female employees in management positions (for at least 12 months) between the ages of 25 and 65. The specific group has been selected due to the challenges women might potentially face in organisations concerning balancing their career and family commitments, as well as different requirements in your current career-life stage.
4. As a participant in this Q-sort session, you will be required to arrange statements (Q-cards) in a certain order (most positive to most negative, according to your own experience and opinion). There will be an additional short interview afterwards to gain insight into why you have arranged the cards in a

certain order. Please note the arrangement is done online. If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the use of a computer, please inform the researcher to make alternative arrangements.

5. The session will last between 40 and 60 minutes during which we will explore current views and feelings about the topic at hand.
6. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to agree to participate. If you choose not to participate you do not have to sign the form and can simply inform the researcher of your choice.
7. You are also allowed to terminate your participation during the process if at any moment you feel too uncomfortable to continue. No harm of any nature will be present during the session although slight discomfort might be experienced during the process.
8. Your participation in this study can potentially contribute to the future development of work-life programs and aid in promoting women to management positions while allowing an opportunity to manage both a career and family commitments.
9. There will not be any compensation for participating in this study.
10. The researcher will schedule all online meetings and provide you with the online link to complete the card sort.
11. All records and data will be kept for 5 years, after which all electronic copies of data, recordings and personal identifiers will be destroyed/permanently deleted. The records are kept for audit purposes during the 5 years.
12. All records will be kept safe, away from any data breaches. The researchers will ensure all data is encrypted and stored on a removable device such as a USB memory stick, always locked away other than when it is in use.
13. All ethical guidelines, including confidentiality will be ensured during the process and processing of data. Your statements will not be shared with anyone within your organisation or outside except the Supervisor of this research project Prof. Moalusi in the department of Industrial Psychology at UNISA.

14. Once the dissertation has been approved, a copy of the research article will be provided to you as a participant, as well as the organisation for future use. In the publication of the article, no names of participants or organisations will be mentioned. Should you wish to contact the researcher for any follow-up session you can do so at the email provided. You hereby acknowledge that you have read through the informed consent form and agree to take part in the research interview process described above:

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