

Employees' Perceptions of Work-Life Balance

by

Madeleine Simard

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Recreation and Leisure Studies

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2011

© Madeleine Simard 2011

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

This is true copy of my thesis including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

There has been an increased focus on balancing multiple life roles and managing the boundary between work and family. To minimize employees' work life balance issues, organizations have turned to policies such as flextime, on-site childcare, and other mechanisms to ensure that engaging in one's family does not interfere with work (Rothbard, 2001). The purpose of this study is to explore employees' use of tactics to manage their work and life stress; particularly the employees' use of resources and social support as well as their perceptions of flexibility. Eight employees who work in the not-for-profit sector were interviewed. Narrative inquiry was used and qualitative interviews were conducted. What was found was that employees seek flexibility, support and understanding from their supervisor.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the faculty, staff and my fellow students in the Recreation and Leisure Studies program for making this a great experience. I'd also like to express my gratitude to all the participants who volunteered their time and shared their experiences to make this study a reality. A special thank you goes out my committee members from our department: Dr. Troy Glover and Dr. Luke Portwarka. Finally, a big thank you to Dr. Ron McCarville for his humour and positive encouragement, and most importantly, for his mentorship.

Table of Contents

Author’s Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: An Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	4
<i>Framework on Work-Life Balance</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1 <i>Personal Characteristics that Contribute to Issues with Work-Life Balance.....</i>	<i>6</i>
2.1.1 Gender.....	6
2.1.2 Marital status.....	7
2.1.3 Parental Status.....	7
2.1.4 Age and Lifecycle	7
2.1.5 Personality	8
2.1.6 Education Level	9
2.1.7 Life Demands.....	9
2.2 <i>Task Variables.....</i>	<i>10</i>
2.2.1 Work Characteristics.....	10
2.2.2 Motivation.....	12
2.2.3 Performance Standards	13
2.2.4 Constraints -	14
2.3 <i>Efficacy Facilitators and the Supervisor.....</i>	<i>16</i>
2.3.1 Flexibility.....	17
2.3.2 Social Support.....	19
2.3.3 Access to Resources.....	21
2.4 <i>Actions Taken to Manage Work-Life Stress</i>	<i>24</i>
2.4.1 Coping Style	25
2.4.2 Strain Reduction.....	25
2.4.3 Leisure	26
2.5 <i>Outcomes.....</i>	<i>26</i>
2.5.1 Professional Outcomes.....	26
2.5.2 Personal Outcomes.....	28
2.6 <i>Concluding Comments</i>	<i>29</i>
Chapter Three: Methods.....	31
3.1 <i>Paradigm.....</i>	<i>32</i>
3.2 <i>Qualitative Research.....</i>	<i>33</i>

3.3 Strategy of Inquiry.....	33
3.4 Role of the Researcher	35
3.5 Participants/Sample	36
3.5.1 Participant Profiles	39
3.5.2 Research Integrity	42
3.6 Data Analysis	43
Chapter Four: Narrative Analysis	45
4.1 Descriptive Analysis: Critical Incident- Negative.....	45
4.2 Descriptive Analysis: Positive Critical Incident	50
Chapter Five: Analysis of Narratives.....	56
5.1 Themes	56
5.1.1 Personal Situation	56
5.1.2 Work situation.....	62
5.1.3 Efficacy Facilitators	68
5.1.4 Coping Strategies/ Actions.....	73
5.1.5 Outcomes	75
Chapter Six: Discussion	78
6.1 Revising the Proposed Framework on Work-Life Balance	78
6.2 Review of Results.....	79
6.3 What Does it all Mean?.....	83
6.4 Limitations.....	85
6.5 Recommendations for Future Research	86
Conclusion	88
References	89
Appendix A: Preliminary Questionnaire.....	98
Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	99
Appendix C: Newsletter Given to Participants	102

Chapter One: An Introduction

This study begins with the basic assumption that work related demands can intrude into the rest of workers' lives. This assumes that workers must deal with often competing demands as they negotiate between spheres of "life" and work. This study explored how participants manage these competing demands. The goal was not to suggest the primacy of work in workers' lives. Indeed it suggests the potentially problematic nature of work's intrusion into the rest of workers' lives.

The work related literature suggests that working conditions are becoming increasingly stressful (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Unfortunately stress is known to have broad and adverse implications for health; chronic stress can alter an individual's immune system, cause inflammation, higher blood pressure, hypertension and other cardiovascular issues (Kang, et al., 2010). Such conditions are inconsistent with a productive and satisfied workforce. Indeed, one of the most common reasons for employee turnover is stress (Porter & Alman, 2010).

Employees are spending more time than ever before at their jobs; White, et al. (2003) report that employees are working the equivalent of an extra month per annum. Being overworked can lead to work-home conflict, a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991; Innstrand, Langballe & Falkum, 2010). Such conditions suggest concerns over well-being and work life balance issues (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). It may come as no surprise that many workers are questioning the amount of time and energy devoted to work. (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004). Many now value the idea of work-life balance and see it as a criterion of success (Jennings & McDougald). The definition of work-life balance that was used for this research is work-life balance is "the individual perception that work and non-work activities are

compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

There has been an increased focus on balancing multiple life roles and managing the boundary between work and family. The work-life and quality of life literatures have identified 170 different life domains that are important in achieving work-life balance; a few of the top domains include work, financial resources, leisure, dwelling and neighbourhood, family, friendship, social participation and health (Warren, 2004). With the increasing focus and pressure to balance all of these different life domains, there has been increasing levels of burnout reported by employees (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991). Work life balance issues have been found to affect one's identity, well-being and quality of functioning (Cinamon & Rich, 2010).

To minimize employees' work life balance issues, organizations have turned to policies such as flextime, on-site childcare, and other mechanisms to ensure that engaging in one's family does not interfere with work (Rothbard, 2001). These policies and programs may assist in alleviating difficulties in managing multiple roles, thus enhancing employee's quality of life (Haar & Roche, 2010). The success of such policies appears to be linked to the front line supervisor (Cinamon & Rich, 2010). An understanding and supportive supervisor can increase an employee's confidence, provide valuable resources, be understanding, flexible and support the employee (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Purcell and Hurchinson (2007) found that supervisory leadership was among the most important factors, explaining positive psychological contracts, work satisfaction, felt excitement at work and loyalty to customers, colleagues and supervisor. This research suggests that balancing the demands of work and the other spheres of life is both complex and dynamic. Unfortunately, few leisure related studies have considered how this

balancing act is undertaken. Most related research has been quantitative in character focusing largely on specific aspects of the negotiation process. It seems appropriate, at this point, that we listen to the workers' stories as they think about and undertake this balancing act. The purpose of this study is to explore employees' use of tactics to manage their work and life stress; particularly the employees' use of resources and social support as well as their perceptions of flexibility. The research questions that were explored during this research are as follows:

1. What is the role played by task variables in balancing work-life demands?
2. What conditions might facilitate balancing work-life demands?
3. What actions might workers undertake to deal with competing work-life demands?
4. What are the outcomes (both professional and personal) of the balancing process?

This study used narrative techniques asking workers to reflect on issues that influence their ability to balance work with the rest of life. Using these insights, employers and the workers themselves can better understand how successful negotiation is undertaken. They can identify key variables in the negotiation process and how those variables interact.

A framework of the literature is offered in the next chapter. This framework was created using the existing literature on the work-life balancing process. The framework serves two fundamental purposes. First, it provides structure to the literature review. The review uses the framework as a guide as it describes the component parts of the negotiation process. Second, the framework suggests questions that might be answered through this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

There has been much debate over a formal definition of work-life balance. According to Greenhaus et al. (2003), most of the major reviews of work-life balance articles either do not mention work-life balance per se, or when it is mentioned it is not explicitly defined.

Furthermore, in studies where work-life balance or related constructs are explored, researchers seem to have used several different approaches to operationally define and measure the construct (Greenhaus et al.; Potgieter & Barnard, 2010). In a review of the literature, Kalliath and Brough (2008) identify six different definitions that are commonly used within the literature:

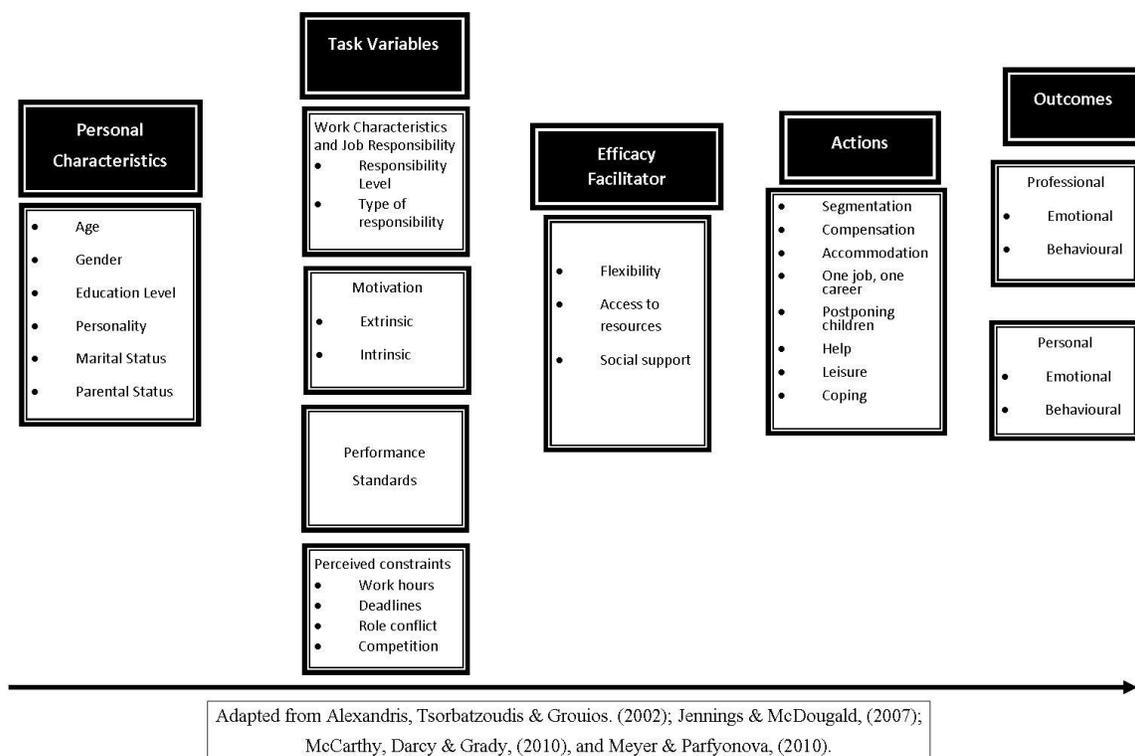
1. Work-life balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles,
2. The extent to which an individual is engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role,
3. Achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time and commitment to be well distributed across domains,
4. The extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individuals' life role priorities at a given point in time,
5. Low levels of inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation contribute to higher levels of perceived work-family balance, and
6. Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work.

The definition of work-life balance that Kalliath and Brough proposed was “work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities”. From this definition it is important to note that work-life balance is about individuals' perception as they fulfill multiple and often competing roles.

The literature review will be organized around the following framework. It will be broken down into five sections: personal characteristics, task variables, efficacy mechanisms, actions, and outcomes. Recall that this thesis views the balancing process from the work perspective. As

a result, the framework relies heavily on work related processes. For example the focus of the task variables, efficacy mechanisms, are on work demands. The actions are behaviours that the employee can engage in to attain work-life balance. However, the outcomes are from the perspective of both the work and life demands.

Framework on Work-Life Balance



2.1 Personal Characteristics that Contribute to Issues with Work-Life Balance

Work and family are closely interconnected domains of human life (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Often, meeting both the demands from work and family can be very challenging and can lead to issues with work-life balance (Md-Sidin, et al., 2008). Although stress has been studied at length, the definition of stress has varied widely. Definitions of stress include an event or stimulus itself, the psychological and physiological process of stress, and/or the stress responses (Kang, et al., 2010). Most stress research has examined the relationship between stressors (e.g. role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of perceived control) and outcomes (e.g. job dissatisfaction, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, absenteeism, and job performance) (Jex & Gudanowski, 1992). There are many personal factors that contribute to stress that can lead to an imbalance between work and life. They include: gender, marital status, parental status, family responsibility, age, personality differences and education level.

2.1.1 Gender - Gender is a topic that has been extensively reviewed within the work life balance literature. Warren (2004) explained that women with domestic responsibilities have taken on part-time jobs as a beneficial way to maintain their labour market skills, as a secondary source of income and sustain interest outside of the home. However, there is also resulting conflict between their work and family commitments and responsibilities (Drew, 2005; Innstrand, Langballe, Falkum, 2010). The reason for this has been explained as women typically assume the majority of childbearing duties (Porter & Ayman, 2010). This responsibility can influence both role stress and negative attitudes at work (e.g. role conflict, job burnout and dissatisfaction) and are positively associated with disruptions at home (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991).

Men and women tend to prioritize work and family roles differently; men typically sacrifice more at home and women tend to sacrifice more at work for home commitments

(Haworth & Lewis, 2005; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). It has been found that women's level of involvement at work did not differ from men's, however they did admit to a certain level of concern with home issues at work (Hall & Richter, 1988). Martins, Eddleston and Veiga (2002) found that women's career satisfaction was negatively affected by work-family conflict throughout their lives whereas men showed adverse effects only later in their career.

2.1.2 Marital status - It has been suggested that individuals who are married give more priority to their personal lives (Martins, Eddleston & Veiga, 2002). It has been explained that employees with families often experience a lack of separation or difficulty keeping separation between work and home boundaries (Hall & Richter, 1988), which can negatively influence both work and family life. Md-Sidin, et al. (2008) reported that individuals who are married experience more work-life conflict than those who are unmarried.

2.1.3 Parental Status - The presence or absence of children in the family continues to make a significant difference in the degree of balance that individuals experience (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Parental status has been found to be a determinant of parents placing increased importance on the role of family (Blau, et al., 1998). Family responsibilities such as household time demands, family responsibility level, household income, spousal support and life course stage have been found to be sources of work-life stress (Jennings & McDougald, 2007).

Dual earner couples with no children report greater work-life balance, while both single and married parents report significantly lower levels of perceived balance compared to single, non-parents (Tausig & Fenwick).

2.1.4 Age and Lifecycle - Age and lifecycle have been found to be determinants of the extent of work-life stress that individuals' experience (Wang, Lawler & Shi, 2010). It has been observed that there has been a change in lifestyle preferences between recent generations. Those born after

1969, or “Generation X”, are said to prefer a lifestyle that includes non-work time, irrespective of other responsibilities, hence may actively seek employers who offer work-life balance arrangements (Maxwell, 2005). Tausig and Fenwick (2001) reported that older adults report greater success with work-life balance. Bardwick (1986) suggests that in later life when individuals have reached a plateau in their careers, they will not be as tolerant of work-family conflict because putting in the extra work does not seem worthwhile.

2.1.5 Personality - Jennings and McDougald (2007) found that certain personality differences predispose individuals to work-life balance issues. The tendency to feel guilty, to be loyal towards others, a lack of sensitivity towards others and the need and desire for “being there” for family members and being unable to manage a new situation has been suggested to influence the level to which an individual experiences work life balance issues (Bekker, et al., 2010). A person’s emotional response to a role is a critical factor influencing their interpersonal availability and psychological presence in a different role (Rothbard, 2001). Individuals with high negative affectivity seem to experience more negative interaction between work and family (Bekker et al.).

Intrinsically oriented individuals are thought to focus on developing and actualizing their inherent potential. Further they are likely to satisfy their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness and therefore function optimally (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste & Has De Witte, 2010). Intrinsic work values express openness to change – the pursuit of autonomy, interest, growth and creativity in work (Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss, 1999). Pursuing intrinsic life value orientations positively predicts well-being and optimal functioning (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste & Has De Witte). Extrinsically oriented individuals, in contrast, adopt an outward oriented focus and try to impress others by acquiring external signs of worth

importance (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste & Has De Witte). Extrinsic work values focus on how job security and income provide workers with the requirements needed for general security and maintenance of order in their lives (Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss). Holding an extrinsic work value orientation as an employee can be associated with lower job satisfaction, job vitality, and job commitment and higher exhaustion (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste & Has De Witte).

2.1.6 Education Level - It has been found that higher education and more working experience could instill more confidence in that individual and increased self-efficacy (Chong & Ma, 2010). Work-life balance is greater among those with a high school degree or less, while it is lower among those with an undergraduate degree or advanced university degree (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Those currently attending school also tend to report less balance (Tausig & Fenwick).

2.1.7 Life Demands - Many individuals find they are increasingly isolated from family and leisure activities in an ever-increasing climate of long work hours and intensity (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). As stated previously, there are over 170 life demands that have been identified as work, financial resources, leisure, dwelling and neighbourhood, family, friendship, social participation and health (Warren, 2004). Many individuals who experience issues balancing life demands also experience emotional exhaustion which has been defined as “a state caused by psychological and emotional demands made on people” which is when an individual is facing seemingly overwhelming demands on their time and energy (Boles, Johnston & Hair, 1997).

When individuals have a negative emotional response to work related stress, they often self-regulate their response (Rothbard, 2001). In doing so, individuals are more likely to experience depleted energy levels and fatigue which can negatively influence work and family roles (Rothbard). A person experiencing stress may display a tendency to withdraw from potentially

supportive people and/or influence the willingness of others to provide support (Adams, King & King, 1996).

2.2 Task Variables: Work Related Variables that can add to Work-Life Stress

Many employees are experiencing long working hours, intensified workloads, constantly changing work practices and job insecurities (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). Working long hours has been associated with high levels of anxiety and low levels of job satisfaction (when employees do not trust their coworkers to do their jobs well) (Jex & Gudanowski, 1992). Employee health is affected not only by a job's physical environment, but also by its psychological environment (Gilbreath, 2004).

It has been found that stress, an aversive or unpleasant emotional and physiological state (Judge & Colquitt, 2004), has a direct influence upon job satisfaction (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991). Individuals who experience chronic work stress have been found to be positively associated with an increased risk of atherosclerotic disease (Kang, et al., 2010). Job satisfaction can be explained as the match between expectations and perceived reality for broad aspects of the job taken as a whole (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley). Task variables are components of an individual's work life that can increase the amount of stress that they encounter. Some of the contributing factors of work stress include: factors at work, performance standards, motivation and perceived constraints.

2.2.1 Work Characteristics – The organizational environment includes the interaction between workers, risk-taking orientation, and a trusting and caring atmosphere (Chong & Ma, 2010). Organizational structure determines levels of responsibility, decision-making authority and formal reporting relations (Chong & Ma). Work domain determinants such as job autonomy, schedule flexibility, hours worked, the amount of social support provided by supervisors and

coworkers, and the existence of family-friendly work policies directly influence work-life balance (Jennings & McDougald, 2007).

Innstrand, Langballe and Falkum (2010) report that individuals working in occupations that necessitate (1) substantial interaction with others, (2) additional work roles, or (3) professional responsibility for others are more apt to experience greater numbers of work life balance issues. Moreover, individuals working in a managerial or higher status occupation report higher levels of conflict between work and their personal life (Innstrand, Langballe, Falkum). Concerns about fairness can also affect the attitudes and behaviours of employees and lead to employees to doubt their ability to cope with work demands (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). When employees feel that they have experienced injustice, they report higher levels of distress, including resentment, ill will, hostility, and outrage (Judge & Colquitt).

Work Demands: Many organizations are introducing new technologies and working practices and are consequently demanding greater flexibility in response to the pressures of competition (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). Additional work hours subtract from home time, while high work intensity or work pressure may result in fatigue, anxiety or other adverse psycho-physiological consequences that can influence the quality of home and family life (White, et al., 2003).

Autonomy: Individuals with lower levels of perceived control over their work are more likely to report high role overload and high interference between work and family roles (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Hall & Richter, 1988; Jennings & McDougald). Low job control has been associated with increased absence rates due to illness, mental health issues and coronary heart disease (Bond & Bunce, 2001). It has also been explained that providing employees with control over their work serves to improve stress-related outcomes, such as lowered anxiety levels, psychological distress, burnout, irritability, psychosomatic health complaints, and alcohol

consumption (Bond & Bunce). Increased amount of control and discretion over working conditions and scope for social interactions also provide employees the opportunity to engage in extra-role behaviours or organizational citizenship behaviours (Baral & Bhargava).

Technology: Technology can both help and hinder work-life balance. Improvements to technology has helped employers make progress to how business is done, help is more accessible to clients, processes are often more efficient and employees are often more reachable. Improvements to technology have made working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week more accessible to employees (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004). This change has lead to employees working more outside regular office hours. Working more outside of regular office hours has lead to increased interference with employee's home life. Individuals are expected to take whatever time is required to get the job done; they are always on the job (Seron & Ferris, 1995). Changes in technology have lead to employers expecting more from employees and not always respecting employees' personal time.

2.2.2 Motivation – Work motivation is a “set of energetic forces that originates both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behaviour, and to determine its form, direction, intensity and duration” (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). Individuals can be motivated both intrinsically as well as extrinsically (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe). Intrinsic motivation is undertaken purely for its own sake (i.e. the activity itself is enjoyable) and reflects “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn” (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe). Extrinsic motivation refers to “the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome” (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe). It has been widely suggested that motivation is an important factor in individuals' decision-making process; the interaction between motivation and perception of

constraints determines, in a large degree, participation in an activity (Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios, 2002).

2.2.3 Performance Standards – Performance standards and targets have been studied and used as a method to improve employees' performance. Appropriate behaviours and performance standards are defined within the work environment (Chong & Ma, 2010). The ability and support received in meeting performance expectations enhance the individual's self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). The effectiveness of performance standards depends on the relationship between the performance measure used and the organization's objective (Sherstyuk, 2000). Task performance consists of behaviours required for a job that either directly produce goods and services or maintain the technical core (Major & Lauzun, 2010). Contextual performance is defined by those behaviours that support the broader work environment and facilitate task performance, including putting forth effort, assisting and cooperating with others, complying with organizational rules, and supporting organizational goals (Major & Lauzun). Researchers have established a connection between supervisor's behaviour and employee's performance (Chong & Ma). Performance can be drastically improved by the supervisor providing the employee's with useful resources and positive feedback (Mumford et al., 2002). Performance can also be enhanced when employees value their work environment and have supportive supervisors with whom they can work and trust (Chong & Ma).

Organizational Culture: Organizational culture can also create a drive for higher performance standards. Organizational culture relates to “the assumptions, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are shared among significant groups within an organization” (van Beek & Gerritsen, 2010). Organizational culture gives employees identification and direction (Martel, 2002). There are many benefits associated with a strong organizational culture. They include: attract and retain

star performers, guide and inspire employee decisions, provide fixed points of reference and stability, a more personal connection with employees, align employees with diverse interests around shared goals and export what the organization stands for (Rosenthan & Massarech, 2003). It has been suggested that work life balance programs cannot yield expected results unless the organizational culture supports use of work-life balance programs (Porter & Ayman, 2010). Organizational culture is an important aspect in the success of employee's attaining work-life balance; if the culture does not support it employees will not feel comfortable utilizing the programs (Maxwell, 2005).

Commitment to worthwhile objectives evokes moral motives that can foster satisfaction even in the absence of economic or relational benefits (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). Employees may find working in an organization with a strong ideology (one consistent with their own) very rewarding even if other aspects of their daily experiences are not. In other words, they may be willing to make some sacrifices (e.g. turning down more interesting or higher paying jobs elsewhere) and continue to cooperate with the organization because it is the "right" thing to do for the cause (Meyer & Parfyonova).

2.2.4 Constraints - Haworth and Lewis (2005) contend that many work-life issues are the result of structural and social constraints. Godbey, Crawford and Shen (2010) explain that there are three types of constraints: structural, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Structural constraints are external constraints related to the availability of resources required to participate in activities (Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios, 2002). Intrapersonal constraints are primarily concerned with subjective perceptions or assessments of appropriateness and relevance of participation in a given activity by the individual in question (Godbey, Crawford & Shen). The bases for determining such appropriateness and relevance may be psychological, cultural and/or the result

of genetic predisposition (Godbey, Crawford & Shen). Interpersonal constraints must be operationalized within a specific culture, in one culture, religion may play a central role in determining who one can participate in an activity, in another, it may play no role (Godbey, Crawford & Shen).

Successful negotiation of these constraints must be conducted in a sequential manner (Godbey, Crawford & Shen, 2010). The constraints an individual faces can take any form depending on his/her particular challenges, including his or her attitudes, interests or stage/level of participation, related knowledge and skills, location or accessibility of facilities, social network, cultural background and so on (Godbey, Crawford & Shen). It could be argued that some types of constraints might influence motivation, which can influence participation (Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios, 2002).

Competition: Competition relates to the nature and extent of forces that are threatening to the success of an organization. While competition is often considered in positive terms (it encourages innovation and discourages complacency) it can also make working life more difficult (Bloom & Reenen, 2006). Competition can be negative because it can create high-performance practices that lead to negative spillover (White, et al., 2003). In an organization with high turnover, the excess burden is often put on remaining employees (Porter & Alman, 2010).

Role Conflict: Role conflict has been defined as the “simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures in the work place such that compliance with one would make compliance more difficult with the other” (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991). There are three major forms of work-family conflict and they are: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Time-based conflict is competition over time spent in different roles, such as work schedules, work orientation, marriage, children and spouse employment patterns may all produce pressures to participate extensively in the work role or the family roles (Gilbreath, 2004). Conflict is experienced when these time pressures are incompatible with the demands of the other role (Williams & Alliger, 1994). Similar to time-based conflict, quantitative role overload is defined as the conflict between organizational demands and the time allocated to the individual by the organization to satisfy those demands (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991).

Strain-based conflict are work stressors that can produce strain symptoms such as tension, anxiety, fatigue, depression, apathy and irritability, these symptoms of strain exist when stress in one role affects one's performance in another role (Higgins, Duxbury & Lyons, 2010; Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991). Behaviour-based conflicts are specific patterns of in-role behaviour that may be incompatible with expectations regarding behaviour in another and if a person is unable to adapt, then they are likely to experience conflict between the roles (Greenhaus & Beutell).

Work/family conflict can best be understood theoretically as a form of stress response to role overload and overlapping or incompatible non-work and work demands (Watkins, 1995). Many employees are taking work home with them, which has blurred the boundary between work and family (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). It has been found that work-specific role stressors serve as predictors of job burnout, job dissatisfaction (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991), turnover intentions and physical symptoms (Judge & Colquitt, 2004).

2.3 Efficacy Facilitators and the Supervisor: Methods used to Manage Work-Life Stress

Work-life balance is not just about working fewer hours, it has become more multi-faceted to include: how long people work (flexibility in the number of hours worked), when people work

(flexibility in the arrangement of hours), where people work (flexibility in the place of work), developing people through training so that they can manage the balance better, providing back-up support and breaks from work (Maxwell, 2005). Within the literature there have been many tactics explored that individuals use to manage work life stress, such as flexibility, social support and access to resources. The role of the supervisor is an important one in expanding these tactics. Supervisors are in daily contact with employees and are in a position to manage, coach and mentor, conveying the culture, spirit, and pride of their organizations (Martel, 2002). The role of the supervisor in developing flexibility, helping employees access resources and providing employees with social support will be explored in the next section.

2.3.1 Flexibility – The heightened demands on organizations have subsequently called for a corresponding staff of flexible and capable individuals (Beltrán-Martín, Roca-Puig, Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2008). Flexibility is the ability to respond effectively to changes (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste & Has De Witte, 2010). It has been suggested that the dimensions of cost, quality, time, and flexibility are not to be traded off against one another but need to be simultaneously prioritized (Kara, Kayis & O’Kane, 2002). Porter and Ayman (2010) reported that when employees were asked, they reported flexibility as the most desirable attribute of a work environment.

There are many different forms of flexibility. Job flexibility relates to the ability of the system to cope with changes in (or the mix of) jobs to be processed by the system (Kara, Kayis & O’Kane, 2002). Porter and Ayman (2010) further divided job flexibility into place flexibility, where an individual works, time flexibility, how long an individual works, and timing flexibility, when an individual works. Functional flexibility refers to employees ability to work on different tasks, under diverse circumstances and the cost and time needed to mobilize employees into new

duties or jobs are low (Beltrán-Martín, et al., 2008). Work-group flexibility is the group's ability to adjust its activities to changing conditions without these adjustments resulting in disorganization (Kara, Kayis & O'Kane).

Human resource flexibility refers to the extent to which employees possess skills and behavioral repertoires that can provide a firm with options to pursue strategic alternatives (Beltrán-Martín, et al.). Employees like these, mobilized through the appropriate human resource practices, constitute a source of competitive advantages (Beltrán-Martín, et al.). Kara, Kayis and O'Kane discussed flexibility in terms of robustness and agility. Robustness refers to the ability to remain in a certain state despite a change, and agility is the ability to instigate change rather than react to it (Kara, Kayis & O'Kane).

There are a few factors that have been described as being able to increase flexibility within the organization that management can control, they are: organizational structure flexibility, technological flexibility, information system flexibility, and human resource flexibility (Kara, Kayis & O'Kane, 2002). Organizations have begun offering employees enhanced autonomy with regard to work schedules as an incentive of employment, in other words employees have more flexibility in determining when they will work (Porter & Ayman, 2010).

There are four types of flexibility that an individual can engage in, in terms of their employment: training flexibility, pay flexibility, flexibility to accept an undemanding job, and flexibility to accept a job for which one is over-qualified (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste & Has De Witte, 2010). Porter and Ayman (2010) found that if employees believe that they have sufficient flexibility in when, what, and where work is completed, they reported higher levels of

work life balance. Beltrán-Martín, et al. (2008) found that as employees show flexibility at work, by manifesting flexibility in skills and behaviors, the organization's results increase.

Gilbreath (2004) explains that it is important to focus attention on the role of the supervisor because they can be a major influence on an employee's work life. Supervisors are in daily contact with employees and are in a position to manage, coach and mentor, conveying the culture, spirit, and pride of their organizations (Martel, 2002). A supervisor can both contribute to and mitigate the deleterious effects of organizational role stressors and work life balance issues (Seltzer & Numerof, 1988). It has been found that supervisory equity is becoming increasingly important as an influence on spillover between work and home (White, et al., 2003).

2.3.2 Social Support – Social support is an informal social network that provides individuals with expressions of emotional concern or empathy, practical assistance, informational support or appraisal (Md-Sidin, et al., 2008). Increased social support (both by work and non-work sources) is related to increased health and well-being (Adams, King & King, 1996; Md-Sidin, et al., 2008). Well-being refers to contentment, satisfaction, or happiness derived from optimal functioning (McDowell, 2010).

Individuals with different sources of support (ex: coworkers, community and financial resources) create a buffering effect that help individuals deal with work-family conflict (Martins, Eddleston & Veiga, 2002; Cinamon & Rich, 2010). Social support is an essential resource or a coping mechanism that is able to reduce the negative effects of stressors and work-family conflict (Md-Sidin, et al.). Along the same lines, employers can provide a supportive work environment to reduce the level of stress in the lives of their employees. They can do this by formally recognizing the importance of an employee's family by supporting other activities not directly related to career success (Boles, Johnston & Hair, 1997).

Martins, Eddleston and Veiga (2002) found that it is very important for employers that would like to develop a motivated and committed workforce to fully understand the contributing factors that can influence their employee's satisfaction in their career. With an increasing number of women in the workforce, Maxwell and McDougall (2004) found that organizations are more likely to offer more work-life balance programs due to individual's home responsibilities. Boden (1999) suggests that employers should seek to create working conditions that are more accommodating of workers personal lives by creating flexible work schedules. In providing work-life balance programs there is the potential to better support employees (Milliken, Martins & Morgan, 1998). Research has demonstrated that supportive work-family culture and informal support have a greater effect on work-family conflict than do formal family-friendly organizational policies (Major & Lauzun, 2010).

The supervisor can determine how satisfying a job can be by influencing how demanding is the job (Gilbreath, 2004). Support from supervisors has been reported to reduce work role conflict, role ambiguity, and resultant work-family conflict (Major & Lauzun, 2010). The supervisor can also determine how much autonomy the employee has in the job and the sense of achievement that comes from doing the job (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). A supervisor who is accommodating when conflicts arise between work and family life can significantly improve job satisfaction and the company's bottom line (Gilbreath; Watkins, 1995). Supervisors in dual-income marriages are described as almost twice as likely to be very accommodating when job and family life collide (Watkins). The relationship between front line managers and their own managers is important and has been shown as the most influential variable explaining front line manager's own levels of affective commitment and job satisfaction (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

When supervisors were perceived to be supporting employees, this improved employees' commitment to the organization (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998) and reduced reported levels of stress and work-family conflict (Cinamon & Rich, 2010; Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Working mothers with supportive bosses report being less irritable, experience reduced stress levels, are less exhausted and feel less tension between job and family responsibilities (Watkins, 1995). It has been explained that a supervisor's support expands individual's psychological resource base such as confidence, which may enhance performance in the family domain (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). Harris (2001) found that a good manager was one who shared information, explained decisions and talked through issues with employee.

2.3.3 Access to Resources – Employees face many sources of stress throughout the day. One of the most pressing problems facing organizations today is retaining knowledgeable employees (Porter & Alman, 2010). Research has established associations between workplace psychosocial conditions and healthcare costs, and organizations are feeling the effect on their budgets because of increased costs of employee health insurance (Gilbreath, 2004). Given that some of those stressors cannot be reduced or removed, employers are attempting to increase employee's coping resources (Heaney, et al., 1995).

With enhanced coping resources, employees are better able to handle these stressful situations (Heaney, et al.). Coping resources have been defined as personal attributes and skills that are considered adaptive or advantageous across many situations and are associated with effective coping behaviour (Heaney, et al.). The established link between work stressors and employee well-being places a clear moral obligation on employers to provide a healthy environment (Donald et. al, 2005).

Work-life balance programs are used by organizations to help employees manage work life stress, with the goal being that employee's work and personal lives can be reconciled (McCarthy, Darcy & Grady, 2010). Work-life balance programs are "any employer sponsored benefits or working conditions that help employees balance work and non-work demands" (McCarthy, Darcy & Grady). There are different aspects of work-life balance programs, such as: flextime arrangements (ie. how long people work, when people work, where people work), time management training, providing back-up support, breaks from work (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Maxwell & McDougall, 2004), job sharing, compressed workweeks, telecommuting and shift work (Porter & Alman, 2010).

Watkins (1995) explains that a workplace is considered "family-friendly" when there are four or more policies or strategies which support employees with families. The most common areas of employer involvement in work-family issues are: (1) the provision of child care benefits, (2) the use of options which enhance workforce flexibility such as flextime, voluntary shifts to part-time work, job sharing, work-at-home options, and flexible leaves (Johnson, 2004).

A common goal for employers who implement work life balance programs is to help employees attain much higher levels of satisfaction with both their work and home life (Allen, 2001). Organizations that can help employees manage their various roles and associated stress should gain competitive advantage by reducing medical expenses and withdrawal while maintaining high levels of job performance (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). They help to ease stress and make employees feel more appreciated, save employees time and decrease turnover (Ulshafer, Potgeisser & Lima, 2005). It has been found that a significant positive correlation exists between satisfaction and organizational commitment and intentions to stay (Porter & Alman, 2010).

Work-life balance is an important area of human resource management. Indeed, it is one of the top three challenges facing Human Resources departments (McCarthy, Darcy & Grady, 2010). Major and Lauzun, (2010) suggest that organizations need to put supportive policies in place that afford managers some degree of autonomy and flexibility to make individual accommodations. The more data a company has about its employees, the more aware its supervisors should be of its employee's work and family conflicts (Milliken, Martins & Morgan, 1998). An accurate needs analysis with companywide participation is a vital component of responsiveness to work-family issues (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). The data on employee's demographics and work-family concerns may be necessary to facilitate top-level manager's noticing work-family issues as it has been significantly and positively related to all forms of work-family responsiveness (Milliken, Martins & Morgan; Judge & Colquitt).

Supervisors play a meaningful role in helping to create, or transmit, perceptions of the organization as a whole (Allen, 2001). Allen explains that because supervisors play such an important role in the administration of benefits, it is imperative that those supervisors are provided appropriate training in order to complete those tasks at a higher level (Gilbreath, 2004). Formal organizational supports such as work like balance programs may not be as important as how supportive an employee's supervisor and organizational culture is towards employee work-life balance (Baral & Bhargava, 2010).

Given how influential supervisors can be, it is important to note that supervisors that are not always aware of work-life balance issues, may not be well trained, adequately compensated or even the right fit for the organization. In fact, Harris (2001) identified supervisors as the weak link in the application of performance management systems. Such issues can have detrimental effects to the organization (Martel, 2002). The skills of supervisors to offer leadership, involve

employees, manage change, communicate and motivate will be an important element in affecting the level and nature of employee commitment (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Employees judge the fairness of the decision-making procedures used by supervisors to see whether those procedures are consistent, unbiased, accurate, correctable and representative of worker concerns and opinions (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Supervisors may well not transmit the articulated values of top management but reflect instead the “informal” culture of the organization (Purcell & Hurchinson, 2007).

Improving the way in which employees are supervised may be a viable way to improve the psychosocial work environment and employee well-being (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Seltzer & Numerof, 1988). Gilbreath (2004) states that protecting the safety of employees is a fundamental supervisory responsibility, and protecting employees from excessive stress is a component of this responsibility.

2.4 Actions Taken to Manage Work-Life Stress

Several tactics have been reported that individuals can use to reduce the amount of work-life stress they experience. Some of those tactics include: segmentation, compensation, accommodation, one job/one career strategy, postponing children and hiring help around the house (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Segmentation is the separation of work and family (Jennings & McDougald), such that the two domains do not affect one another (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Compensation is when an individual is dissatisfied with one domain, they compensate by over investing in the other domain (Edwards & Rothbard; Jennings & McDougald).

Accommodation occurs when individuals become less involved in one domain to satisfy the demands of the other domain (Bloom, 1982; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). One job/one-career

strategy is in reference to couples; one partner takes on a more demanding career while the other takes a less demanding job to fulfill family demands (Jennings & McDougald). Some couples postpone having children so that they can focus on their career and have fewer demands at home while they build up their career (Hewlett, 2002). Individuals also hire help around the house to reduce the amount of work around the home (Jennings & McDougald) or look for support from family members or friends.

2.4.1 Coping Style- An individual's coping style, the way in which he or she manages stressful events, as threatening appraised external demands can help an individual overcome work life balance issues (Bekker et al., 2010). There are three types of coping styles: problem-focused (involvement in activities aimed at dealing with solving problems), emotion-focused coping (focusing upon the emotional consequences of a stressful situation without solving it) and avoidance-focused coping (avoiding the problem) (Bekker et al.). Coping resources can come from multiple life domains, personal/individual level, work level, couple level, and family level (Appel & Kim-Appel, 2007). Skill coping dimensions include the constructs of problem solving and communication (Appel & Kim-Appel).

Appel and Kim-Appel explain that the greater the number of coping resources one has developed, the better one is able to manage life stress and thus increase adaptation and life satisfaction. Strength in one life domain (relationship or skill) may provide resources to cope with stress in the other life domain (Appel & Kim-Appel). When an individual is less willing to seek social support, then that can lead to more negative interaction from home to work (Bekker, et al.).

2.4.2 Strain Reduction - Bond and Bunce (2000) suggest that in order to prevent and reduce strain either: emotion-focused stress management interventions, which target undesirable thoughts and

emotions aroused by work stressors or, problem-focused stress management interventions, which seek to identify and alleviate the stressors giving rise to strain. It has been stated that if an individual accepts the events that cause them stress, the event will not lead to emotional problems such as strain, depression and anxiety (Bond & Bunce).

2.4.3 Leisure - Leisure is frequently reported as having the most positive and significant influence on individual's quality of life, as well as on the achievement of a successful work-life balance within this (Warren, 2004). Trenberth and Dewe (2002) explain that leisure plays a positive role in well being and in providing a range of health benefits, such as reducing tension and stress coping skills.

2.5 Outcomes

The reference point for judging well-being is a person's own aspirations, based on a blend of objective reality and their subjective reactions to it (McDowell, 2010). Well-being can be assessed in each domain of health: physical, emotional, social and spiritual (McDowell). The amount of a person's total waking life-time spent in non-work activities is now greater than the amount spent in paid work (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). The importance of leisure for people's lives should not be underestimated or obscured by the focus on paid work throughout the life course (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). Hall & Richter (1988) argue that the employee needs to have clear boundaries between the two domains and some degree of separation- too much overlap between work and home can cause employee burnout and dissatisfaction. There have been many benefits, both at the individual and organizational level, found to be associated with attaining work-life balance.

2.5.1 Professional Outcomes – Professional outcomes can both be personal in nature or from the organizational level. Employees experience many positive outcomes when they feel that they

have attained work-life balance. Employers are often motivated to implement family-friendly policies based on the premise that economic gains will be realized from increased employee productivity and reduced turnover as a result of such policies (Allen, 2001).

Work-life balance programs contribute to creating a culture of honesty and trust where staff can admit to home problems and get support (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004). Some benefits with work life balance programs at the organizational level include: lower recruitment, lower training costs, improved productivity (Ulshafer, Potgeisser & Lima, 2005), decreased job burnout (Haar & Roche, 2010), easier service delivery, enhanced quality service, enhanced employee capability, less absence, lower turnover, employee flexibility, skills to succeed in rapidly changing markets (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004), increased organizational commitment, increased levels of organizational citizenship behaviours (Baral & Bhargava) and increased levels of participation within the organization and initiative (Haar & Roche). It has been found that work-life balance programs allowed supervisors the option to help staff and made the management role less difficult (Maxwell & McDougall).

All of the positive emotions that employees experience by reducing their stress levels are associated with an outward focus of attention, such that when people are happy, they report increased liking for others and are more willing to initiate conversations and offer help (Rothbard, 2001). It has been reported that the lure of work life balance programs may not be in the utilization, but in the access to them (Porter & Alman, 2010). Porter and Alman found that employees who believe that they have sufficient flexibility in when, what, and where work is completed, regardless of if they participate in alternative work schedules, are those most greatly affected.

When an individual leads a balanced life, they are likely to experience vigor as a component of work engagement (Cinamon & Rich, 2010). Vigor has been characterized as comprising high levels of effort, energy, resilience and persistence (Cinamon & Rich). Involvement in multiple individual roles can result in benefits both to the individual and the organization (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer & King, 2002), therefore, it is important for employers to recognize these benefits and support employees commitments outside of the job by being flexible and providing them the opportunity to engage in these activities.

There are many consequences associated with lack of work-life balance. Issues with work-life balance have been linked to diminished organizational commitment, job satisfaction, life satisfaction and increased stress and turnover intentions (Major & Lauzun, 2010). Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000) caution that blurring the line between work and personal life by bringing day care, recreation facilities and other aspects of personal life to work it makes it more difficult for employees to transition between roles and may compromise the integrity of home, work and third places (Hall & Richter, 1988). In trying to find a solution to a major problem that employees are facing, it is possible that it has created another problem. Research has demonstrated that work interference with family is more prevalent than family interference with work and is more likely to be influenced by workplace factors and supportive supervisor behaviours (Major & Lauzun).

2.5.2 Personal Outcomes - At the individual level, some benefits that employees may experience include: less role conflict, more quality time with family, control over their lives, being more content with their lives (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004) and job (Baral & Bhargava, 2010), reduced problem drinking, enhanced physical and mental well-being (Cinamon & Rich, 2010). Supportive work-family culture enhances the psychological resource base for employees by

increasing a sense of self-acceptance and flexibility which can aid individuals develop positive affect towards work (Baral & Bhargava). Attaining work-life balance can lead to increased feelings of self efficacy, which is a person's belief about whether they can successfully perform a task (Jex & Gudanowski, 1992).

Work-family enrichment is the extent to which experience in one role improves the quality of life namely performance or affect, in the other role (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). Also, if an employee can better manage their time in one domain, the spillover of demands to another domain is decreased, thus increasing total efficiency (Porter & Alman, 2010). This may suggest that when people are happier with their work role and family life, they will be more likely to help others and to be more enjoyable to work with. It is possible for positive spillover to occur where an employee could utilize skills used in the workplace, such as setting agendas, collecting feedback, directing and counselling – with a few modifications, in the home (DeLong, 1992). Some other benefits that both the employee and employer may experience include: improved productivity, motivation and commitment to the organization (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004).

2.6 Concluding Comments

With increased demands both at work and at home, employees are reporting higher stress levels (Weiss, 2002), leading to lower work performance, poor morale, burnout, turnover and difficulties with recruitment (Ulshafer, Potgeisser & Lima, 2005). The need for a balance between work and personal life has become an integral element of employee expectations from employers (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). The review of the literature suggests that there are several aspects of work-life balance; personal characteristics, task variables, efficacy facilitators, actions and outcomes. This will be one of the first studies to look at the whole picture of work-life

balance. It remains to be fully understood if and how the efficacy facilitators (flexibility, access to resources and social support) influence an employee's perception of their work-life balance.

Chapter Three: Methods

With the increasing hours spent at work, the increasing number of roles that individuals are taking on, there is no wonder employees can feel stress and the sense of being overwhelmed. The purpose of this study is to further explore employee's perceptions of work life balance. In particular, this study uses narrative techniques asking workers to reflect on issues that influence their ability to balance work with the rest of life. Using these insights, employers and the workers themselves can better understand how successful negotiation is undertaken. They can identify key variables in the negotiation process and how those variables interact. The research was approached from a post-positivist, deductive approach with exploratory components. In depth qualitative interviews were conducted with males and females to further explore the participant's understanding of their tactics to manage work-life stress.

Several questions were used to explore this study's four research questions. Each research question is restated below and questions used to explore that question are then provided.

RQ 1: What is the role played by task variables in balancing work- life demands? This question is addressed by asking participants the following questions:

1. What are your commitments in terms of your work life? Are they important to you? Why?
2. What kind of responsibilities do you have at work?
3. How do you manage all of your commitments? Do they conflict?

RQ 2: What conditions might facilitate balancing work-life demands?

1. What happens if something comes up in your personal life that needs to be dealt with during work hours? Is your supervisor flexible: with deadlines, work hours, where you work, HR policies, etc?
2. When balancing work commitments with the rest of life, where do you feel you have flexibility – at home, work?
3. Do you have support from supervisor, co-workers, family? Please describe how they support you.
4. Do you feel that your organization supports work-life balance?

5. Does your supervisor make your job easier or harder? How do they do that?
6. Do you have access to resources at work that help you find balance between work and home? (WLB program, coping resources, etc) Do you take advantage of these resources?

RQ 3: What actions might workers undertake to deal with competing work – life demands?

This question is addressed by asking participants the following questions:

1. How did you cope with this situation?
2. Did anyone help you deal with these demands? What did this person do that was effective/ineffective? Why was it effective/ineffective?

RQ 4: What are the outcomes (both professional and personal) of the balancing process?

1. How often do you participate in your favourite leisure activities
2. Has your leisure behaviour been affected by your work? How?
3. Do your home responsibilities impact your leisure time? Are they as great a challenge as your work commitments when you try to pursue your favourite leisure activities?
4. Generally how are things these days?

3.1 Paradigm

This research was approached from a post-positivist paradigm. Post-positivist challenges the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge and recognizing that we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behaviour and actions of humans (Creswell, 2009). Also, within this paradigm, it is believed that reality is constructed, where external reality is subjectively perceived and understood from the perspective of the observer (Daly, 2007). As a researcher, I strove to interpret the participants' social world from their point of view (Bryman, Teevan and Bell). The meaning of prior experience is necessary and instrumental for shaping the intellectual formulation of any special event (Daly), for example within this research, the story that the participant told about their experience with work-life balance. This was of particular importance for this research because the participant's previous understanding of work-life balance shaped which experience they choose to share. The basis for

this research project was that the supervisor will play an important role in developing employee's tactics for work-life balance. The reality of participants involves a process of co-construction insofar as there is interplay between the meanings of the researcher and the meanings of the participant (Daly).

3.2 Qualitative Research

This research was conducted from a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009) and how individuals interpret their social world (Bryman, Teevan and Bell, 2009). With qualitative research, often the researcher actually speaks with the participant in the natural setting (Creswell). Researchers collect the data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour or interviewing participants, they are the research instrument (Creswell), in this research, interviewing participants. Several sources of data are often collected, such as interviews, observations and documents, rather than relying on a single data source (Creswell). A deductive approach is taken to data analysis by considering patterns, categories and themes (Bryman, Teevan & Bell; Creswell). Qualitative research was chosen for this study because it allows for a more exploratory approach to the inquiry. It also allows for open ended questions to provide the participant with the opportunity to discuss what they feel is important in their juggling act to attain work-life balance. Also, follow up questions can be asked to further probe what the participant has said to gain a better understanding.

3.3 Strategy of Inquiry

Narrative was the guiding framework used to understand employee's perceptions of work-life balance. Narrative serves to connect the broad domains of art and science (Daly (2007). Daly explains narrative as "stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters

embedded in the lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meanings and values into question". The use of narrative in this study served as a means of making sense of the past (Daly, 2007).

Narrative allows us to understand people's lives in a more holistic way (Daly, 2007), which was important in understanding work-life balance as a whole. It was important to focus on the way individuals tell the story of their own experience and the content of the story itself- the events and activities that were included in the story (Daly). The goal was to look for truth and meaning from the participants' perspectives, so what they feel is important in their juggling act to attain work-life balance.

Critical incident technique (CIT), will be used in this study. CIT was developed in the nineteen forties by John Flanagan with the intent that it would allow researchers to gather and analyze objective, reliable information about specific activities (Hughes, 2007). It started out being used to aid military operations but has since been used in social science disciplines, including psychology, counselling, management and education (Hughes). CIT is often described as a "moment of truth". CIT is the collection of detailed reports of incidents in which an individual did something that was especially effective or ineffective in achieving the purpose of an activity (Gremler, 2004; Meldrum, 2007). Critical incident technique is a qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of momentous events, incidents, processes, or issues identified by the participant, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects (Gremler). Gremler explains that "the objective is to gain understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective, and behavioural

elements". A critical incident is described as one that makes a significant contribution, either positively or negatively, to an activity or phenomenon (Gremler).

There have been many benefits of CIT that have been reported. CIT does not restrict observations to a limited set of variables or activities (Gremler, 2004). CIT can provide a rich set of data (Gremler) with first-hand perspectives on human activities and their significance (Hughes, 2007). This insight into real-life individual experiences assists the identification of broader patterns and understandings (Hughes). CIT also might enable the identification of key research issues, develop a knowledge-based for further investigation and support conceptual modeling (Hughes). CIT has been described as being a culturally neutral method (Gremler) which can be beneficial in multicultural community.

Some issues with CIT include that respondent stories can be misinterpreted or misunderstood (Gremler, 2004). CIT requires respondents to take time and effort to describe situations in sufficient detail, a low response rate is likely (Gremler). The CIT relies on events being remembered by respondents and requires the accurate and truthful reporting of them. An incident may have taken place sometime before the collection of the data; thus, the subsequent description may lead the respondent to reinterpret the incident (Gremler). CIT's reliability as a method is sometimes challenged with regard to: limited generalizability of the findings, subjectivity of analysis, selectivity or lack of accuracy of critical incident data, due to its personal recalled nature (Hughes). The data analysis procedure is also painstaking and very time consuming (Hughes).

3.4 Role of the Researcher

I have personal experience with issues balancing work and life demands. I previously worked full-time in a mentally and physically demanding job and also went to school full time as

a Masters student. Through this experience I realized just how difficult it can be to attain work-life balance by juggling all of life's demands. Through observations of family and friends I noticed that they were struggling as well. Through this research my goal was to understand what has helped participants attain work-life balance and co-construct recommendations for attaining work-life balance. It was important for myself as a researcher to acknowledge my own experiences as I interpreted the information provided by participants in the study in order to better understand those of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2009).

3.5 Participants/Sample

There were several criteria that were used in order to determine whether individuals can participate. The sample will consist of eight females who were employed at a non-for-profit organization and have been working for an extended period of time. The sample size of eight participants was chosen to somewhat as an arbitrary number, but it allowed for a large enough sample size to gather different individual's experiences and perspectives. Within narrative inquiry it would be almost impossible to attain sample saturation due to the fact that each individual's experience is different and would have a different perspective. The scope conditions included: the participant reported working within a potentially stressful environment, had a high level of emotional attachment to the workplace and, reported working at a demanding job.

The following is the rationale for the scope conditions. A not-for-profit was chosen because working in that environment has a few unique attributes that are not always present in other work environments: typically a lower salary (stress about money), lots of work hours, not a lot of resources, don't always have a lot of employees and the use of volunteers that may not have adequate training. Haar and Roche (2010) explain that there has not a lot of work-life balance research done in not-for-profit and it is under-represented sector. The participants

needed to have worked at the organization for a while so that they would have had the opportunity to form a high level of emotional attachment to the organization. Emotional attachment to the organization is an important factor because it binds an individual to an organization (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). If the individual is emotionally attached to the organization then they will be more willing to make sacrifices in their personal life and more likely to experience work-life balance issues. Having a demanding job can cause stress for an individual which can lead to work-life balance issues. If the participant does not have a demanding job then they are less inclined to experience issues with work-life balance. Experiencing stress is also very important because if participant does not experiencing stress then they will be unable to speak to their experiences with work-life balance issues.

A snowball technique was used to find prospective participants. Snowball sampling is a form of convenience sample where the researcher first makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses them to establish contact with others (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). I first contacted a few individuals from the Niagara region to ask them to participate. After a few key participants have been identified and interviewed, they were asked to identify others they felt would be willing and able to participate. The first key participants were asked to provide the names of individuals that fit the scope conditions that were previously mentioned.

The interviews took place in a private setting that was convenient for the participant, most took place in the participant's office at work. The participants were first informed of the purpose of the study and how confidentiality would be preserved (Hughes, 2007). Informed consent was required of all participants and they were asked to sign an informed consent form, approved by ethics. They were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, that they were

able to stop participating at any time, the purpose of the study, how the results would be used, the expectations of their involvement, that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, that the data would be stored in a secure location accessible only by the main researcher and the advisor and the risks and the benefits of participation were outlined (Daly, 2007). The data was collected from the respondent's perspective in his or her own words (Gremler, 2004). CIT can be used to generate an accurate and in-depth record of events (Gremler). The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of participants and ensure confidentiality.

The definition for work-life balance that was used for this research is: work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). The participants were asked questions in a similar structure as the framework that was presented at the beginning of the literature review.

Participants were first asked to fill out a preliminary questionnaire about their personal characteristics; their age, gender, education level, their marital status and their parental status. During the interview, they were then asked about their job, the level of responsibility they have, their motivation, the performance standards that exist within their organization and the constraints that they face. Consistent with CIT, participants were then asked to recount a time where work and their personal lives were not compatible. To better understand who the key actors in the situation were, the participants were asked how important their supervisor, family and friends and co-workers were in that situation. They were then asked to recount a time where their work and personal lives were not competing, and then who or what was an important factor in ensuring a satisfactory balance between their work and their personal life. They were then

asked about the efficacy mechanisms in their life, so the amount of flexibility they have, access to resources and the social support they receive. They were then asked about the actions they engage in to balance their commitments. Then they were asked how they felt about how everything has been going. A few sample questions include: Tell me about a time where you really felt that your work and personal life were not compatible. Explain why you consider this incident to be significant. What contributed to those feelings? How did you cope with this situation? Do you have support from supervisor, co-workers, family? Please describe how they support you. Please see Appendix A for the full interview guide. Probing open-ended questions were used to elicit more information.

3.5.1 Participant Profiles

3.5.1.1 Coleen: Coleen is a woman in her late-twenties, she is married, she has no children, and has lots of pets. Coleen works as a Coordinator of Services to the Niagara Region, a position that she has held for several years. She often works weekends and occasional evenings. She feels she has a supportive supervisor. The organization that she works for does not have any official work-life balance policies but is able to take lieu time and the organization provides resources for the employees. Coleen went on to explain all of the different ways that her organization supports work-life balance and then says “I think that we have challenges during wellness week and teams will form to challenge what team can be the healthiest... but I don’t know, I’ve never joined one.”

3.5.1.2 Felicity: Felicity is a woman in her late twenties, she recently got married, and has no children. Felicity is in the first year of her career and is the Executive Director of a not-for-profit organization in the Niagara Region. She often works overtime to ensure that the organization is

successful, even though she does not get paid for overtime, but can take flextime. She reports having a supportive supervisor. In the last year she feels she has learned a lot about work-life balance. Felicity does not have a lot of demands on her time other than work, but is anticipating that this will change when she starts having children. The organization that she works for does not have any official work-life balance policies, but is considering developing some work-life balance resources.

3.5.1.3 Amanda: Amanda, is a woman in her mid-thirties, she has two young children, a husband that works out of town, a son that is sick, and her mother helps out. Amanda works for a not-for-profit agency in the Niagara Region as a volunteer coordinator, a position that she has held for several years. In an attempt to manage all of her commitments, Amanda tries to segment between work and home. Segmenting sometimes causes her stress because she has lots to do, but doesn't want to take work home. She feels she has a supportive and flexible supervisor and understanding co-workers. The organization that Amanda works for does not have any official work-life balance policies, but she says they are working towards developing some.

3.5.1.4 Blair: Blair is a woman in her early-forties, she has two children, and her husband is a civil servant. She explains "I have two children, so being able to balance our personal activities, recreational activities, and just trying to keep everyone happy is definitely my first priority". Blair's mother helps out with some of the home responsibilities and care of children. Blair works as a volunteer coordinator for a national not-for-profit organization, a position that she has recently started but has been with the organization for several years. Blair has the flexibility at work that she is able to work from home. She travels a lot for work and is allocated flextime to make up for it. She feels she has a very supportive supervisor. The organization does not have any official work-life balance policies.

3.5.1.5 Hailey: Hailey is a woman in her mid-forties, she has three children, a husband. She spends a lot of her time organizing and coordinating her children's leisure activities and does not receive support from her husband. Hailey works for a national not-for-profit organization as a Manager of Programs. She feels she has a very supportive and understanding supervisor. She also has very flexible work hours. She is occasionally required to travel for work which often causes problems at home. At the organization that she works for, there are no official work-life balance policies or resources.

3.5.1.6 Denise: Denise is a woman in her mid-fifties, she has no family. Her mother that she cared for recently passed away. Denise lives alone and is therefore responsible for all household duties. Denise works for a National not-for-profit organization with fund development, a position that she has held for several years. During certain periods, she has to work a lot of overtime and has to work evenings and weekends. Denise feels that her job is very stressful and demanding because it is so deadline driven. She does not receive support from her supervisor or many of her co-workers. Her supervisor is often absent and creates more work for her.

3.5.1.7 Grace: Grace is a woman in her mid-fifties, she is nearing retirement age, she has children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and she is separated. Grace is the Assistant Executive Director for a not-for-profit organization in the Niagara Region, a position that she has held for many years. She works overtime for the occasional special event or fundraising activity. She also works as a yoga teacher part time. She believes that everything is a choice and not to stress about the things you do not have control over. The organization that she works for does not have any official work-life balance policies.

3.5.1.8 Erin: Erin is a woman in her late fifties, she is close to retiring, she has two children, grandchildren, and she is divorced. Erin lives alone so is responsible for all of the household duties. She recently moved into a condo so that she is no longer responsible for the outdoor duties of owning a house. Erin is a volunteer coordinator for a not-for-profit organization in the Niagara Region, a position that she has held for a number of years. Erin feels that her job is not very stressful because she has a manageable workload. She feels she has a supportive supervisor and has flexibility with her schedule at work. Erin feels that if a situation is temporary she can push through and get everything done.

3.5.2 Research Integrity

Integrity can be defined as a process of trying to achieve the qualities of soundness and consistency among values, beliefs and methodological strategies (Daly, 2007). There were several steps taken to ensure that integrity was maintained throughout the research process. As mentioned previously, informed consent was required of participants. They were aware of what they were involved with and cognizant of the (limited) risks of participation. The participant's identity was also protected by masking personal details that may identify them that they have revealed throughout the interview process, as recommended by Daly. Accountability was also maintained by developing a respectful and appropriate relationship with participants and ensuring that the participant's time was put to good use (Daly). Member checks were completed to maintain integrity throughout the research process. Once a few interviews had been completed, I contacted the participants again to discuss my observations and ask their perspective. Their feedback was considered to be additional data and was included within the results.

3.6 Data Analysis

With CIT, detailed analysis of critical incidents enables researchers to identify similarities, differences and patterns and to seek insight into how and why people engage in the activity (Hughes, 2007). The researcher allows the themes to emerge during the process instead of having pre-determined themes (Hughes). Thematic analysis examines what is said rather than how it is said (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). It was important to determine how participants make sense of what has happened (Bryman, Teevan, Bell). A deductive approach to analyzing data helps to further understand the phenomenon of interest that was explored within the literature.

In order to do this, the transcripts and the audiotapes were reviewed several times in the search for themes. While reading the transcripts, I wrote memos about potential themes that appeared to emerge from the data. I then put my own thoughts and biases aside to truly try and find what the participants were trying to say and let the data speak for itself. The transcripts were then manually sorted into codes (Hughes, 2007). I went through the transcripts and wrote in potential codes, this process was repeated and the different codes were compared to flush out the most descriptive. Once the codes were finalized, the codes were then sorted into sub-categories as finer similarities and differences became apparent (Hughes). On a large table all of the codes were set out, and then like a puzzle, I tried to find the relationships between the codes. The sub-categories were then sorted into themes. The themes were given tentative names and brief definitions for the main categories (Hughes). Once all of the codes were sorted into themes, I looked at the larger picture to see how they fit together. When it appeared that all of the participant's thoughts and feelings were represented in the themes, the themes were finalized.

To ensure data quality, CIT researchers need to consider what constitutes an appropriate critical incident and identify relevant criteria for excluding inappropriate incidents (Gremler, 2004). In order to reduce the number of inappropriate incidents, during the interviews the researcher further probed the participants to ensure that they provided rich, thick descriptions that spoke to their experiences with their work-life balance.

The analysis depends on the insight, experience and judgment of the researcher (Hughes, 2007). Throughout the analysis process I strove to see the world through the participant's eyes (Daly, 2007). I journaled throughout the analysis to ensure the methodological procedures were understandable, visible and transparent (Daly). Also, I kept a journal to remain reflexive. The progression in my understanding of employee's perspectives throughout the interview process is included in the findings section to show the evolution of the findings. Intrajudge reliability is a concept that examines how consistent a given judge is in making categorical decisions over time (Gremler, 2004). Within this research, there were several tactics used to ensure intrajudge reliability. For example, some of the reliability procedures that were used include: checking transcripts for mistakes during transcription and diligence in maintaining consistent meaning of codes throughout the coding procedure (Creswell, 2009). Rich, thick descriptions will also be used in order to adequately convey what participants were sharing with the researcher (Creswell). The story that was told will be meaningful, sensitive and appropriately nuanced (Daly).

Chapter Four: Narrative Analysis

The following is my interpretation of the interaction I had with the eight participants. As Daly (2007) explains, “in qualitative research, we are one of those listeners and we play an important role in the way we interpret the narrative account that is provided”. The following is a summary of the Critical Incidents that the participants shared during the interview. The stories have been divided into two categories- a story that the participant shared about a time where they were able to find a balance between their work and personal life and a story where the participant was unable to find a balance between work and personal life.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis: Critical Incident- Negative

Amanda- Amanda told about when she had so many competing challenges that she felt unbalanced:

umm.. I think I am going through that right now. Again, with my son. Uh.. back and forth from [the hospital], just this week I was there Monday morning, I’m going back Thursday morning. You can’t choose when your appointments are, they choose for you. Haha. And there is a lot of things going on at work right now, with policies, volunteer appreciation. We have a grant that I’m trying to finish, so the time crunch in here, and I’m gone for two mornings this week..

She experiences stress over not knowing what was wrong with her son. She also did not have control over when appointments were, which caused conflicts at work in her schedule. She had a lot going on at work, there was a time crunch. She had to take time off from work to go to the appointments. Amanda explained that she will be “stressed that I want to get everything I want to get done, accomplished. I’ll feel that way... that’s the way I am”. Her mother gave support by bringing her son to appointments. Amanda’s supervisor also allowed for flexibility in her schedule to ensure that she could go to appointments and also get work done. If she were to do

anything differently, she said that she would be more proactive with the medical care of her son and space projects out at work so it is less overwhelming.

Blair- The following is the stressful situation described by Blair:

Umm I think it was more with my old position because it was a day position. I worked straight days, and it was more with getting everything in those work times. And my kids were younger. So I think just trying to coordinate day care, recreational activities and work. There was a time when there were struggles because my husband is a [civil servant], and works shifts, so trying to get the shifts and trying to get all that down was a little bit tough.

She had difficulty coordinating family and work. Her husband worked shifts so he did not have a lot of flexibility with his schedule. Blair became so overwhelmed that she finally asked for help. She explained: "I felt confident enough to do that, where I didn't feel that I wasn't letting someone down. I realized its ok to ask for help and utilize the resources you have around you. No one can do it on their own." She made sure she was very organized and set more realistic personal (management related) expectations for herself.

Coleen- Coleen told a story about when she struggled to find balance between work and life:

umm well it was recently. So a time would be basically a 2.5 month period managing [two] branch programs, so basically taking two jobs into one job. Which didn't quite work. I was frequently finding myself working 7 in the morning to 11:00 at night. It was very hard at home, to the point where it was causing, not really conflict but I kind of felt like I was neglecting the animals because I wasn't tending to their needs because I was so busy doing work. A little bit of a strain on the relationship, because the same thing, you know just neglecting the other person, because you aren't really spending time. So I found that to be difficult, but at the same time the workload was so heavy that there was really no other way around it. It was just like in my head I knew this is going to be 2.5 months of an intense workload, 2.5 month of basically no time for myself, and I guess in the end I balanced it out by taking a week vacation when I was finished with that posting.

She did not have any time for herself, which she felt would have been important in order for her to cope with the stress. She had some support staff at work to help with some of the workload, support from her mother and her husband helped with home responsibilities. In the end result she

returned to her previous job responsibilities and the workload was much more manageable.

Coleen also realized that there needed to be more support at work and is trying to get more people to work together to make things more efficient and to pool resources.

Denise- Denise told of a time she felt she was unable to balance her work and personal life:

umm I mean I did struggle during... [a disaster at work] and I just gave up haha. The [other disaster] was like that as well... Umm at the time my mother was still alive and I was taking care of her, it was a really difficult situation. I was working all of these crazy hours, I remember I worked New Years Eve for God sake. Because we still had people coming in to give us money. As long as people are willing to give us money, we have to be here to take it. So that was a really bad situation. She (mother) was being neglected because she was disabled so she couldn't even make her own meals. That was a really difficult time for me, I really felt torn. I mean the one thing was it was just me. I get home at 11, I make a hot dog and I go to bed. Umm but yeah that was extremely difficult. I don't know... I know she suffered during it.

She did not have much support at work and had to do a lot of the work herself. She feels that as a result of working so much overtime she was unable to care for her mother, and that her mother suffered because of that. The organization suggests the use volunteers to help with the overwhelming workload, but Denise feels that volunteers sometimes creates more work for her because she has to explain everything and supervise the volunteers.

Erin- Erin talked about a time when she was unable to balance her work and personal life:

I was working for a different place... I had to run a summer camp. And it was absolutely, demands were completely unrealistic, I was in charge of everything from planning to budgeting to hiring the summer students to supervising them to being on site with like 40 kids. And if you've got 40 kids, then you've got 80 parents to deal with. It was just transportation, and I would work I would have to go in early, I was going home exhausted, you didn't stop, there were no lunch breaks, no nothing. I mean you ate lunch, but you were always working. I would go home so tired that I couldn't even go out to enjoy the things that I enjoy. It drained me so completely and it was every single day. It seemed like all summer I was going, and had no life. And it was... I didn't like it, it was the hardest job I've ever done. I did it for 2 years, when I took the job, she (supervisor) said you have to run summer camp, I said I will agree to do summer camp for 2 years, and she said I'll take it. Because I found out from people who worked the summer camp before, and they said that its horrendous. So I knew that I didn't want to promise to do it

for 20 years. So that was really hard. Like I said it ate up my personal life, I didn't have one.

Her supervisor was not understanding of her position and made her job much more difficult. She also felt she had no control over her working conditions. She also had to work a lot of hours, which really influenced her personal life. She tried to cope with the situation by talking to her supervisor, but it did not really help. She did not receive any support from anyone. The demands were so high, that Erin chose to leave the organization.

Felicity- Felicity's struggle to find balance between work and her personal life focused on a difficult board member:

Yes, umm I was dealing with a difficult board member who is no longer with us. It was more so me personally, it wasn't the position I was in. There would have been people in the same position who could have handled it a bit easier. I personally really struggled with it, we really butted heads and I felt like I couldn't do my job with that person in that position. It caused me to not sleep at night, it caused me to not do my work at work and uh it just overall... and it of course affected my family life. Yeah, it wasn't a fun situation. I probably learned a lot from it uh but nonetheless if something like that were to happen again... it's just who I am, it causes me to stay awake at night. Hopefully I learn to brush things off more easier, not worry about things so much.

The situation took a lot of her attention and affected her work life, as well as her personal life. She received support from her superiors, her family and friends. In order to cope she vented to those who were close to her and they encouraged her. Eventually the difficult person left and Felicity had the freedom to do her job the way that she saw fit.

Grace- Grace's struggle to find balance between work and her personal life focused on working two jobs simultaneously:

Yes. Umm about 10 years ago or 12 years ago, I decided I was going to pursue yoga as a full time career, and uh my marriage, I was single, my marriage I was separated. I decided I'm just going to go for it. Everything around me said follow your dream, but I had a mortgage and I couldn't quit my day job, so it was really difficult because I got so much yoga, I was teaching yoga 7 days a week, and still working 5 days a week. I would

even have a yoga class before work at 8:30, I think one at 7am, and I thought it was working better, but I was working way too many hours. I got used to it, you get used to operating on cortisol. It's not adrenaline, it's the bad hormone. It took a few years to slow down when I realized I couldn't do it.

She felt torn because she had expenses and a yoga instructor's salary could not support her as much as she would have liked or needed. So she continued to work her full time job as well. She worked more hours than she thought acceptable. In the end she learned to say no and realized she needed to be more realistic of her time. She received a lot of advice from friends at the time but was too stubborn to listen.

Hailey- When asked about a time where she struggled to find balance between work and her personal life Hailey told the following story:

Well when I was at convention last week, I got a phone call. My daughter was in the hospital, she broke her arm. It really affected my ability to be there, present at convention. So even after that, all I wanted to do was be at home. And the guilt of being at home for my daughter, that was really challenging. I get phone calls from school, your daughter's sick; you need to come pick her up. It's always me that has to drop everything I'm doing, because there is no one else for me to call. And that's an ongoing thing that happens frequently and is challenging as well.

Hailey spoke with colleagues and realized that her going home wouldn't change anything.

Although she felt guilty, she stayed for the remainder of the conference. When she returned home her daughter was very happy to have her back. After that, Hailey felt more appreciated at home.

From the stories that the participants shared with me it is easy to see a few commonalities. Many of the stories included main characters; the supervisor, the organization, family members and the participant. The plot often included overwhelming amounts of work or a crisis at work or a crisis at home. The conclusion? The crisis was over and they had successfully dealt with it and they could return to their regular routine. However, most felt that they did not cope with the

situation and had just pushed through it. The situation was over so they could return to their regular routine. The participants also discussed the consequences of not being able to find balance between their work and personal life. Many discussed a lack of time which resulted in less time to spend with their family, less time to care for their children and pets and less time for themselves. Participants who experienced a lack of time also experienced feelings of rushing and increased stress, which affected both their work and personal lives.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis: Positive Critical Incident

Amanda- Amanda is a busy woman who has young children, is working full time and her husband is out of town often. When asked about a time when she felt she was able to balance all of her commitments, Amanda told the following story:

umm... I guess when my children were really young. I was able to work. Start working right after my maternity leave, uh my husband works out of town quite a bit, go out of town for 8 months, he would come home on weekends. I was able to prioritize everything and still have a home life. And work those commitments and work as well. Uh... I just make sure that everything, I scheduled everything accordingly.

It was challenging because her children were young and had more needs. She was able to come back from maternity leave and still care for her children by prioritizing and planning everything carefully. She took personal time to rejuvenate and ensured that they had family time on the weekends to bond and to ensure her husband connected with the children. Also, her daycare was flexible with the schedule and her mother helped with the care of the children and household duties.

Blair- Blair seems to enjoy a lifestyle in which her commitments seem balanced. When asked about a time when she was able to balance all of her commitments she observed that:

umm well I think that's my everyday life. Again, I travel a lot for work so I'm able to ask my mom if she can come and stay if my husband's shifts kind of overlap and we are alone. I um

I just organize myself and make sure everything is made for the week. Um again organization has really helped me. And knowing what I can and can't do in terms of... the laundry can wait, the dusting can wait. I have prioritized what is important to me in this stage of my life, spending time with my family and asking family for help and um working. Because I do really love my job I do what I need to do and ask people to help me out, whether its transportation, pick up, drop off for sporting events, you know, after school. So far it's all worked out, organization and communication.

She travels a lot for work but is able to get support from her mother and organize when her husband's shifts are to ensure all of the household responsibilities are taken care of and her children are cared for. She has learned to prioritize what is important to her. She explained "the world is not going to end if they (the kids) don't make their beds every day." She has gained perspective of what is important.

Coleen- Coleen is a go-getter and it is important to her that she does her job well. This creates a lot of stress in her life, but also brings joy to her life when she gets it right. The following is the story that Coleen told about when she was able to find balance:

Umm I think when, every time our program changes, our program changes roughly every 5 years, so when we change our program, its new literature that come out, the instructors need to trained to new standards, we have to again, educate the public, internally train staff so that if anyone comes in they can answer inquiries. I think that would be a time when it's a lot of tasks to do in a very short time frame because when a new program rolls out you need to make sure that everyone is ready to go and we're all doing the same thing. It's something that is managed fairly easily again just by being organized, knowing when you are going to schedule your upgrade clinics and maybe having a meeting, a staff meeting or orientation something that you can bring everyone together so you can get everything done at once. Address any inquiries, anything that might come up.

In order to cope with all of this work she ensured that she was very organized and utilized her resources. The changes were successful and she was able to maintain a bit more balance between work and her personal life.

Denise- Denise finds her job very demanding and sacrifices her life to get it done. When she figures out how to get everything done she feels an added sense of accomplishment. When asked

about a time where she was able to manage all of her commitments, Denise told me the following story:

I think a couple of months ago I had to get a couple of grant applications in all at once and it was very stressful. Plus I also had a point where we have to work at reception sometimes and the day before it was due I had to work at reception for 2.5 hours because of a bunch of circumstances. But I worked from home that night to get it done. Umm those are short term things, I can do that. If it's a grant application I know its due in a week and I can't get it done. You know I can work a couple of nights at home, no big deal. But sometimes what will happen is I will get it done and I'll come in the next day and I'll leave early. I have that flexibility as well... With the grant applications I know when the deadlines are. One thing or another I know it will be over. Either I got it in or I didn't.

Denise worked in the evening to get the work done. In order to make up for that she took a morning off in lieu time. She also managed her time and got organized to ensure the work got done. She told me that she feels her time management skills are not great and she would like to attend a seminar to improve. She would also like to try to plan ahead.

Erin- Erin looks for ways to ensure she enjoys what she is doing and that she takes care of herself. The following is the story that Erin told of a time where she was able to manage her commitments:

I worked at [another organization], they had built a brand new store and they hired a bunch of us to set it all up and take the merchandise up, set the shelves, and the whole deal. So I got hired on there and before you went they made you agree something like... what was it... 8am-9pm, or something like that, not only did you agree to do that, but it started to be like you also work on Saturday and Sunday. And the reason we would do it, was because everyone wanted to get a full time job when it was done. So then you know it's wrong, and you know you don't want to do it, but they know you will do it because they won't give you the job. So I worked and I worked and I worked. And I worked those long days, for weeks and weeks and weeks, and finally one day they gave us the day off. Oh! A day off, I'm going canoeing (in very excited tone). That's what I love so much, it rejuvenates me, I think it's almost a spiritual thing for me, and so I did, I took that day, and I went by myself, I went in that canoe, and that was my thing.

In order to cope, with her limited time off, she engaged in her favourite leisure activity that helped rejuvenate her. Socialization with co-workers made the job more enjoyable and helped her cope with an unfavourable situation.

Felicity- As a young professional, Felicity faced many challenges in her first year at her place of employment. Felicity spoke of a time where she was able to manage her commitments:

Umm... yeah... umm... a couple of months ago I had a staff member that was a lovely person, but I don't think overall wanted to be here anymore. That makes it a bit difficult... that was challenging. And we got along for the most part pretty well, but she started being really quiet when she would come in. I could tell she really wasn't happy. And she didn't really want to talk about it. It was like she didn't want to admit it, or she didn't want to talk to me about it. That was a challenge. Because, as you saw when you came in, we have a very small office and if I were to come in all mopey and quiet, everyone would feel that right away. Umm and I didn't want to that to happen for the few people who are in the office. So I would try and keep it upbeat as much as possible and uh like I said, if you are kind of feeling down, and other things are creeping in, you're not as productive and you don't get you're worn done, you just don't feel good. So that was a challenge having someone like that in the office. The situation wasn't solved perfectly or right away, but overall it could have been worse. And I just gave her a chance for her to talk to me, and it kind of went up and down. Umm but yeah I think we balanced it out. And then it passed over...

Felicity felt torn because the problem the staff member was facing was personal and she did not want to pry into the person's personal affairs. She felt had it been a work related problem she could have helped, but did not feel able to help that person with personal problems. Felicity coped with the problem by getting support from those closest to her.

Grace- Grace has taken her experience from over the years and put it to use for helping her find a balance and to be more productive. When asked about a time where she was able to maintain many commitments she said:

Humm... I'm sure that there is a time... humm... probably now, I think I'm the best balance I have ever been. Because I do take the time for myself, I schedule 'me' days where there is no way I will make commitments. I really think commitments through before I do them I don't jump at the opportunity to be out in the community. I used to feel

if there was an opportunity for someone to make a speech about [the organization] if the director or the board wasn't available, I would jump at the chance. Now I think about it and let other people, it's nicer for other people to step up.

She ensures that she schedules time for herself. She also realized she does not have to do everything at work; she can empower others to do things and allow them the time to shine. She now reflects and takes the time to make the best decision for her.

Hailey- Hailey described how going away for a few days for work helped her balance competing commitments.

a specific time... that's kind of an ongoing thing too.... (long pause)... alright.. I am also an accreditor with the national agency, so I have to do one or two accreditation a year, which means I leave to go wherever across the country for a minimum of 3 days, so when I went to my first accreditation to [a town in western Ontario], I had to drive [there], which was fine, but then I was gone for 3 days and uh my second one was the same, I had to go to [the Greater Toronto Area]. The same situation, gone for 3 days. So I volunteered to do this, but on the other hand, what that means for my life is total chaos. Because I'm leaving my work responsibilities what I need to be doing, so everything that I should be doing at that time, is just building up for when I return, and at home, it's a lot of work for me to orchestrate to do that. And then I don't have the full support of my spouse either, he's not very supportive of it. There's that as well, and my kids don't like me being away, so there's the guilt of that. I'm doing it for myself, and it never feels good because of all of the other stuff that surrounds it.

Before she left she ensured that everything was organized and planned ahead for her family.

In order to cope she focused on the present to ensure that she got all of her work done.

Everything worked out, and Hailey felt more appreciated when she came home.

The main areas of importance were flexibility from their supervisor, support from their supervisor and family and being able to maintain their commitments. When individuals experienced flexibility at work they felt more able to manage their commitments. When individuals did not have flexibility at work, they felt less able to maintain their commitments. When support was present, participants felt more able to manage their commitments. When

support was lacking, participants experienced more stress and were less able to manage their commitments.

The positive situations followed a similar format to the negative one with the characters, the plot and the conclusion. An observation that I made was that there was not much difference in the stories between when they felt they were able to manage their commitments and when they couldn't. I would say the main difference between the two situations in general would be in the positive situation the positive emotions that individuals felt over feeling they could actually overcome the challenges that they were facing. Whereas in the negative situation, participants often explained that they felt they just pushed through the situation. Another observation is that some individuals were more comfortable with the imbalance whereas others needed to remember that the situation was temporary in order to get through the difficult situation.

Chapter Five: Analysis of Narratives

As mentioned, the critical incident technique is a qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of significant incidents identified by the participant, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects (Gremler, 2004). The objective is to gain understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements. (Gremler, 2004). The stories the participants told reflect their everyday life experiences and what methods they use to cope and overcome challenges to attain work-life balance.

I have allowed the participants to tell most of the story by including direct quotes from our interactions. In doing so, I hope to convey how they felt about their work-life balance, what causes them stress and what they have found that helps them find balance.

5.1 Themes

There were several themes that emerged throughout the research process. They include personal situation, work situation, efficacy facilitators, coping strategies and both personal and professional outcomes.

5.1.1 Personal Situation

The personal situation of all these individuals determines how many demands for their time they have, what their responsibilities are and how well they are able to balance their life. In an example of a typical evening, Erin says:

Like you know you work all day, by the time you grab a few things at the store, and you cook dinner, you do your dishes... if you happen to do your dishes. I have a dishwasher now, I love

it. And then it's like you need to go to Canadian Tire to return the lock you bought for your bike because it fell apart. And so you go there and you get a refund and you get home, and by the time you do a few things like that your evening is done. And there's still other things like that that I need to do. But well the laundry is just going to have to wait til tomorrow, and then there's still other things. And by the time you stick in a bike ride because you're too fat, the whole evening is gone.

Sometimes the participants felt, through the application of personal skills, that they could deal with multiple and often conflicting demands. Erin explained that regardless of what the commitment was, "You know if I take the job and I say I will do it, I would be committed to do it no matter what the hours." This shows that her priority is to keep her commitments regardless of what it does to her personal life. Erin also said "So I can balance things, but I do see some people... and think to myself 'why are you booking two things at the same time'? So maybe I'm just naturally, I seem to be naturally good at organizing things." This shows the difference in priorities. Erin feels that other people try to do too much and do not give enough attention to the first thing they committed to, whereas she does not do that. This suggests the demands on time and all of the pressure we put on ourselves to accomplish things that we feel are important. Other personal factors that influence work-life balance include: sources of stress in personal life, life stage, marital status, parental status, and lack of time.

Priorities- Within the research it was found that an individual's priorities were very important to their decision making. Individual's priorities determine how they spend their time and what they focus on. There were commonalities between individual's priorities. Most stated that their family, friends, being happy and successful at work were their priorities. Some other participants explained that caring for their family, their children, their parents, aunts and their pets were their priorities. One particular quote from Erin's interview that really demonstrated her priority in life, she said that what is important to her was to do what she loved and "when you follow your bliss

you have so many more hours in you... so that's the secret to life, find something you want to do.”

As an example of one of Erin's priorities, she stated “Let's not save money, let's go to Florida, and we would. Because your kids are only young once, you have to watch your kids and play with your kids and love them. Everything else, we'll get to it.” This shows that she valued spending time with her kids, enjoying their company and being happy, rather than her financial situation.

Sources of Stress in Personal life- Individuals encounter many sources of stress in their personal lives. Blair explains that “it's how much pressure we put on ourselves” that creates stress. Increased demands on time have been found to cause stress and issues with work-life balance (Ilies et al., 2007). Each of the participants explained that there was at least one thing in their personal life that caused them stress. They ranged from caring for a sick child, caring for a parent, having a partner demand they spend more time at home, and not having a partner to spend time with.

A specific example that Hailey gave of how her personal life negatively influenced her work-life balance was when her daughter broke her arm while Hailey was away at a conference and could not come home to take care of her daughter. She explained that “Its always me that has to drop everything I'm doing, because there is no one else for me to call.” This creates a lot of stress and added pressure on Hailey. Amanda also explained that having a sick child causes stress over making it to doctor's appointments, worrying what is wrong and worrying about when she is going to get her work done. Coleen explained that her partner works out of town and so “when he is home, there is that expectation that we will plan something to do together.” This

expectation can at times conflict with what Coleen feels she needs to do in order to do her job well, thus creating stress in her personal life. Blair also said that “stress can really eat you alive if you are not careful. It affects family, relationships with your kids, your husband, your partner, whoever. Keeping an eye on it, keeping everything in check.”

Life stage- Life stage also can impact the level of stress or issues with work-life balance. Wang, Lawler and Shi (2010) found lifecycle to be a determinant of the extent of issues with work-life balance that individuals experience. Felicity who is a young employee that recently got married is now contemplating having children. Felicity said: “Umm so ya, things are good. I hope that... I don’t intend for that to change. Having kids will create a different obstacle. I try not to look at it as a negative thing.” Felicity also mentioned:

And I think I’d like to stay home for longer with my kids, but even financially I don’t know if that will be the best decision for us. So I’ll probably come back, but I think I’m the type of person who will probably be a better mom, wife if I am working, and not a full stay at home mom.

When I asked Felicity when she thought she would start having children, she said not for another few years. This shows that even though she is not at that stage, she is still thinking about the stress to come. Other issues with lifecycle that were mentioned throughout the interviews include having young children that create a lot of demands on your time, when you are a little bit older and your children move away it can be stressful not seeing them as much as you would like and starting to think about retirement and your financial situation. There are many different issues that come up when talking about life stage, they are often intertwined with marital status and parental status.

Marital status- Within this research, marital status was found to be a significant determinant of issues with work-life balance and stress. Md-Sidin, et al. (2008) reported that individuals who are married experience more issues with work-life balance than those who are unmarried, this

was consistent with the findings of this study. Individuals who were married had another person depending on them and although they often shared home responsibilities, still experienced significant amount of stress. An unsupportive partner can also create a great deal of stress.

Hailey explains that she feels a lack of support from her husband

I definitely feel that I need more time for myself, and I don't have that. And it's one of those things I don't feel that, I know that my husband doesn't understand that, there's no support in that way. So it makes it even more difficult to take the time. So yea... that's really a missing piece for sure. There are a lot of things I would like to do that I don't get to do.

Felicity did mention that her husband was extremely supportive, understanding and encouraging. She often would come to him to discuss issues at work and he would help her overcome those problems. There were also two individuals who were divorced and explained that their stress level significantly decreased when they started living on their own. However, they did say that they missed having a partner to engage in leisurely activities with.

Parental Status- Within the literature, parental status has been found to have a great impact on an individual's stress levels and struggle to attain work-life balance. Tausig and Fenwick (2001) explain that the presence or absence of children in the family continues to make a significant difference in the degree of balance that individual's experience. The findings from this study are no different. Amanda explains that "a lot of my leisure time is spent driving to their (kids') activities". Alternatively, Blair explains that "my kids' sporting events have been incorporated in our social lives, we have met a lot of wonderful people because we see them at soccer games and hockey games." Blair personally saw the positive aspect of her children's recreational activities in terms of the social benefits for herself.

Family responsibilities such as household time demands, family responsibility level, household income, spousal support and life course stage have been found to be sources of work-

life stress (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Family responsibilities typically involve the care of children and thinking of their wellbeing. Hailey explains: “My daughter just broke her arm umm last day of school. So she’s not able to do any of that (leisure activities). So this summer especially right now thinking what are we going to do. Because she can’t do anything that we would normally do. So that’s really weighing on my mind right now.” This shows that the responsibility of caring for children can mentally drain someone by them worrying and thinking about how to best care for their children.

It has also been found that parents often sacrifice a lot for their kids. Amanda states that “I had much more leisure time before I had children for sure. So enjoy it”. Amanda also said that “If there was anything it would be for me, that I would give up so that they can make it to their activities” This shows a willingness to sacrifice personal needs for the wellbeing of children. In doing so, individuals can lose the opportunity to engage in leisure and not experience the potentially rejuvenating benefits of participation in leisure.

Lack of time- All of the participants complained of not having enough time. There is not enough time to get everything done at work. There is not enough time to get all of the home responsibilities done and also enjoy time with those close to you and engage in leisure. Hailey explains:

There’s just not enough time in the day. And also, in addition to that, I have the flexibility to do that, to go to the gym, that’s what I really like to do, at work. But myself I get busy and wrapped up with what I’m doing. It’s difficult to stop and do that for an hour. So I do that. And then in the evenings umm you know it’s too much going on with everything.

Similarly, Hailey explains that she has “too much juggling, too much on my plate. From early morning until... it’s all day. As soon as I leave work, my mind is going – what do I need to do now?” This shows a mental strain with a heavy workload. Hailey is constantly thinking about

what she has to do and what is next. Lack of time can cause an individual to feel rushed, Coleen said that “I always feel like I’m rushing, 100% of the time”. In hindsight, Grace explains “I would have friends, and I think it was a competition, we would say oh I’m really busy, and they would say no, no I’m really busy. It’s crazy what we do. It’s not a good thing. I think at one time I thought it was good thing.” Grace realized that rushing and being busy all of the time is not a good thing. Questioning the amount of time and energy devoted to work is consistent with Maxwell and McDougall’s (2004) findings. She also brought up the point that being busy became a competition with friends, which made it seem desirable to be busy.

5.1.2 Work situation

The participants described how priorities, responsibility level, workload and expectations were the most significant contributors to stress and issues with work-life balance. Blair explains that: “I think that all work at some point will impact on your personal life and your recreational type activity”. The environment in which individuals work in can also impact their ability to find work-life balance. Blair explains:

I think in social services as a whole that we just want to please people all the time, we have a difficult time saying no, we have a difficult time because we see them in different circumstances we tend to just often put our own need and wants and our families a little bit secondary to our jobs because we feel that umm we want to excel at our job. We need to remember that we want to excel at our personal lives.

Priorities- As mentioned previously, priorities are important in an individual’s decision making and how they spend their time. Work priorities are very different than personal priorities. Work priorities determine how much time an individual will spend at work, how much effort they will put it and can determine how much work influences their personal life. Felicity explained how being productive at work was a priority for her because it allowed her to feel a sense of

accomplishment. Blair explained that she realized that the work environment was changing, that she had to adapt her expectations. In turn, this helped her feel that she was doing her best at work and helped her remain flexible. This change in mind frame also really helped in her home life. She said that her realistic expectations helped her feel like “I know what I can juggle and what I can’t” also she said “I’m just human and I can’t get to everything my kids want and provide everything that my kids want. But I can do my best.” This realization has helped Blair feel happy with her current situation and allows her to give herself a break.

Similarly, Felicity said “Someone actually said to me, quite a few years ago, umm that they work so that they can live, they don’t live so they can work. So I like my job, and I don’t mind taking it home but if I want to do something with my husband, or with my sisters or with a friend I can put that aside, and that waits. It’s not going to go anywhere.” This shows that her priority is spending time with friends or family, work can wait.

Responsibility level- Responsibility level refers to what the individual’s job entails. The individuals that were interviewed had a wide range of responsibility level. Innstrand, Langballe and Falkum (2010) explain that when an individual feels they have too many responsibilities, they report higher levels of stress, which is consistent with what was found in this study. Erin explains: “So yeah, if it’s a hard job, I don’t have the energy to do the things I love and like.” This can be interpreted that if Erin were to have too high of a responsibility level she would be unable to engage in leisure, which would significantly impact her life because she would be unable to experience the rejuvenating aspects of leisure. Erin explained that when she first started her job, the responsibility level was overwhelming. She did not have anyone to teach her how to do her job and this caused her a lot of stress;

When I first started here, there was no training. They all started laughing, no there's no training, figure it out on your own. So I closed my office door, I went in there, and I just started reading, I read everything on the computer, all of the files, everything on the internet, but I just stressed out to the max. I took this job, and I don't know how to do it. I would go home, and walk in the door and my mom would say 'how are you?' I'd start to cry...

This shows the impact that uncertainty can have. Not only did she feel incapable of doing her job but it caused her to break down and question herself. Conversely, Bond and Bunce (2001) explain that low level of responsibility level and autonomy leads to increased stress. This is consistent with what Coleen explained when she did not have control over the amount of work that she was given. She explained that she was doing the work of two people with little support and that she "didn't really cope with it. I just did the work, that's pretty much it... I pretty much felt like a robot or a zombie." On the odd occasion when a balance can be found and the individual feels they have the right amount of responsibility, individuals feel they can be successful at work and sometimes go above and beyond and engage in extra-role behaviours (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). Unfortunately the participants in this study were not fortunate enough to experience this type of balance.

Workload- Workload reflects the demands placed upon employees in their jobs and thus has often been referred to as a job stressor (Ilies et al., 2007). The literature suggests that such workload issues can be a significant contributor to stress. High work intensity or the amount of work an individual is responsible for may result in fatigue, anxiety or other adverse psycho-physiological consequences that can influence an individual's ability to find work-life balance (White, et al., 2003). This is consistent with what participants shared; many of them stated that they had too much work to do and not enough time to do it in. This often leads to working overtime. Denise gave an example of a time where she worked a lot of overtime;

There was a period of time when I worked something like 14-18 days straight, and they were twelve hour days. I'd leave my house at eight in the morning and come home at ten at night because I'd have to attend an event after work... Or work on the weekend... So when that happens the rest of my life just falls apart, it's very difficult.

Felicity said "I feel like the days are way too short. My days never go by slowly, which is a good thing they don't drag. But it comes to 4:00, and I work until 4:30, and I'll say how did this happen? I just feel like I never get enough done." With "too large" workloads, workers can feel they never accomplish enough. This, in turn, can lead to negative psychological consequences such as feelings of incompetence, decreased morale or decreased job satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2007).

The ability to keep on top of work commitments is what most of the participants explained was how they managed their work-life balance. Specifically, participants: prioritize, plan, delegate, organize, work hard, juggle, manage commitments, learn to say no, use resources, focus on present, be realistic, power through and stay positive. Hailey explained "I make sure everything at home is taken care of, I make all of the arrangements for everybody, depending on what's going on, if who needs to be, if they need to be somewhere, and make sure it's been taking care of. So yeah, just lots of planning." Colleen was unhappy with this rather passive approach. When given extra tasks, she believed that "there needs to be a balance. If you are putting more work on a person, there needs to be something taken away to alleviate the pressure". Colleen also dealt with workload by trying "to keep a very organized and tight schedule, when possible. Umm that can sometimes be complicated because when something doesn't go as planned it's frustrating. So try to reschedule..." However, Colleen acknowledged the difficulty in staying ahead of workplace demands:

I manage to get everything done. And whether it's from staying up later or getting up earlier umm not taking a lunch break, I do manage to get things done. But I think that if I

was taking breaks, sleeping more and working regular hours, then of course things would fall behind and not be completed.

This shows self sacrifice in order to manage a heavy workload. Coleen explained that after taking on added responsibilities at work, “kind of just being pushed to the point of being burnt out by the job, just to realize that you don’t really have to work that way. I look at other people and realize that they leave it to the next day, so you can do the same thing.” She realized that sacrificing her personal life was not making her a better employee. It is possible to stop working and ensure that there is a balance between work and personal life.

In terms of maintaining a manageable workload, Erin explained “I don’t commit to too many things. If it’s absolutely necessary, I’ll do it and I’ll get through it”. Erin also stated “you might get overtime, work a lot of overtime, you might get a lot of money, but if you’re exhausted and you’re unhappy and resentful, that doesn’t work out too good.” This suggests the potentially negative consequences of taking on too much. Felicity said “when I got your email, most things that come up like that, not with studies, but other things that aren’t really connected to work I just say no, because I feel like I can’t fit it in, or I feel like I should be fitting work in.” This shows a pressure to get work done where Felicity felt she could not take on anything extra in order to maintain her workload.

Expectations- The participants explained that there are formal expectations or job responsibilities and then there are the unspoken expectations of the workplace. Denise explains the unspoken expectations at her workplace: “Because we have that home access it becomes expected that we do take advantage of it, after hours. It’s sort of an unspoken expectation” to check emails at night. These informal expectations are part of the organizational culture, as van Beek and Gerritsen (2010) explain.

Coleen explains that at the organization she works for, there are very high expectations for employees in terms of workload. She describes how that has impacted her and co-workers. “It’s a strain on everyone. And then you start questioning at the end of the day how effective you are at your job when you are tied up with all of these minor things that you don’t need to be, that sort of stop you from doing your job.”

There are also individual’s expectations of themselves. Hailey goes above and beyond the formal expectations of her workplace, to attain the expectations she has of herself: “I have a blackberry, so any emails that come in, I respond to. And I’m not required to, but I do that.” The personal standards that participants set for themselves could often add to stress levels. As Felicity explains:

We’re a not-for-profit, so we don’t get paid for overtime, it’s just not in the budget um but nonetheless if I want to do a good job and I want this place to do well I have to put in overtime... so it’s a fair bit of commitment that goes into work, by choice. I could obviously cut back if I wanted to, but I want to do well, and I want this place to do well. So sometimes work comes home with me.

Grace explains that she had to change her own expectations to finally find her own work-life balance: “I’m finally getting it, and understanding my limitations. I used to be a closet perfectionist. You wouldn’t know it, but I expected so much of myself. If I would fail, I would beat myself up over it. But I don’t do that anymore.” Coleen has also revised her expectations of herself, she explains that “I’ve learned that at the end of the day the one thing that you think you should bring home with you to get done, you really don’t need to. It can wait until tomorrow.” This demonstrates that sometimes an individual’s expectations of themselves are much higher than the expectations that the organization can have of them. These high expectations can impact an individual’s work life and their ability to also have a personal life. Through experience, some of the participants realized that they were putting too much pressure on themselves.

5.1.3 Efficacy Facilitators

Efficacy facilitators are things that help individuals attain better work-life balance, such as flexibility, support and resources. Work-life balance is no longer about working fewer hours (Maxwell, 2005). Within the literature there have been many tactics explored that individuals use to manage work life stress, such as flexibility, social support and access to resources. The following is what the participants felt were important to them in their quest to attain work-life balance.

Flexibility- From a review of the literature, Porter and Ayman (2010) explain that flexibility is arguably the most important facilitator of work-life balance, which is consistent with the findings in this study. Erin explains that you need to give a little in order to be given flexibility; “If you talk to them (organization), its give and take. You give a little when they need you to come in a little earlier, they need you to stay a little late, you do it.... then they’ll make that work for you (when you have a situation that comes up)”. This shows that employees are willing to give back when they are allowed a bit of understanding.

Grace explains that at her organization “all of our employees are able to pick up and take off. There is always someone who can fill in, because we realize another time it might be us. We are also asked to work so many nights and weekends that umm you know to reward us for being flexible, we can go as long as we make it up.” Blair explained “I am able to work from home... It is a balancing act but umm I really enjoy my job, so I am very fortunate umm do things via webinars, or teleconferences, emails, that sort of thing”. This shows an appreciation for the flexibility she has been provided. Erin explained her work hours as: “Its 9-5 and usually things

are really flexible if I have a doctor's appointment, I can put down that I have a personal appointment and go. So I feel very fortunate about that." Hailey said

There are not many workplaces that allow you the flexibility to leave for a doctor's appointment or to go to the dentist or whatever or your child is sick, or you're sick and you don't have to make up an excuse as to why you are going to be away from the office.

Amanda explained that her ability to manage work-life stress is due to: "being able to flex my hours". All of the participants showed a great deal of appreciation for the flexibility they were provided with. They explained that it really made it much easier to balance all of their commitments.

Resources- Most of the individuals that I interviewed for this research did not receive a lot of work-life balance resources at work. Two individuals received a newsletter with tips, another attended a yearly conference where there were sessions on how to manage stress and others could attend outside sessions if it was financially possible. The current literature suggests that work-life balance resources can significantly impact an individual's work-life balance, however from this research I believe that work-life balance resources are helpful when an individual does not have any flexibility, support or coping strategies.

Support- Support can come in many different forms: co-workers, supervisor, the organization, family and friends. Md-Sidin, et al. (2008) explain that social support is an informal social network that provides individuals with expressions of emotional concern or empathy, practical assistance, informational support or appraisal. Increased social support is related to increased health and well-being (Adams, King & King, 1996; Md-Sidin, et al., 2008). It was found that individuals that had different sources of support were better able to find work-life balance, which is generally consistent with Cinamon and Rich's (2010) findings.

Co-workers- Blair explains the importance of relying on co-workers: "I'm not good at everything, and that's ok. Because there are people in our department or our whole organization who are good at technology, or this. I'm more on the creative and personal side. So you know utilizing the resources we have and feeling comfortable with that." Co-workers can have a positive impact on employees. Hailey explains: "So last year I was off work for a month so I had people pitching in and doing my job and support during that time. Family support is not so much, I don't have a lot of family support." Sometimes co-workers don't always positively influence everyone, Coleen explains "from co-workers, I mean, I think we are all really pressured to meet deadlines and complete different job functions, so it can be stressful amongst co-workers, you try and support each other but you are also trying to maintain those positive relationships, it all depends on how people work together." Denise explains how some co-workers can be helpful and others only think of themselves:

So umm like co-workers to a certain point (provide support), as long as they're able to, some co-workers did a lot of work that wasn't their job, but they did it to be supportive. Now they still have their goals and objectives that they have to meet, again they don't report to me, so I can't say you have to, but they just do. As far as other people, no not at all. They just don't feel it's their job, so too bad.

Supervisor- A supervisor can either help support employees or make their jobs much more challenging. Support from supervisors has been reported to reduce issues with work-life balance (Major & Lauzun, 2010). Blair explains that "it makes a big difference when you have a supervisor who umm is compassionate and aware of home life priorities".

Many of the participants explained that their supervisor is very helpful and makes their job much easier. Amanda explains: "I have always said that if I didn't have her (supervisor), I'd have a lot of problems". Amanda also said "she (supervisor) does help me, she says go deal with it, then come back and we will figure out how to work around your schedule". Blair explains that

her supervisor “is very understanding for sure, I think it really helps when your supervisor has held the same roles, mother and is juggling that”. This shows the difference a supervisor that can relate to employees and an understanding supervisor can make. Coleen explains that her supervisor “is pretty great at ensuring that we are working extra hours that we take time off in form of lieu time.” This shows that a supportive supervisor can really ensure that an employee is able to successfully achieve work-life balance.

Grace explains that sometimes her supervisor can be a positive attribute to the job, but can also create more stress: “I think I’m in that position of middle management where I have someone telling me what I have to do but I also I’m responsible for staff underneath, so kind of being pulled. I can’t make the decisions but I have to explain the decisions.” Similarly, Coleen explains “And I think it all stems down from the top line. If you have an effective manager who is also organized and doesn’t just throw things at you last minute, it can sort of help with dealing with things like that that come your way. But I do receive a lot of last minute requests and so I think it can put a strain on you.” This shows that a supervisor can really negatively influence an individual’s outlook of their work and can create more work for the employee. Denise also has negative interactions with her supervisor. When talking about her supervisor, she said

A lot of the time she is just MIA (unavailable) and everybody will be looking for her for stuff, and when they can’t find her they come to me. And so I would sort of pick up her slack, and she doesn’t even know I’ve ever done that. I can’t really say, why aren’t you responding to your emails and why aren’t you responding to this person and this person. Because when you don’t, I have to. So I have to say she does make it (her job) harder.

Organization- An organization can either formally support employees with work-life balance policies, employees can perceive that the organization informally supports work-life balance or it does not support work-life balance. The actions and behaviours of individuals particularly in a

management position are perceived by employees as reflecting the organization as a whole.

When asked whether her organization supports work-life balance, Denise responded

Every Friday he (the Director) would send out these updates and would say ‘don’t forget to take care of yourselves’ and it got to the point where I wouldn’t even read the emails any more. They would make me so mad. What does that mean? If I take time off there isn’t anyone to do the work. So there is lip service that has to do with that.

This is an example where the organization may feel that it is supporting employee’s work-life balance but the employees’ perceive that the organization is just pretending to support work-life balance. When asked what the organization could do to help others maintain work-life balance, Felicity said:

If we do, whether it’s our resource in our office with tips and strategies on how to help people. Or maybe we bring someone in, again because we’re so small, even if I had a staff of 10, not that my small staff doesn’t deserve it, it’s hard to bring in people for such a small group, but to bring in a coach to talk about it or even just to have a staff meeting where we talk about it together would probably be helpful.

Erin explains how she feels her organization should formally support work-life balance with policies “No, I kind of felt that we needed some of that. That that was missing a little bit. Nothing’s happened yet, but maybe in the future.” Grace explains how she tried to develop more policies to better support individual’s work-life balance but the organization did not agree, “I was working on HR policy, and umm I wanted to include, instead of sick days, we get 8 sick days a year, I wanted to include family days, so that our employees with children could call up and say my child can’t go to school today, I need the day off, and use a day off. The board and the executive director did not agree.”

When asked about work-life balance policies, Blair said: “Because we are such a large organization, what may work for one office, for one region may not work for others”. This suggests that organizations face a lot of issues with work-life balance programs. In the not-for-

profit sector, many of those problems come down to resources, particularly money. When an organization is relying on the public for financial support, it is important that they are responsible to them by keeping costs down. This can sometimes inhibit programs for staff, like work-life balance programs. However, as Blair also said “if we are happy at our home lives, we will be happy at work. It’s a big circle, if you are happy at work, you will be happy at home. It will work”. This shows that regardless of financial issues, it is important to help employees be happy and balanced so that they can contribute to the organization.

5.1.4 Coping Strategies/ Actions

Coping strategies and actions that individuals can use to decrease life stress is an important aspect of finding work-life balance. An individual’s coping style, the way in which he or she manages stressful events can help an individual overcome work life balance issues (Bekker et al., 2010). Denise explains the implications of not coping: “It’s very tough, my personal life falls apart, I don’t see any friends, my house is a disaster, nothing gets done. Haha... it’s you know, I just kind of tough it out, there is nothing else that can be done.”

Amanda explains that she segments in order to cope with the demands of work and her personal life; “when I’m at work, I’m at work. And when I’m at home I try to be with my family”. Blair said that “if things come up I usually let my boss know. If there is a school play or thing that I want to go to with my kids, I just ensure that you know I wake up earlier, go to bed later. Just make sure the work is still getting done.”

Help/Family support- Many participants received family support. Amanda and Blair received support from their mother with their children. Blair explained: “I travel a lot for work so I’m able to ask my mom if she can come and stay if my husband’s shifts kind of overlap and we are

alone.” This support means that she does not need to worry about her children and can concentrate on work. Coleen received support from her mother as well as emotional support with work issues. Erin and Felicity received emotional support from their sisters. Erin explains “I have a really great family, they help me, like when I moved, I don’t know what I would have done without my sisters.” Denise does not have any family so did not receive support from them. Hailey and Grace did not receive support from their families. Hailey explains that she feels a lack of support from her husband

I definitely feel that I need more time for myself, and I don’t have that. And it’s one of those things I don’t feel that, I know that my husband doesn’t understand that, there’s no support in that way. So it makes it even more difficult to take the time. So yea... that’s really a missing piece for sure. There are a lot of things I would like to do that I don’t get to do.

Leisure- Leisure has been found to reduce tension and enhance stress coping skills (Trenberth & Dewe, 2002). Grace stated “I’m pretty satisfied with how much leisure time I have. But I wouldn’t complain if I had more.” This shows the appreciation for leisure, and always wanting more. Blair mentioned “In the last year I have been able to get back to the things I really love, and not feel guilty.” She attributes this to her children getting older and having fewer needs.

Although leisure is meant to be relaxing and rejuvenating, it can also create added stress. Amanda and Blair shared that at times, they had to sacrifice their own leisure to accommodate their children’s recreational activities. Leisure can also become a family pursuit that can bring the family together, but at the same time take away from an individual’s personal leisure time. Amanda explains “we still try to have family time. As much as possible, we try to incorporate our leisure time together”. Many participants commented on the lack of leisure time they had and how that has impacted their quality of life. It seems, for example, that leisure can get sacrificed for work. Many individuals have to give up their leisure pursuits to work overtime. This can be particularly true in the not-for-profit sector when employees need to attend or run fundraising

activities on the weekend. Another issue with leisure is lack of energy to engage in leisure activities. Denise, Erin and Felicity explained that they are often so tired from work that they do not want to engage in leisure. Erin explained that her previous job was so demanding that it really impacted her leisure, “I would go home so tired that I couldn’t even go out to enjoy the things that I enjoy. It drained me so completely and it was every single day.” Also, for example, Denise said that “having more personal time and interactions and stuff, not being so tired when I leave work so that I would have more energy for leisure time” are the things that would make her happier.

5.1.5 Outcomes

As McDowell (2010) explained it, the reference point for judging well-being is a person’s own aspirations based on a blend of objective reality and their subjective reactions to it. There were a few reoccurring themes when participants were asked what work-life balance is. They were around the idea of having enough time, policies and resources at work that support work-life balance, having separation between work and home and work-life balance means just feeling satisfied in your life.

Most of the participants had an image of what work-life balance ideally looks like. When asked what her ideal work-life balance would look like, Hailey said that work-life balance would mean: “enough hours in the day to go to work, and having enough hours to do what you needed to do at work without any other distractions or interruptions then leaving at the end of the day feeling good with what you accomplished and not worry what you didn’t get to, or what needs to be addressed because that interrupts my sleep.” With a similar time theme, Denise explains that her ideal work-life balance is to “just have time, it’s all about time. Just to keep your life in control. I guess it’s all about control too, because that’s what happens when you don’t have

work-life balance”. This demonstrates that individuals value time and control. Having the autonomy to choose how to use your time at work can significantly reduce stress and improve work-life balance.

In a revelation in the middle of the interview, Erin declared

If I can tell myself its temporary, then I know I can endure it. That’s the secret... that’s the secret for me. Is if its temporary I know I can do it, I can get through it. And if it’s not temporary...or if I don’t know where the end is.... its knowing the end is in sight that works for me and I’m able to do it, psychologically I could. And if it wasn’t (temporary), I’d get out of it.

There are a few components in this quote that can help with understanding how an individual perceives their work-life balance; work-life balance is a state of mind- individuals choose to mentally overcome challenges they face. Also, it was found that a temporary situation has fewer implications on an individual’s work-life balance.

Participants also spoke about work hours. Denise said: “I think that whenever I go on job interviews they say well you know there may be some non-traditional hours, I don’t think that there are really any traditional hour jobs left. I think that this is something that everyone needs to cope with.” This speaks to the change in the workforce that most individuals are not working the “traditional” jobs that work forty hours a week. When explaining that work sometimes gets in the way of home, Coleen says “I don’t really know that there is a balance for that or a way to get rid of that”. This shows that the shift in work situations and changing work schedules, can really impact an individual and how to fix that is still unknown. Similarly, Blair said:

I think the 9-5 jobs are sort of um done. I think that we are in a different circle of trying to balance work-life only because uh I feel like my generation, like 30s and 40s, not only are we taking care of our kids, our home life, but our parents and aging population. I think that organizations have to look at trying to help individuals find work-life balance. And being open to ideas of job sharing, part time with benefits, umm home office, teleconference, webinars, and using technology more.

This also brings up the issue of not only care of children, but also care of parents. With the increasing life expectancy, children increasingly have to care for their parents. This can create an added burden for those children. Blair mentioned that organizations need to “step up and help” individuals to find a better work-life balance. Many of the participants mentioned how important flex-time is in their ability to manage both their work and home commitments. Flex-time allows individuals flexibility in their schedule to better accommodate all of their commitments. Time off was also found to be important; particularly, lieu time. If an individual works overtime, (s)he expect to get time off to make up for that extra work. This allows individuals to take a break and rejuvenate so that they can continue to be a happy and productive employee. Which can be exemplified in Felicity’s following quote: “I think that if staff members are more balanced, and they’re happier and therefore more productive.”

For most participants, they did not experience the “ideal” work-life balance of sharing your time half at work and half at home. Generally, they would work as much as they needed to, and tried to do the best they could with the time they had leftover. Occasionally when there was an emergency or something that had to be dealt with during the day, they were able to take some time off from work to tend to personal matters. However, when they returned to work they still had to catch up on what they missed. When asked how to attain the positive outcomes that they had described many explained they had too many commitments, or needed to learn to be better at multi-tasking.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The preceding chapter highlighted the key findings based upon discussions with eight employees who work in the not-for-profit sector. This chapter follows up by re-examining the conceptual framework of work-life balance presented within the literature review. The research questions will be re-examined as well as how the research findings have answered those questions. I will also explain what the findings indicate. A discussion of the limitations of this research and suggestions for future research on work-life balance will also be presented.

6.1 Revising the Proposed Framework on Work-Life Balance

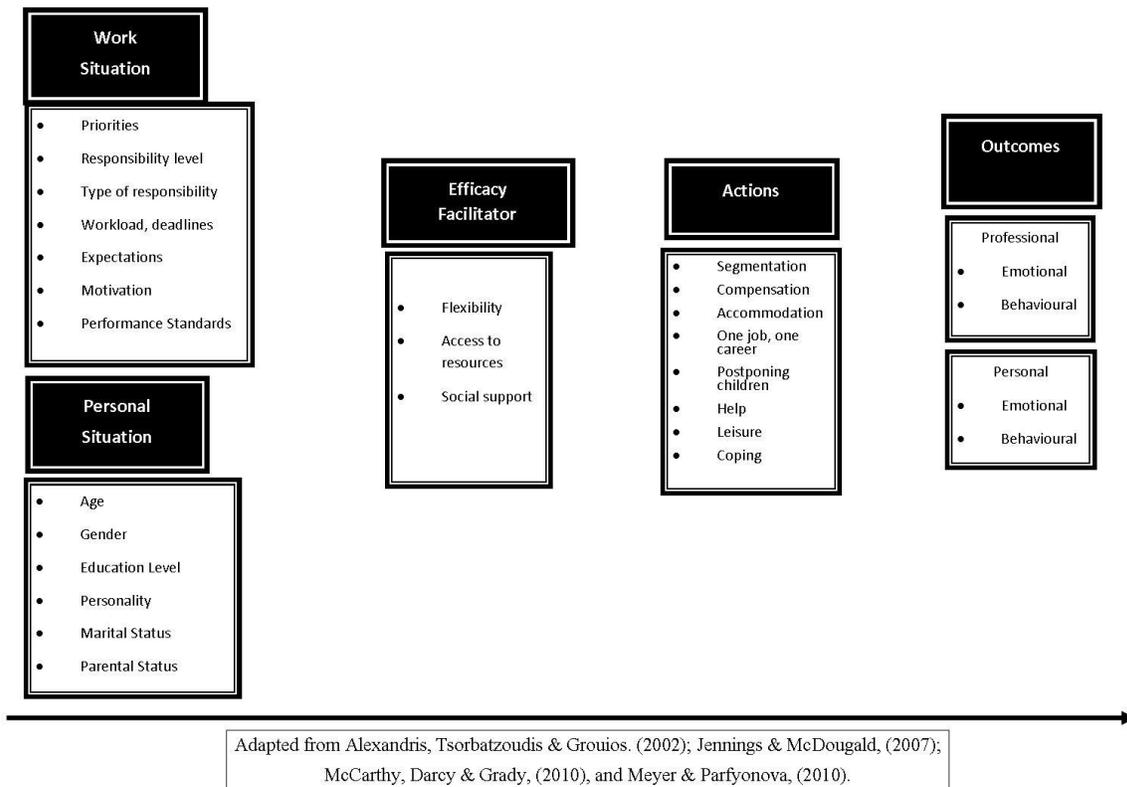
I have adapted the previous framework that was presented in the literature review to reflect what the participants felt to be important to them in their work-life balance. It seems more accurate that work situation and personal situation be considered simultaneously within the framework. This reflects the ongoing negotiation that occurs as participants seek to create work-life balance.

Professional and personal outcomes have also been merged into one section. The two domains are so intertwined that it works best when they are together. This framework will be used to focus the discussion on the personal situation, work situation, efficacy facilitators, coping strategies and both personal and professional outcomes.

Within the research it was found that personal situations influence the commitments workers face in their personal lives. The work situation determines the type of work and the responsibilities associated with their employment. The efficacy facilitators relate to the things that help individuals attain better work-life balance, such as flexibility, support and resources.

Actions are the things that individuals choose to do to help them attain work-life balance.

Outcomes relate to how individuals perceive work-life balance.



6.2 Review of Results

As stated previously, the research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the role played by task variables in balancing work-life demands?
2. What conditions might facilitate balancing work-life demands?
3. What actions might workers undertake to deal with competing work – life demands?
4. What are the outcomes (both professional and personal) of the balancing process?

Research Question One: What is the role played by task variables in balancing work-life demands?

Responsibility level, workload and expectations were important contributors to stress and issues with work-life balance. When workers experience overly demanding responsibility levels, stress can result. They may respond by altering their own capacity. In this study they often worked overtime in order to meet job expectations. This response seems appropriate in the short term but can limit workers efforts to undertake rejuvenating leisurely activities.

Research Question two: What conditions might facilitate balancing work-life demands?

What was found was that flexibility was the most important factor that allowed participants to be able to find balance between work and their personal life. Most participants were allowed the flexibility to leave work to attend to personal issues. The majority of participants explained that they had more flexibility at work because they could put things on hold, however with personal issues they were often pressing. However, later in the interview many participants explained that their personal life suffered because of work demands. This may be explained as participants thoughts on what area of their life they have flexibility is situation specific. Alternatively, it is possible that participants would rather believe that they put their personal life before their professional life.

Support from supervisor, co-workers, spouse and family was also extremely important. Individuals who did not have support experienced higher stress levels than those that did have support. Individuals that did have support still reported experiencing stress but were more resilient. All of the participants said that in some way their organization supports work-life balance. Many of the participants noted that the organization did not have specific work-life balance policies where benefits were provided. However, the participants explained their

supervisor was understanding and flexible, which they interpreted as supporting work-life balance. The resources that were provided by the organization seemed to offer little additional support but participants explained they were nice to have. When asked further about this, the participants explained that they did not make use of these resources, therefore did not positively influence their life. This may be interpreted as the benefits did not meet the needs of the employees, therefore were not helpful.

Research Question three: What actions might workers undertake to deal with competing work – life demands?

What was found was that there were many sources of support that helped these individuals cope. Family members providing support was found to be very important to individuals to help them cope. Engaging in leisure was also found to be important in helping individuals manage their work-life balance, when they made the time for it. Having a manageable workload allows individuals to be able to complete their work at work and not eat away at their personal life. Many participants stated that in order to cope with many competing demands they prioritized. In doing so, there were a lot of things that got ignored or forgotten during the busy times. Some of those things were their own leisure time, household tasks and their personal relationships. Most of these things were sacrificed for work.

Research Question Four: What are the outcomes (both professional and personal) of the balancing process? This question asks participants to explain how all of these demands, has influenced their leisure life.

All participants stated that they would like more leisure time because they recognized the positive benefits of engaging in it. There were several reasons given for not engaging in as much leisure time as they would like. Three participants explained that a lack of partner made it

difficult to engage in leisure because they did not have someone to do it with. Other participants explained that they did not engage in as much leisure as they would like due to other responsibilities such as caring for children or parents. Other participants explained that work got in the way of engaging in leisure. What was found was that many individuals give up their personal commitments and do not participate in their favourite leisure activities to complete all of their work. Participants explained that working in the not-for-profit sector often means running fundraising events on evenings and weekends which can interfere with leisure time.

Participants explained that they were often disappointed with the loss of opportunity to engage in their favourite leisure activities. However, when they do have time to engage in their favourite leisure activities, individuals are able to feel rejuvenated and it brings pleasure to their life. The strategy that most participants developed to ensure they were engaging in leisure was to schedule time for leisure to make sure it happened. The participants explained that household chores and home responsibilities were seen as more “work” and took away from time they could be dedicating to leisure.

A difference between participants was that their current lifecycle and personal situation dictated how much their home responsibilities influenced their leisure. For example, Felicity is recently married, does not have any children and does not have a lot of home responsibilities. She is anticipating that when she has children this will change. On the other hand Amanda has children and has to bring them to their recreational activities, clean the house, laundry and many other commitments at home that take up her time. It was evident that throughout the lifetime of a participant that the demands in their personal life fluctuates with their current situation.

Although participants explained how they struggled with work-life balance, when asked “how are things these days” almost all of them said things were stressful, but still good and did not say much more than that. There are many interpretations as why they may have answered that way. It is possible that social construction has led them to believe that they are not supposed to complain and say that things are alright. Also, it is possible to believe that if you ask a general question, you should expect a general answer. My personal belief is that the individuals may have problems in their life but chose to believe that in general things are okay and are trying to look past the issues.

6.3 What Does it all Mean?

That is what I kept asking myself throughout this entire process. A good portion of the research on work-life balance has been on the effectiveness of certain work-life balance policies. Well most of the participants in this study did not really have many or any work-life balance policies in their workplace, and this did not seem to bother them. However, they are unaware of the benefits of a work-life balance program could provide because they have not experienced them. Regardless of the programs that were available, most of the participants were looking for an understanding supervisor and the flexibility to be able to get their work done but also have a personal life.

Another significant finding was that of the temporary nature of the demands placed on them by the workplace. Some of the participants found that if they had to deal with a very stressful situation, as long as it was temporary, they believed they could handle it. They explained that they were able to overcome the challenging situation as long as they could tell themselves that it was temporary. What is important to note from this is that they still became unbalanced and usually their personal life suffered. The temporary situation is a mental trick for

the employees because they do not see the long term implications of not being able to balance their work life with their personal life. The take away message is that work is always stressful, depending on the circumstances it can be easier to handle and leisure can help overcome the stress.

While analyzing the data, I kept a journal to ensure that I kept asking myself: what does it mean? I asked myself several times “does age or lifecycle influence the ability to manage work and life commitments?” From what participants shared, I observed that younger people are more stressed with work, middle aged are stressed with work and their family, older adults reflect on all that stress and re-evaluate their expectations of themselves, this is generally consistent with Wang, Lawler and Shi’s (2010) findings where they explained the extent of stress individuals face throughout the lifecycle. The constant is the stress and the variable is what caused the stress. Consistent with Trenberth and Dewe (2002)’s finding that leisure plays a positive role in well being and reducing tension and stress, participants believed that leisure helped to reduce stress and increase the ability to find work-life balance. One interesting observation is that most of the participants spoke of social leisure time as the most rewarding. This may be because the participants had someone to support them, listen to their problems and the opportunity to unwind.

I also made many notes during the interviews as well as when I was reviewing the transcripts about the influence of gender. A few of the participants made comments about how women are still completing most of the home responsibilities. This finding consistent with results reported by Porter and Ayman (2010). I thought it was curious that of eight participants that self selected to participate, all of them were women. However, when reviewing contact lists for the not-for-profits within my research area, most employees in these organizations were women. When I

asked one participant about this, she explained that there are many more women who work within the not-for-profit sector. She attributed this trend to the fact that women are typically more helpful and experience more positive feelings from working with others.

In review this is what I have discovered:

This is what I have discovered.

1. Stress is a constant companion. It may emerge from different sources as employees enter various stages of the life course but the stress itself is constant.
2. Leisure can offer comfort and rejuvenate thereby alleviating some of that stress.
3. Social leisure was the type of leisure that the participants gravitated towards for the social support and for the possibility of temporarily escaping from their problems.
4. Work life demands vary over time. This variability can lead to periods of intense focus and stress.
5. During such periods, employees are faced with choices about what tasks must be completed and what tasks must be sacrificed.
6. Employees seek flexibility and additional resources during these periods in order to deal with increased demands.
7. If these resources are not forthcoming, as work demands rise, balance is lost as personal tasks are sacrificed.
8. Organizations, through supervisors and policy, could provide resources necessary to help deal with work stress and in achieving work-life balance.

6.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it examines the work-life balance of employees working in the not-for-profit sector. Because of variability between sectors, this study is limited in the extent to which it is generalizable. Also, the sample consisted solely of women so it would be difficult to speak to any differences between gender. Secondly, these findings are subject to limitations of the critical incident interviews. It is possible that expectation-led interviewer effects, although reportedly minimal, may have influenced the data collection. These effects, which occur when the interviewer may inadvertently influence respondents to produce outcomes consistent with a priori expectations, would manifest itself as an increase in the number of issues with work-life balance reported (Gremier, 2004). However, given the reliability and

predominance of categories that emerged, it is less likely that the distribution of types of issues would change significantly. Moreover, the participant's stories can be misunderstood or misinterpreted (Gremler, 2004). As well, the participants were relied upon to accurately and truthfully retell their story (Gremler). Lastly, the results from this qualitative study cannot be statistically projected across a population. However, the methods and framework presented can be used to inform future quantitative studies that can assess rates and types of issues with work-life balance, or quantitatively evaluate the effect of an intervention such as work-life balance policies and programs.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Upon reflecting on the research process and the results, several recommendations are possible for future research. I believe a quantitative study on the effectiveness of work-life balance programs versus having flexibility in the workplace should be done. The results of a quantitative study could be much more widely applied to the workplace. I think the work setting, (i.e. working in the not-for-profit sector versus those in the public sector) should be further investigated to examine whether it influences employees' work-life balance. Is there a difference? What are the differences in policies and resources? Also, one participant mentioned a unique idea for employee benefits. She explained that she tried to implement a new policy where employees were entitled to take a "family day" instead of taking a sick day. The purpose of a family day varies, it could either be used to care for a sick child, a parent or any other family duties. She explained that it would promote employees being truthful with employers so that they would not have to lie about being sick. I believe that this idea warrants further research.

Gender also inadvertently played a role in this study. When recruiting participants the first key informant was female, she then gave me the name of another woman. That woman gave

me the name of another woman, and by the end I had only spoken to women. One may infer from this that I could speak to the experiences of women within the workplace. And I can explain the experiences of those specific women, but I cannot necessarily say that all or most women would have the same challenges and successes. I would recommend that further research be done to compare the experiences of women within the workplace with the experiences of men with work-life balance.

Through the entire process, no participant suggested I contacted a male. When I noticed this emerging, with the last two participants I asked them about gender within the not-for-profit sector. They explained to me that there are less men in the not-for-profit sector. When I asked them further about this, one participant explained that men are often more driven to “succeed” in terms of position of authority and income. Within the not-for-profit sector that can often be difficult to achieve. She said that men will often work within the private sector. I did not find any literature to suggest that there are less men within the not-for-profit sector. It may be worth further exploration to see if men are more driven to succeed and are drawn towards the private sector. This may also suggest that the work sector can influence individual’s perceptions of potential success in the workplace. It would be worth further inquiry to better understand if the work sector (not-for-profit, private and public) would determine which gender is drawn to that setting.

Conclusion

So again I ask, what does it all mean? Before I began collecting data, after reviewing the literature I was cynical; I was expecting that everyone felt so busy, that they were overwhelmed and they felt like nothing helped. I was surprised to find that yes individuals feel busy and at times feel overwhelmed but the small and somewhat simple things were what really helped them manage everything and get through the day. Many articles on work-life balance try to push company sponsored work-life balance programs for employees, but what I found was that what employees wanted was some understanding and flexibility from their employer. This is a significant finding for organizations and their management.

The issue of work-life balance has become such a popular topic item that *Canadian Living Magazine* recently published an article in their March 2011 edition on tips to better attain work-life balance. The author took an individualistic approach of what readers could do to improve their work-life balance. Noteworthy for this discussion was the suggestion to “choose your boss wisely and enjoy the benefits of flexibility” (Righton, 2011). This really demonstrates how much of an issue it has become and that the population is really looking for a solution to the problem.

References

- Adams, G., King, L. & King, D. (1996). Relationships of job and family involvement, family social support and work-family conflict with job and life satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81* (4), 411-420.
- Alexandris, K., Tsorbatzoudis, C. & Grouios, G. (2002). Perceived constraints on recreational sport participation: Investigating their relationship with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 34* (3), 233-252.
- Allen, T. (2001). Family-supportive work environments: The role of organizational perceptions. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 58*, 414-435.
- Andriotis, K. (2009). Scared site experience: A phenomenological study. *Annals of Tourism Research, 36*(1), 64-84.
- Appel, J. & Kim-Appel, D. (2007). Family systems at work: The relationship between family coping and employee burnout. *The Family Journal, 16* (3), 231-239.
- Ashforth, B., Kreiner, G. & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review, 25* (3), 472-491.
- Bacharach, S., Bamberger, P. & Conley, S. (1991). Work-home conflict among nurses and engineers: Mediating the impact of role stress on burnout and satisfaction at work. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 12*, 39-53.
- Baral, R. & Bhargava, S. (2010). Work-family enrichment as a mediator between organizational interventions for work-life balance and job outcomes. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 25* (3), 274-300.
- Bardwick, J. (1986). *The Plateauing Trap: How to Avoid it in your Career... and your Life*. New York: AMACOM.

- Bekker, M., Willemse, J. & De Goeij, J. (2010). The role of individual differences in particular autonomy-connectedness in women's and men's work-family balance. *Women & Health, 50*, 241-261.
- Beltrán-Martín, I., Roca-Puig, V., Escrig-Tena, A. & Bou-Llugar, J. (2008). Human resource flexibility as a mediating variable between high performance work systems and performance. *Journal of Management, 34* (5), 1009-1044.
- Blau, F., Ferber, M. & Winkler, A. (1998). *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bloom, J. (1982). Social support, accommodation to stress and adjustment to breast cancer. *Social Science & Medicine, 16* (14), 1329-1338.
- Bloom, N. & Van Reenen, J. (2006). Management practices, work-life balance, and productivity: A review of some recent evidence. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 22* (4), 457-482.
- Boden, R. (1999). Flexible working hours, family responsibilities, and female self-employment: Gender differences in self-employment selection. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 58* , 71-83.
- Boles, J., Johnston, M., Hair, J. (1997). Role stress, work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion: Inter-relationships and effects on some work-related consequences. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 17*, 17-28.
- Bond, F. & Bunce, D. (2000). Mediators of change in emotion-focused and problem-focused worksite stress management interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 5*, 156-163.
- Bond, F. & Bunce, D. (2001). Job control mediates change in a work reorganization intervention for stress reduction. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6* (4), 290-302.

- Budwhar, P. (1998). Evaluating levels of strategic integration and development of human resource management in the UK. *Personnel Review*, 29 (2) 141-161.
- Cinamon, R. & Rich, Y. (2010). Work family relations: Antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 18, 59-70.
- Chong, E. and Ma, X. (2010). The influence of individual factors, supervision and work environment on creative self-efficacy. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 19 (3), 233-247.
- Creswell, J. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cunningham, I. & Hyman, J. (1999). Devolving human resource responsibilities to the line: Beginning of the end or a new beginning for personnel? *Personnel Review*, 28 (1/2), 9-27.
- Daly, K. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DeLong, T. & DeLong, C. (1992). Managers as Fathers: Hope on the homefront. *Human Resource Management*, 31 (3), 171-181.
- Drew, E. (2005). Work/life balance: Senior management champions or laggards? *Women in Management Review*, 20 (4), 262-278.
- Edwards, J. & Rothbard, N. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *Academy of Management Review*, 25, 176-199.
- Gilbreath, B. (2004). Creating health workplaces: The supervisor's role. *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 19, 101-126.

- Gilbreath, B. & Benson, P. (2004). The contribution of supervisor behaviour to employee psychological well-being. *Work & Stress, 18* (3), 255-266.
- Gist, M. and Mitchell, T. (1992). Self-efficacy: A theoretical analysis of its determinants and malleability. *The Academy of Management Review, 17*, 183-211.
- Godbey, G., Crawford, D. & Shen, X. (2010). Assessing hierarchical leisure constraints theory after two decades. *Journal of Leisure Research, 42*, 111-134.
- Greenhaus, J. & Beutell, N. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review, 10*, 76-88.
- Greenhaus, J., Collins, K. & Shaw, J. (2003). The relation between work-family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 63* (3), 510-531.
- Haar, J. & Roche, M. (2010). Family supportive organization perceptions and employee outcomes: The mediating effects of life satisfaction. *The International Journal of Human Resources Management, 21* (7), 999-1014.
- Hall, D. & Richter, J. (1988). Balancing work life and home life: What can organizations do to help? *The Academy of Management Executive, 2* (3), 213-223.
- Harris, L. (2001). Rewarding employee performance: Line managers' values, beliefs and perspectives. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 12* (7) 1182-1192.
- Haworth, J. & Lewis, S. (2005). Work, leisure and well-being. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 33*, 67-79.
- Heaney, C., Price, R. & Rafferty, J. (1995). The caregiver support program: An intervention to increase employee coping resources and enhance mental health. *American Psychological Association, 93-108*.

- Hewlett, S. (2002). Executive women and the myth of having it all. *Harvard Business Review*, 2-10.
- Higgins, C., Duxbury, L. & Lyons, S. (2010). Coping with overload and stress: Men and women in dual-earner families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 847-859.
- Hughes, H., Williamson, K. & Lloyd, A. (2007). *Critical incident technique*. In: Lipu, S., (ed) Exploring methods in information literacy research. Topics in Australasian Library and Information Studies, Number 28. Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, N.S.S., p. 49-66.
- Ilies et al., (2007). When can employees have a family life? The effects of daily workload and affect on work-family conflict and social behaviours at home. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92 (5), 1368-1379.
- Jennings, J. & McDougald, M. (2007). Work-family interface experiences and coping strategies: Implications for entrepreneurship research and practice. *Academy of Management Review*, 32 (3), 747-760.
- Jex, S & Guadonowski, D. (1992). Efficacy beliefs and work stress: An exploratory study. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 13, 509-517.
- Johnson, J. (2004). Flexible working: Changing the manger's role. *Management Decision*, 42 (6), 721-737.
- Judge, T. & Colquitt, J. (2004). Organizational justice and stress: The mediating role of work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89 (3), 395-404.
- Kalliath, T. & Brough, P. (2008). Work-life balance: A review of the meaning of the balance construct. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 14, 323-327.
- Kang, D., Rice, M., Park, N. Turner-Henson, A. & Downs, C. (2010). Stress and inflammation:

- A biobehavioural approach for nursing research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 32 (6), 730-760.
- Kara, S., Kayis, B. & O’Kane, S. (2002). The role of human factors in flexibility management: A survey. *Human Factors and Ergonomics in Manufacturing & Service Industries*, 12, 75-119.
- Martel, L. (2002). The principles of high performance- And how to apply them. *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, 21 (4), 49-59.
- Martins, L., Eddleston, K. & Veiga, J. (2002). Moderators of the relationship between work-family conflict and career satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45 (2), 399-409.
- Maxwell, G. (2005). Checks and balances: The role of managers in work-life balance policies and practices. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 12, 179-189.
- Maxwell, G. & McDougall, M. (2004). Work-life balance. *Public Management Review*, 6 (3), 377-393.
- McCarthy, A., Darcy, C. & Grady, G. (2010). Work-life balance policy and practice: Underlying line manager attitudes and behaviours. *Human Resources Management Review*, 20, 158-167.
- McDowell, I. (2010). Measures of self-perceived well-being. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 69, 69-79.
- Md-Sidin, S., Sambasivan, M. & Ismail, I. (2008) Relationship between work-family conflict and quality of life. *Journal of Management Psychology*, 25, 58-81.
- Meldrum, J. (2007). *Understanding commitment and the contingent leisure service worker: an interpretive approach*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada.

- Meyer, J., Becker, T. & Vandenberghe, C. (2004). Employee commitment and motivation: A conceptual analysis and integrative model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89 (6), 991-1007.
- Meyer, J. & Parfyonova, N. (2010). Normative commitment in the workplace: A theoretical analysis and re-conceptualization. *Human Resource Management Review*, 20, 283-294.
- Milliken, F., Martins, L. & Morgan, H. (1998). Explaining organizational responsiveness to work-family issues: The role of human resource executives as issue interpreters. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41 (5) 580-592.
- Mumford, M., Scott, G., Gaddis, B. and Strange, J. (2002). Leading creative people: Orchestrating expertise and relationships. *Leadership Quarterly*, 13, 705-750.
- Porter, S. & Ayman, R. (2010). Work flexibility as a mediator of the relationship between work-family conflict and intention to quit. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 16, 411-424.
- Potgieter, S. & Barnard, A. (2010). The construction of work-life balance: The experience of black employees in a call-centre environment. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 31, 892-900.
- Purcell, J. & Hutchison, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: Theory, analysis and evidence. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17, 3-20.
- Righton, B. (2011, March). Shift Happens. *Canadian Living*, 81.
- Rothbard, N. (2001). Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46, 655-684.
- Ruderman, M., Ohlott, P., Panzer, K. & King, S. (2002). Benefits of multiple roles for

- managerial women. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45 (2), 369-386.
- Seltzer, J. & Numerof, R. (1988). Supervisory leadership and subordinate burnout. *Academy of Management Journal*, 31 (2), 439-446.
- Seron, C. & Ferris, K. (1995). Negotiating professionalism: The gendered social capital of flexible time. *Work and Occupation*, 22, 22-47.
- Sherstyuk, K. (2000). Performance standards and incentive pay in agency contracts. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 102 (4), 725-736.
- Tausig, M. & Fenwick, R. (2001). Unbinding time: Alternate work schedules and work-life balance. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 22(2), 101-120.
- Thornhill, A. & Saunders, M. (1998). What if line managers don't realize they're responsible for HR? *Personnel Review*, 27 (6), 460-476.
- Trenberth, L. & Dewe, P. (2002). The importance of leisure as a means of coping with work related stress: An exploratory study. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 15, 59-72.
- Ulshafer, S., Potgeisser, M. & Lima, T. (2005). Concierge services help deliver better work/life balance at Bronson Healthcare Group. *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, 24 (3), 23-30.
- van Beek, A. & Gerritson, D. (2010). The relationship between organizational culture of nursing staff and quality of care for residents with dementia: Questionnaire surveys and systematic observations in nursing homes. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 47, 1274-1282.
- Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M. & Has De Witte, W. (2010). Unemployed individuals work values and job flexibility: An explanation from expectancy-value theory and self-determination theory. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 59 (2), 296-317.

Wang, P., Lawler, J. & Shi, K. (2010). Work-family conflict, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and gender: Evidences from Asia. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 17 (3), 298-308.

Warren, T. (2004). Working part-time: Achieving a successful 'work-life' balance? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55, 99-122.

Watkins, K. (1995). Changing managers' defensive reasoning about work/family conflict. *Journal of Management*, 14 (2) 77-88.

White, M., Hill, S., McGovern, P., Mills, C. & Smeaton, D. (2003). 'High-performance' management practices, working hours and work-life balance. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41 (2), 175-195.

Williams, K. & Alliger, G. (1994). Role stressors, mood spillover, and perceptions of work-family conflict in employed parents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37 (4), 837-868.

Appendix A: Preliminary Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study on employee's perceptions of work-life balance. Please complete the following questionnaire prior to participating in the interview.

About Your Job

1. What organization do you work for?
2. What is your job title?
3. What is your primary responsibility?
4. How long have you been in this position?
5. How long have you been with the organization?
6. How many hours a week do you work on average?
7. Are you required to perform work responsibilities outside of regular office hours? Ex: have a work phone, check emails from home, be on call after hours, etc.
8. Does your organization have work-life balance policies? What do those policies look like?

Personal Characteristics

9. In what year were you born?
10. Gender: M/ F
11. What level of education have you completed?
12. What is your current marital status?
13. Do you have children? How many? What age?
14. What are your responsibilities at home?

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Work and home

4. What do you consider as the priorities in your personal life?
 - a. Probes: Significant other? Children? Leisure time? Work? Other?
5. What are your commitments in terms of your family and your leisure time? Why are they important to you?
6. What are your commitments in terms of your work life? Are they important to you? Why?
7. What kind of responsibilities do you have at work?
8. How do you manage all of your commitments? Do they conflict?
9. Role conflict: Do you feel rushed or strained for time as you fulfill your commitments?
10. Constraints: What stops you from maintaining all of your commitments?
11. Do you feel that you have control over your different commitments?
12. What do you think work-life balance looks like?

Efficacy facilitators

13. What happens if something comes up in your personal life that needs to be dealt with during work hours? Probe: Is your supervisor flexible? With deadlines, work hours, where you work, HR policies, etc
14. When balancing work commitments with the rest of life, were do you feel you have flexibility – at home, work?
15. Do you have support from supervisor, co-workers, family? Please describe how they support you.
16. Do you feel that your organization supports work-life balance?

17. Does your supervisor make your job easier or harder? How do they do that?
18. Do you have access to resources at work that help you find balance between work and home? (WLB program, coping resources, etc) Do you take advantage of these resources?

CIT- Stressful situation

19. Tell me about a time where you really felt that it was a challenge to balance your work and personal life
20. What conditions made the situation such a challenge?
21. How did you cope with this situation?
22. Did anyone help you deal with these demands? What did this person do that was effective/ineffective? Why was it effective/ineffective?
23. Describe the outcomes or result of the incident
24. Explain why you consider this incident to be significant

CIT- Positive situation

25. Tell me about a time when you felt you were facing a great many competing challenges but you were able to balance them.
26. What conditions made the situation such a challenge?
27. How did you cope with this situation?
28. Did anyone help you deal with these demands? What did this person do that was effective/ineffective? Why was it effective/ineffective?
29. Describe the outcomes or result of the incident
30. Explain why you consider this incident to be significant

Outcomes

31. How often do you participate in your favourite leisure activities (as much as I would like, less than I would like)
32. Has your leisure behaviour been affected by your work? How? (enjoy it more or less, take part more or less often, etc)
33. Do your home responsibilities impact your leisure time? Are they as great a challenge as your work commitments when you try to pursue your favourite leisure activities?
34. Generally how are things these days?

Recommendations

35. What changes could be made to help you better make balance work and life?
 - a. At work
 - i. What could you do?
 - ii. What could the organization do?
 - iii. What could your supervisor do?
 - b. At home
36. How likely are these changes to happen?

Appendix C: Newsletter Given to Participants

University of Waterloo, Recreation and Leisure Studies

10/11/2011

Employee's Perceptions of Work-Life Balance

The Journey of Discovering what Work-Life Balance is.

After a year of working full-time I realized the pressure that is put on individuals within the workforce can be so demanding that our personal lives are almost always sacrificed. I was working full-time and also going to school full-time. I got into work early in the morning so that later in the afternoon I could leave to go to class. I would work late into the evenings, often falling asleep with my head in my textbooks. I decided to take the opportunity to study work-life balance for my Masters thesis. After reviewing the literature on work-life balance I learned that most research suggested the use of work-life balance programs. These programs can consist of flextime, on-site childcare, telecommuting or any kind of policy that helps work not interfere with personal life. What I thought

about was what if the organization cannot afford to have a fancy and expensive program like that. I wanted to know about what the individual could do to better

as well as their perceptions of flexibility. So I interviewed eight individuals from the Niagara Region who work in the not-for-profit sector.

These are individuals who have an overwhelming workload, few resources to work with and lots of pressure from the public and board members to do a good job. I asked them about their responsibilities, the demands on their time, what their organization does to help them with their work-life balance, the support that they have and what helps them get through the day. There were many interesting findings; most were consistent with the literature on stress coping.

However, what was unique was the circumstance of the research. The participants were telling their individual story of what helps them overcome the everyday issues with work-life balance.



"What do you mean, you need to find a balance between work and family? We consider you part of our family,"

their work-life balance. The purpose was to explore employees' use of tactics to manage their work and life stress; particularly the employees' use of resources and social support.

Defining Work-Life Balance

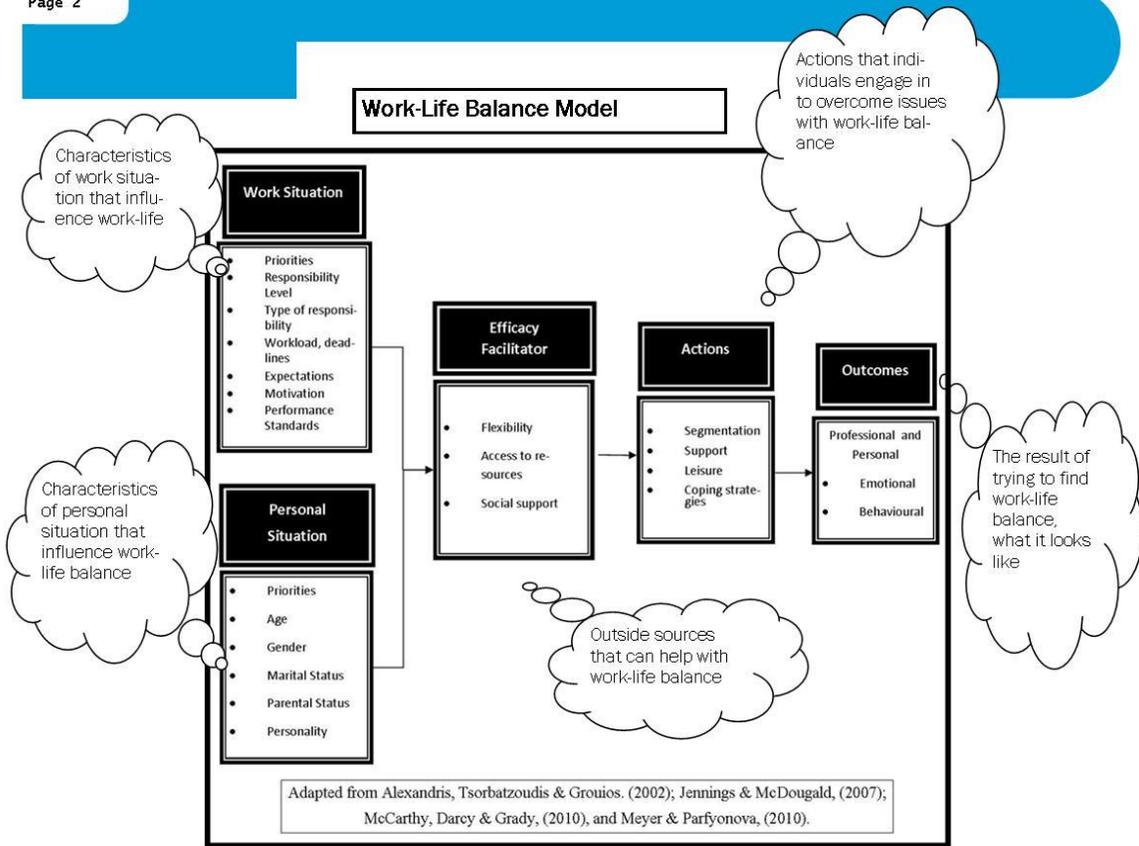
There has been much debate over a formal definition of work-life balance. According to Greenhaus et al. (2003), most of the major reviews of work-life balance articles either do not mention work-life balance per se, or when it is

mentioned it is not explicitly defined. This can create some issues when trying to better understand what work-life balance is. The definition of work-life balance that was used within this research is "the

individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Inside this Issue:

The Journey of Discovering what Work-Life Balance is.	1
Defining Work-Life Balance	1
Work-Life Balance Model	2
Suggestions on how to Better Manage Work-Life Balance	2
What I have Learned	3
If I want a Flexible Work Arrangement	3
Getting Support	3
Conclusion	4



"When you follow your bliss you have so many more hours in you... that's the secret to life, finding something you want to do."

Suggestions on how to Better Manage Work-Life Balance

So how can you better manage your work-life balance? Well from the literature review and the research, I have a few suggestions. It is important to work somewhere where you feel passionate about the cause of the organization. It is also important to have a supervisor that you get along well with. You should feel comfortable going to them when you have issues with your workload or there is something going on at home that

you need a bit of flexibility to manage both your work responsibilities as well as your home responsibilities. It is also extremely important to engage in leisure. Leisure can be rejuvenating and very rewarding. What was found in this research was that the participants gravitated towards social leisure. Social leisure can provide an individual with the opportunity to vent about what is going on in their life and also allow for a distraction.

Physical activity can also bring many benefits to an individual, such as: better health, improved fitness, better posture and balance, higher self-esteem, weight control, stronger muscles and bones, feeling more energetic, relaxation and reduced stress and continued independent living in later life. What is most important when it comes to work-life balance is doing what works for you.

What I have Learned:

1. Stress is a constant companion. It may emerge from different sources as employees enter various stages of the life course but the stress itself is constant.
2. Leisure can offer comfort and rejuvenate thereby alleviating some of that stress.
3. Social leisure was the type of leisure that the participants gravitated towards for the social support and for the possibility of temporarily escaping from their problems.
4. Work life demands vary over time.
5. During such periods, employees are faced with choices about what tasks must be completed and what tasks must be sacrificed.
6. Employees seek flexibility and additional resources during these periods in order to deal with increased demands.
7. If these resources are not available, as work demands rise, balance is

If I want a flexible work arrangement, how do I initiate that discussion with my manager?

You need to look for an opportunity. Some fairly obvious ones are any annual performance review, a return to work from maternity leave, an interview for a promotion, or the beginning or end of a project. Those are natural times when you can broach the subject. If there is no natural time, then make one. Ask for an opportunity to sit down with your manager or supervisor to discuss your career plans and options. Formal is better than informal. Be prepared in advance, and don't spring it onto a manager on a Friday afternoon in a fit of tears after an exhausting

week. Let them know exactly what you're looking for and why; explain why, not from the perspective of "I need to spend more time with my kids", but in terms of, "In order for me to be the most effective employee possible, this is the work arrangement that I need in order to fulfill my commitment to you."

- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Labour, Government of Canada

<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>

*Work-Life
Balance=
Flexibility,
Support and
Understanding*

Getting Support

Getting support in the workplace is an extremely important part of attaining work-life balance. Support can come in many forms. You can get support from family and friends, your supervisor, your co-workers and the organization you work for. The following are some suggestions on how to ask for support from your employer.

- You need to be really clear on what it is that you need and you want.
- You need to do your homework. Become familiar with what exists in terms of programs, policies, and benefits within the organisations.
- You need to know what practices exist
- You need to look at it and present it to them from their perspective. For

example, if you want to drop down to a part-time position but want to maintain a career track, going to a manager and saying, "I need to drop down to half-time because I want to spend more time with my family," means nothing to them. But if you go to them with a concrete proposal that it assists the organisation to meet their objectives, then the manager's got something to consider, evaluate, and approve. You remove the personal from the decision-making.

- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Labour, Government of Canada

<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>



I would like to take this time to thank all of the busy participants who took the time to meet with me, to be open and discuss their work-life balance. Without their insights and perceptions I would still be asking how do people get through the day with all of those demands. I would also like to thank my advisor who answered my countless questions and took the time to read over all of the drafts of my thesis. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Madeleine Simard
 MA Candidate,
 University of Waterloo
 m2simard@uwaterloo.ca

Conclusion...

So I ask, what does it all mean? Before I began collecting data, after reviewing the literature I was cynical; I was expecting that everyone felt so busy, that they were overwhelmed and they felt like nothing helped. I was surprised to find that yes individuals feel busy and at times feel overwhelmed but the small and somewhat simple things were what really helped them manage everything and get through the day. Many articles on work-life balance try to push company sponsored work-life balance programs for employees, but what I found

was that what employees wanted was some understanding and flexibility from their employer. This is a significant finding for organizations and their management.

The issue of work-life balance has become such a popular topic item that *Canadian Living Magazine* recently published an article in their March 2011 edition on tips to better attain work-life balance. The author took an individualistic approach of what readers could do to improve their work-life balance. Noteworthy for this discussion was the suggestion to

“choose your boss wisely and enjoy the benefits of flexibility” (Righton, 2011). This really demonstrates how much of an issue it has become and that the population is really looking for a solution to the problem.

