
Original Article

A framework for work–life balance practices: Addressing the needs of the tourism industry

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the key issues associated with work–life balance (WLB) with a particular focus on practices within the tourism industry. It provides an overview of the general literature and then the research that relates specifically to WLB in the tourism industry. It builds on previous research in this area to present an adapted framework for addressing the key variables of WLB that can be tested in subsequent research.

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in the way we work, driven by the globalisation of commodities and services, have impacted on perceptions of leisure time, travel, study and careers. For many tourism industry employees, working in frontline positions of 24/7 operations, it is difficult to maintain a healthy

lifestyle, travel or study. The following sections provide more specific background to the focus of this paper, particularly those issues surrounding work–life balance (WLB), labour turnover in the tourism industry and labour shortages being experienced in hospitality and tourism.

WORK–LIFE BALANCE

The recent study by Pocock *et al* (2007, p. 2), entitled *Work, Life and Time: The Australian Work and Life Index*, argues that longer hours worked

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'are consistently associated with worse work–life outcomes on all our work–life measures'. Such findings suggest that there is an unhealthy acceptance of long working hours, especially in the service industries of hospitality and tourism. What is equally important, particularly for younger workers, is the fact that these hours are unsocial and often mean that there is little flexibility in the way that such workers conduct their social/family lives. Ultimately, this lack of flexibility often leads to employees leaving the industry, not just the organisation, further exacerbating the labour shortages being experienced in a range of industries.

Although the WLB terminology has only been used over the past 20 years, Roberts (2007) argues that the issue has been around for much longer (he uses the example of women working dual roles during the Second World War). Defining the concept of WLB is a complex task, as it can be viewed from the meaning of 'work', 'life' and 'balance'. Another work by MacInnes (2006, p. 223) argues that what are usually assumed as the causes of the debate over the concept – longer hours, greater stress at work, together with the 'collapse of the male breadwinner division of parenting and employment responsibilities ... are nothing of the sort'. He argues that the origins of the debate can be found in the demographic trends, particularly low birth rates, which influence labour supply. He suggests that the debate may really be about rewarding baby boomers.

Guest's (2002) overview of the study of WLB provides a sound basis for this paper. He argues that there are three key areas for the rise of concern regarding WLB. In the first instance, it is the pressure and intensification of work that is of concern. There are a number of contributors to this pressure, including the advances in technology, the need for quick responses and the importance given to customer service and 'its implications for constant availability' (p. 257). Within service industries such as tourism and hospitality, such pressures are magnified because of the intensive nature of these sectors and the fact that they operate 24/7.

A second cause of concern focuses on the quality of home and community life. Guest suggests that greater affluence, the growth of single-parent families and the privatisation of family life have contributed to the deterioration of family life. The pressures to 'keep up with the Joneses' lead to longer and more intensive work hours but, more importantly, unsocial hours and therefore less quality family time.

The final concern relating to the WLB is that of the attitudes and values of people. The issues are somewhat unclear here in that some groups of workers such as those in Generation X appear to seek greater balance in their work and family life, whereas older workers may not do this. The empirical evidence in this area is limited.

LABOUR TURNOVER

Research into the antecedents of labour turnover has, traditionally, focussed on the impact that job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment have on an employee's intention to leave (Deery, 2002, 2008; Deery and Jago, 2008). Equally, the role that personal attributes such as positive and negative affectivity (Griffeth *et al*, 2000) have played in employee turnover decision-making has been examined substantially. Key turnover researchers such as Deery and Iverson (2004) have found that other variables such as job opportunities, distributive justice, routinisation of job tasks and kinship responsibilities impact on the turnover decision-making process and examine the consequences of this within the company context. Much of this research, however, is located within organisations where the aim is to develop strategies to alleviate high levels of turnover at the company level. Far less research has been undertaken to examine the scale of employee turnover from the overall industry rather than the specific organisation. Among the few pieces of research that have been undertaken is the recent work by Delfgaauw (2007a), however, which focused on the question of where exiting employees go. In other words, do they leave the organisation but



remain within the industry, or do they leave the industry entirely? His study that involved a large sample of Dutch public servants found that there were two job domains that forced employees to leave not just the organisation but also the industry. These were job duties and work pressure. Dissatisfaction with financial prospects also contributed to industry turnover as did the physical working conditions.

Delfgaauw's (2007a,b) research is informative for this current study, which locates the research in the labour-intensive, low-paid service industry sectors such as hospitality and tourism. In examining workers' reasons for leaving the organisation versus leaving the industry, Delfgaauw (2007b) found that the variable 'work v private life' was significant in determining the predictors of employees leaving the industry. Hjalager and Andersen's (2001, p. 127) work on tourism employment, among others, confirms the declining level of staff retention in the tourism sector by stating that the desire to have a 'pleasant lifestyle' is important for employees in tourism. Their work also argues, however, that the temporary nature of tourism work suits the younger generations, and they conclude that 'tourism . . . More than any other industry in the economy attracts the ultramobile, the virtual and the boundaryless' (p. 128). Again, the focus for these previously cited studies is more at the supervisory or management level, whereas the focus for this current study is the operational, non-supervisory, often casual staff.

WLB AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO LABOUR TURNOVER

Although the issues relating to obtaining a WLB have received substantial attention over recent years, especially in the area of contemporary organisational research, less attention has been given to researching the impact of WLB in the service industry such as the hospitality area (Mulvaney *et al*, 2006). These authors discuss the impact that work factors such as job stress and burnout have on an employee's intention to leave an organisation, and, in particular, they focus on the impact that job stress, work–family

conflict and the characteristics of the job have on this vital decision. These authors suggest that the levels of conflict between work and family will be impacted or moderated by the levels of support employees (in this case, managers) receive, the personal attributes they bring to the job, the industry norms and the way all these components are managed in the workplace. Mulvaney *et al* (2006), Cleverland *et al* (2007), Namasivayam and Zhao (2007) and Karatepe and Uludag (2007), together with Rowley and Purcell (2001), argue, in various ways, that these components work to effect job satisfaction and organisational commitment and ultimately lead to employee turnover.

The research note by Cullen and McLaughlin (2006) offers a different perspective on the WLB issue. Cullen and McLaughlin discuss the notion of 'presenteeism' defined as 'an overwhelming need to put in more hours or, at the very least, appear to be working very long hours' (p. 510). They argue that there are three rationales that reinforce presenteeism as a managerial value in hotels. Firstly, it appears to be the belief of hotel managers that they have a duty to provide emotional support to their staff and need to be available to provide counselling. The second rationale is that hotel managers see themselves as the face of the hotel and need to be continually present to be this. Finally, the authors argue that it is the very nature of the industry, the constancy and complexity of running a hotel that is open at all times, that makes it appear vital that managers be available for excessively long hours. All of this 'presenteeism' impacts negatively on life satisfaction and the WLB.

The issue of WLB is so serious that a number of organisations have introduced measures to ameliorate the impact of an imbalance between these two competing forces. There are a number of variables in the literature that are seen as antecedents or consequences of an imbalance between work and life. Table 1 provides a brief summary of these variables, together with some of the strategies emerging from the literature.

Table 1: Antecedents, consequences and sources of work–life balance

	<i>Source</i>
<i>Antecedents</i>	
Long working hours; long working hours culture	Guest (2002); MacInnes (2006); De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005); White <i>et al</i> (2003); Lewis (2003); Roberts (2007); Cullen and McLaughlin (2006); Deery (2008)
Time pressures	Mauno and Kinnunen (1999); Lewis (2003)
Lack of flexibility	White <i>et al</i> (2003); Lewis (2003)
Financial pressure	White <i>et al</i> (2003); Warren (2004)
<i>Employer practices</i>	White <i>et al</i> (2003); De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005)
• Supervisor practices	
Lack of communication with staff	De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005)
<i>Demographic details</i>	White <i>et al</i> (2003); Mauno and Kinnunen (1999); Lyness and Kropf (2005); Roberts (2007); Smith and Gardner (2007); Ponzellini (2006); Tomlinson (2006); Doherty (2004); Guest (2002)
• Gender	
• Education	
• Marital status	
• Children	
• Socioeconomic status	
• Job tenure	
• Work status	
Increased work demands	MacInnes (2006); De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005); Roberts (2007); Guest (2002)
<i>Stressful work; job stressors such as</i>	Mauno and Kinnunen (1999); MacInnes (2006); Roberts (2007)
• job insecurity	
• role clarity	
• job autonomy	
• time pressures	
• leadership relations	
Exhausted from work and too tired to enjoy homelife; marital satisfaction via job exhaustion	MacInnes (2006); Mauno and Kinnunen (1999)
Psychographics, especially personality	Lewis (2003); Guest (2002)
New technology	Roberts (2007)
<i>Negative consequences</i>	
Marital and work stress	Mauno and Kinnunen (1999); MacInnes (2006); Roberts (2007)
Psychosomatic symptoms	Burchell <i>et al</i> (1999); Mauno and Kinnunen (1999); Lewis (2003)
Absenteeism, turnover	Deery, 2002, 2008,, Wang and Walumbwa (2007)
Organisational difficulties in recruiting staff	Doherty (2004)

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY WORKFORCE

The issues surrounding WLB are exacerbated when considered in the context of the tourism industry, which is a labour-intensive area that is currently experiencing a severe labour shortage. The long and unsocial hours, low pay and often low status of many tourism jobs, especially in the hospitality area, mean that it

is an industry that does not easily attract new staff nor retain existing staff (Deery, 2002). Research by Rowley and Purcell (2001) argues that the hospitality industry has higher than average skill shortages, labour turnover and hard-to-fill vacancies. Pratten and O’Leary (2007), for example, discuss the causes of the chef shortages in the United Kingdom, confirming the impact that low pay, poor physical conditions and strict



kitchen rules have on employees' intentions to leave the organisation. These authors recommend better and additional training to that which is currently offered.

In its recent enquiry on the challenges facing the Australian tourism industry, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation (2007) found that the labour shortages in this industry were holding back growth in this area. Specific areas of labour shortages were identified in the report, such as regional and remote tourism operations, and Western Australia was particularly highlighted as having difficulty in finding sufficient staff for areas other than mining. The House of Representative Committee's report made a number of recommendations to address the labour and skill shortages in the tourism industry including that the government, in partnership with owners and operators, develop a seasonal workforce management plan, conduct research into barriers to the workforce participation of older workers and also commission an analysis of turnover costs versus investment in retention. In making these recommendations, it is possible that issues relating to a work–life imbalance could also be addressed. As one submission to the enquiry stated (p. 92):

Eventually, employees decide to opt out of the industry because they do not wish to constantly upset their family living arrangements and work–life balance.

WLB IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The issue of WLB in Australia has become important from a number of perspectives. Tourism Australia, for example, has launched a campaign to encourage employees to take their annual leave. The campaign, aptly named 'No Leave, No Life', aims to combat the high incidence of non-leave taking within Australia – in 2005, there were 70 million days of untaken leave. The campaign was developed in partnership with the Australian Human Resources

Institute and included a pilot programme that involved 12 Australian companies, who participated in the research to encourage their employees to take their annual leave. From a tourism perspective, the aim of the programme is not only to encourage employees to take their leave but also to take it within Australia at Australian tourism destinations.

Work–life balance issues, in relation to the impact of these on employee turnover in the tourism industry, have been examined by Deery (2008) using research specific to the hospitality and tourism settings. Her findings argue that there are three key areas that relate to employee turnover in the tourism industry, and these focus on, firstly, employee job attitudes where much of the debate in the previous research has centred on whether it is organisational commitment or job satisfaction that has the greatest influence on employee turnover. Although this issue is examined in the hospitality literature cited here, other issues relating to these job attitudes are also incorporated into the studies.

The second theme focuses on attitudes that the employees have that contribute to their desire to leave an organisation. Psychological dimensions such as job burnout and exhaustion were examined by Lee and Shin (2005) where the job burnout construct used had the three components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion, on the other hand, refers to a lack of energy 'due to excessive psychological demands' (p. 100). Their study used a number of other dimensions including examination of the impact of positive and negative affectivity on an employee's intention to leave.

In discussing the impact of WLB on employee intentions to leave an organisation, Deery (2008) argues that little research has been undertaken in the tourism literature to relate the two issues. Mulvaney *et al* (2006), for example, discuss the impact that non-work factors such as job stress and burnout have on an employee's intention to leave an organisation,

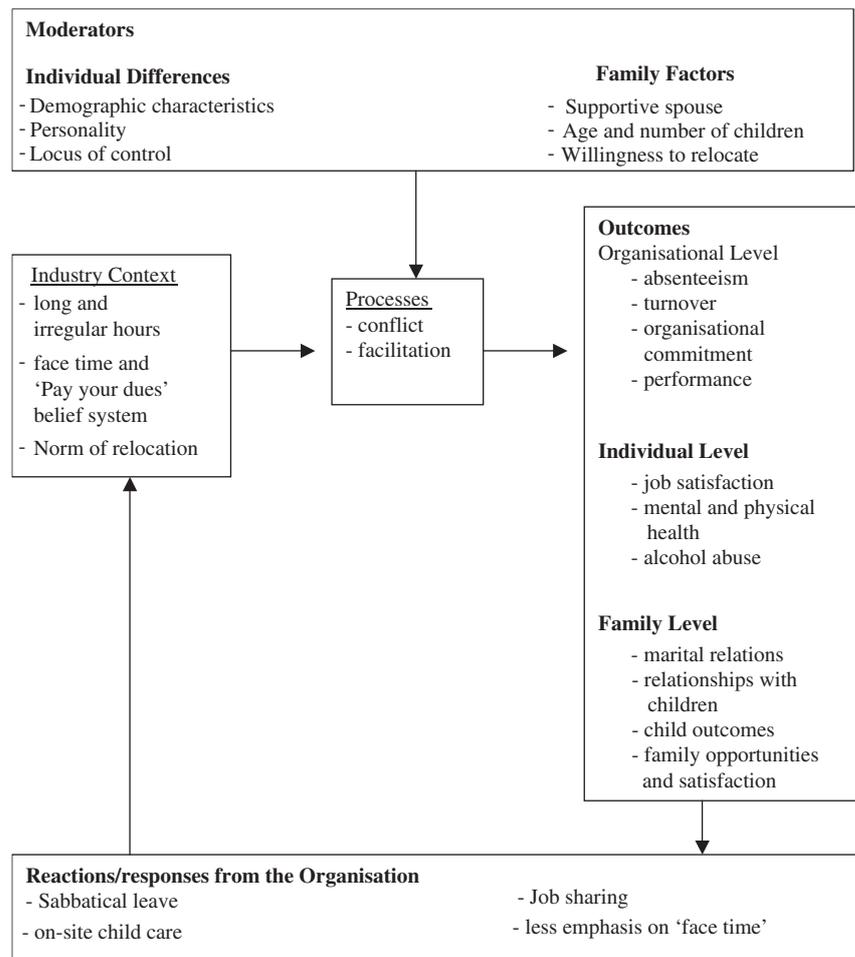


Figure 1: A proposed model of work–family issues for hotel managers (Mulvaney *et al*, 2006).

and, in particular, they focus on the impact that job stress, work–family conflict and the characteristics of the job have on this vital decision. Their model, presented here in Figure 1, includes many of the variables frequently associated with the antecedents of employee turnover, variables such as the long and irregular hours.

Cullen and McLaughlin (2006) argue that the culture of hotels promotes this phenomenon, which is ultimately detrimental to gaining a WLB. Research by Doherty (2004) in examining WLB for women in the hospitality industry found that it were the very long hours and the lack of flexibility that deterred women from seeking senior levels. Doherty found that ‘a male model of a career based on commitment in

the form of long hours persists’ (2004, p. 448). She argues that the long hours culture is counterproductive and that initiatives such as Barclay’s Technology Services ‘Go Home on Time Days’ and campaigns to work smarter, not harder, were initiatives to emulate in the hospitality industry.

WORK–LIFE CONFLICT: STRESS, BURNOUT AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

Berry *et al* (2007), in their study of alcohol use and abuse among Australian workers, found that hospitality workers were at a significantly

**Table 2: Strategies and sources to address work–life balance issues**

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Source</i>
Job sharing	Ponzellini (2006); De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005); Smith and Gardner (2007); Doherty (2004)
Leave (parental, study, and so on)	De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005); Smith and Gardner (2007); Ponzellini (2006)
Job sharing	De Cieri <i>et al</i> (2005); Smith and Gardner (2007)
Childcare benefits	Wang and Walumbwa (2007); Smith and Gardner (2007); Ponzellini (2006)
Transformational leadership	Wang and Walumbwa (2007)
Buying time/controlling time	Roberts (2007); Doherty (2004)
Flexible working times	Ponzellini (2006); Wang and Walumbwa (2007); White <i>et al</i> (2003); Smith and Gardner (2007); Doherty (2004)
Working at home	Allen and Wolkowitz (1987); Felstead <i>et al</i> (2002)

higher risk of short-term and long-term harm than most other workers. For example, these workers were found to be between 2.4 and 3.1 times more likely than workers in other industries such as education to drink alcohol frequently at high-risk levels. These authors attribute the high use of alcohol to the workplace culture that condones excessive alcohol use. In an earlier study by Larsen (1994), however, factors such as the hospitality industry's unstable working hours, low emotional support and the number and type of customer interactions, some of which are confrontational, were seen as contributors to drinking both on duty and after work. The role that stress plays in the abuse of alcohol by hospitality employees is confirmed by Ross (2005), and he highlights the impact that this has on the employee's intention to leave the industry.

It is the work by Karatepe and Uludag (2007) on work–life conflict, exhaustion and motivation in the hotel industry, however, that is critical to the development of a framework on WLB in the tourism and hospitality industries. These authors found that frontline employees in the hotel industry 'who had difficulty in spending time with their family and/or social commitments as a result of their job-related responsibilities were more susceptible to elevated levels of emotional exhaustion' (p. 661). The study also found that the increased emotional exhaustion experienced by the frontline hotel

employees due to a number of problems faced including irregular work schedules, the long working hours and heavy workloads increased their intentions to leave the organisation. Similarly, research by Netemeyer *et al* (2004) found that work–life conflict increased employees' intention to leave, thereby creating greater stress levels for those left in the work environment.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS WLB ISSUES: FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

There is a substantial amount of literature providing strategies for addressing issues of WLB. Many of these focus on flexibility in terms of time at work and scheduling of workloads. Some of these strategies are provided in Table 2.

The research undertaken to date with regard to strategies to alleviate the impact of work–life conflict have been company-based strategies (see, for example, Allan *et al*, 2007). These initiatives to improve WLB, which have been reported in studies, will inform the current research, and an examination of these strategies will be undertaken to determine whether they can be applied at an industry level. A study of 153 employees in a large New Zealand organisation, for example, examined the effectiveness of various initiatives to improve the WLB (Smith and Gardner, 2007). Sixteen initiatives

were introduced, and these included paid special leave to care for dependents, telecommuting, flexitime and elder care. These authors found that the most used initiatives were flexitime, time off to attend non-work events, paid special leave to care and time off for study. They also found, not surprisingly, that awareness of the initiatives correlated highly with use of the initiatives. Gender was also found to be statistically significant (females were more likely to use the options). Age, tenure number of dependents and partner status were not statistically significantly related to the uptake of the initiatives.

De Cieri *et al* (2005) found that the most frequently used strategies to improve the WLB included part-time work, study leave, flexible starting and finishing times, working at home on an *ad hoc* basis and job sharing. Research by Holland and Deery (2002) examining the role of flexible strategies in the workforce confirms employee preferences for flexibility. The De Cieri *et al* study (2007) study also examined the barriers to the use of these options and found that 'insufficient involvement of and communication with senior management' (p. 96) was one of the most consistently cited barriers along with the ineffective implementation of the strategies and the lack of communication with staff.

When examining WLB initiatives in the tourism industry, Doherty (2004) found that none of the companies examined in a large selection of WLB organisations were from tourism. Companies that were providing some strategies focused mainly on flexible working arrangements and used these as a means of attracting and retaining staff.

WLB IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: THE REALITY

Although there is an abundance of research that examines the barriers to obtaining WLB, anecdotal evidence, at least, would suggest that there is still a great deal of work to be done in the tourism industry to encourage employees to achieve a balance. It would appear, given the amount of untaken annual leave in Australia,

that employees are reluctant to take the breaks that they are not only entitled to take but also should take in order to recuperate both emotionally and physically. Wanrooy *et al* (2007), in their *Australians@Work*, argue that Australia has some of the longest working hours in the world, and one-fifth of workers are working 50 hours or more per week. These authors also state that there is an 'alarming acceptance of long hours' (p. viii). The unsocial hours worked in the hospitality and tourism industry exacerbate this problem even further.

The authors of this paper have been involved in an 8-year longitudinal study in a large five-star hotel that has involved administering a detailed self-complete questionnaire to all staff to explore employee attitudes towards the hotel and their roles within it. This study was initiated by hotel management in order to help reduce staff turnover by identifying the issues of most concern to staff and then introducing practices to address these concerns. The same research instrument has been used throughout this 8-year period.

Given the increased prominence now given to WLB as a factor that has the potential to cause substantial stress in the workplace if it is not well balanced, an attempt was made in 2007 to examine variables in the existing research instrument that could be seen as indicators of WLB, to see if there were trends that could help explain staff attitudes. As the research instrument was not developed with WLB issues in mind, it is recognised that using proxies for WLB is not ideal. Depth interviews were also held with a small sample of employees in order to explore some of the issues underlying their attitudes.

Although the examination of the proxy variables in the quantitative study indicated that WLB was not a problem in the hotel, this was seen to be at odds with the results of the depth interviews where it was clear that staff felt that their time at home was being negatively impacted by their employment. Despite this, however, most staff in the depth interviews indicated that they were generally satisfied with their position at the hotel.

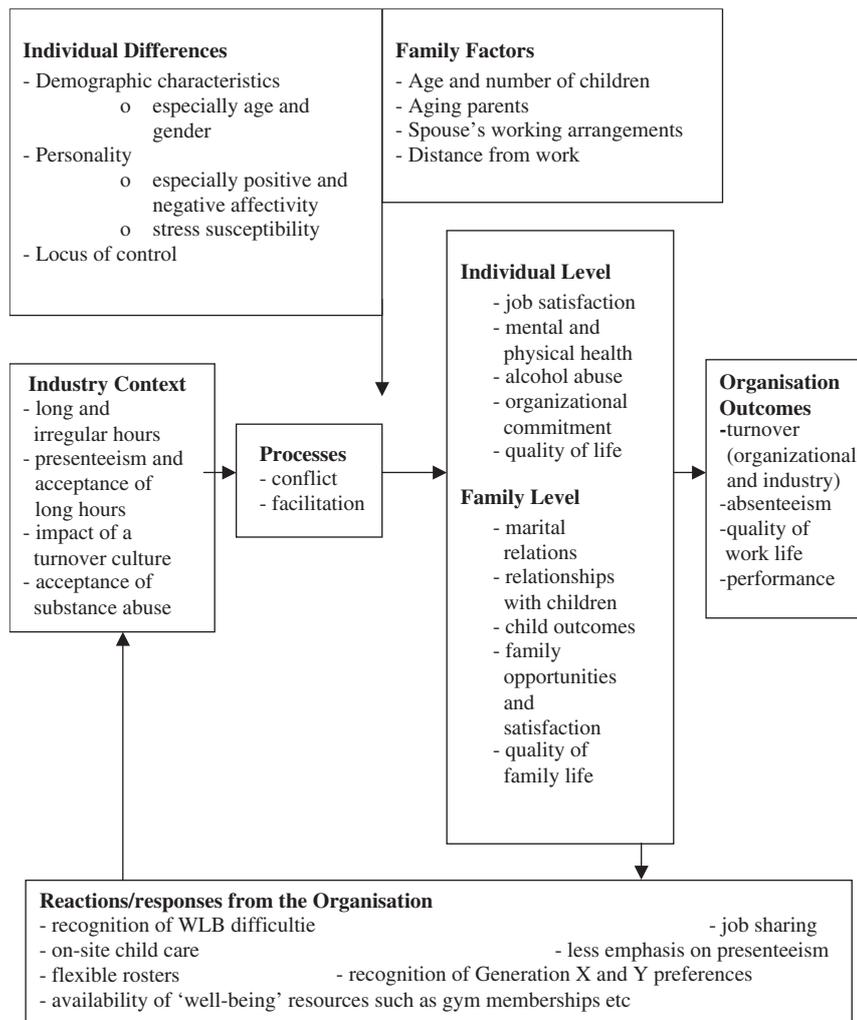


Figure 2: A framework to examine work–life balance in the tourism industry.

Interestingly, this finding is remarkably similar to the results reported by Pocock *et al* (2007, p. 1), who found that ‘three-quarters of Australians are satisfied with their work–life balance’ despite the fact that there were ‘high levels of spillover from work to life’. It appears that, when probed, employees may have substantial concerns regarding negative impacts of their work on their home life, but they still indicate an overall level of satisfaction that does not appear consistent with the summation of the individual components of satisfaction.

Clearly, this needs to be examined further, and it is likely that a study will be undertaken

that will ask respondents to rationalise/explain the fact that their overall assessment on this issue does not seem consistent with the sum of the component parts. In order to more fully understand this complex issue of WLB, additional depth interviews will be conducted so that the issues can be probed.

A FRAMEWORK TO EXAMINE WLB ISSUES IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

There is a need, therefore, to re-examine the way we look at WLB issues, especially given the acceptance of long working hours within

Australia and the presenteeism in the tourism industry. As this issue is quite complex with a range of interconnected variables, a framework will help simplify the task by allowing the overall task to be compartmentalised. Using the preliminary results from the depth interviews undertaken in the aforementioned study, Mulvaney *et al*'s (2006) framework has been amended, as presented in Figure 2.

The key changes to the model focus on the specific variables that influence WLB and the potential outcomes from these. For example, the variables under the 'Individual Differences' category now include specific items such as positive and negative affectivity, age and gender, and stress susceptibility. All these items have been found to be influential in work–life conflict. Similarly, 'Family Factors' now include aging parents, spouse's working arrangements and distance from work. The 'Industry Context' has included the concept of turnover culture and the acceptance of substance abuse, whereas the outcomes of the processes have been divided into one group of individual- and family-level outcomes, which are then proposed to lead to organisational outcomes such as employee turnover from both the organisation and the industry. It is proposed that this framework will be used for testing and refining.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the key antecedents to the issue of WLB in the tourism industry, finding that the long, unsocial hours within the industry, the levels of stress associated with job insecurity, role ambiguity, job autonomy and time pressures, together with home-life pressures and psychosomatic symptoms, are variables that impact negatively on WLB. What is useful for the purposes of this paper and such future studies is that there are strategies that can impact positively on WLB. These include a greater use of flexible work practices such as flexible scheduling, working from home and having access to both paid and unpaid leave. Job sharing is also a strategy that assists, as does a sound and clear leadership style.

Work–life balance is an area that has received less attention than it deserves both in the tourism academic literature and within the work environment. This paper presents a model that may assist in a more thorough examination of the related issues as well as strategies for implementation and reduction of the negative impact that WLB can promote.

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