



THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT: Over the years, researchers have tried to find answers to the question of how work-life balance influences many organisational dimensions and which organisational practices should be implemented. However, the implementation process of WLB practices is scarcely analysed in the literature. The main goal of this project is trying to put into practice a tool for analysing the implementation process of WBL practices based on previous theoretical contributions. In particular, we analysed, in a Spanish subsidiary IT company, the quality of various steps of the implementation process (i.e., design, supportive environment, execution and demonstrated value). In doing so, we will draw conclusions on how the practices have been implemented, which potential steps influence some of the desired outcomes, and what are the main practical implications. To this end, personalised surveys were carried out according to their position within the company. The results obtained were subjected to different calculations, which were analysed and interpreted. The conclusions of this project are quite enlightening, and it can be stated that the sample of staff under study shows excellent satisfaction with work-life balance.

KEY-WORDS: Work-life balance, Implementation framework, WLB practices, supportive environment, design quality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The current context and the importance of work-life balance practices

In the last decade, the study of work-life balance (WLB) within organisations has grown in interest and importance within the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature (e.g., Nishii *et al.*, 2008). The reason for this is that achieving high levels of WLB has shown positive effects on employee attitudes such as job satisfaction, well-being, job performance, attraction and retention of talent, lower rates of absenteeism, and a better external image (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2021). As a result, achieving WLB is being considered a key organisational factor that will make it possible to bring together and assemble both organisational and social outcomes, an issue that is currently trending and reflected within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals at work (Gálvez *et al.*, 2020; Connor, 2015). Among them, Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), which promotes a fairer, more sustainable and inclusive society for all.

The WLB represents or is defined as: «the possibility for working people to make compatible, on the one hand, the work aspect and, on the other hand, the personal aspect in the broadest possible sense, including family needs as well as personal and individual needs, leisure management...» (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2021, p.7). From the field of HRM, efforts have been made to find out through which HR practices could lead to achieving WLB. Although there is some debate about the specific HR practices that should be adopted, the most commonly WLB practices cited in the literature are: sabbaticals, teleworking, flexible hours, paternity and maternity leaves, intensive working hours in summer, Fridays or other dates, and so on (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2021; Sánchez-Hernández *et al.*, 2019; López-Ibor *et al.*, 2010).

The importance of adopting some of these practices has transcended the usual purposes of application, reflecting their value in times of crisis. Some of them, such as *teleworking*, have been particularly important in recent years (due to the Covid-19 crisis) since this measure allowed people to work out of the common workplace, preventing more global health impairments. In addition, the current energy crisis, which is impacting Western society, highlights even more the importance of such WLB practices, since, through them, employers might decrease operational costs (Belzunegui-Eraso *et al.*, 2020).

However, the mere adoption of a set of WLB practices does not imply that they will have the desired outcome (i.e., *WLB perception*). It is required that the subsequent

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implementation process be properly undertaken (Wright and Nishii, 2006). Thus, a failed implementation may likely lead to poor or counterintuitive results to those initially planned (Woodrow and Guest, 2014). Although there are different definitions of implementation effectiveness, we understand «effective implementation as the satisfaction employees' show with the HR practices» (Van Wayenberg and Decramer, 2018, p. 96). It should be noted that the implementation is a complex process made up of many factors and stages, which together can affect (positively or negatively) this outcome. For example, in Evans (2016), line managers feel so overloaded with operational tasks that they cannot dedicate the time they need to all of them, relegating WLB practices to the background. In other cases, WLB is simply adopted as a "ceremonial" matter, to satisfy trade unions or legal requirements, meaning that the adoption of WLB is superficial, on paper, but employees do not benefit from it (Cordón and Soler, 2005). It may also happen that the company has an organisational chart where the figure responsible for these issues does not appear (Pasamar and Valle, 2011). These issues, all related to the implementation process, contribute to the fact that employees do not benefit from the practices and, therefore, a WLB perception is no longer achieved.

1.2. The purpose of the study

Based on the frameworks of WLB practices implementation developed by Bardoel, De Cieri and Mayson (2009) and Ryan and Kossek (2008), the aim of this study is to develop a tool to analyse in-depth *the implementation process of the WLB practices* in a private IT company. In particular (see Figure 1), we examine; a) the quality of the design of the WLB practices, b) the supportive environment for WLB, c) the quality of execution of these WLB practices and, finally, d) the demonstrated value achieved (employees' satisfaction with WLB practices and the level of WLB perceptions). These will be described in detail in the following sections.

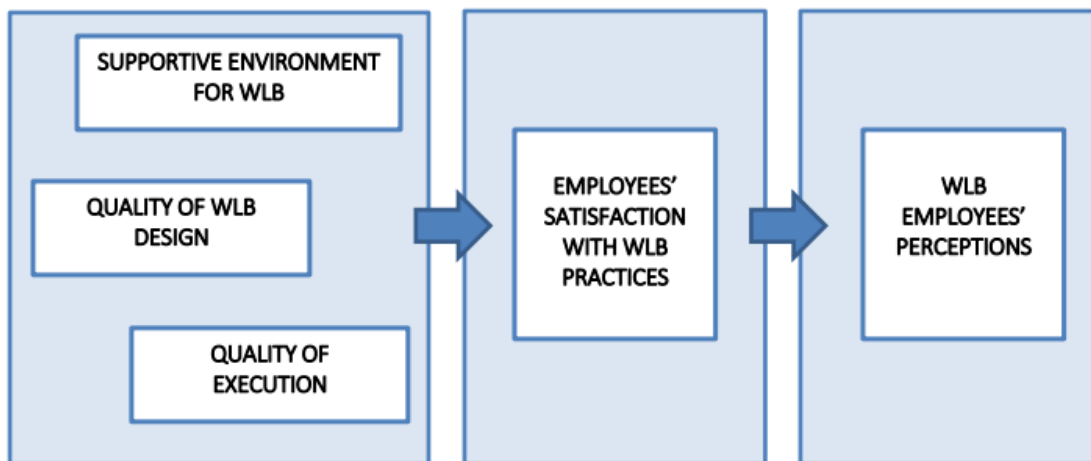
I consider that all of these factors related to the implementation process (i.e., quality of WLB design, supportive environment for WLB and the quality of WLB practices execution) will determine the degree of employees' satisfaction with WLB practices, and, in turn, the level of WLB perception. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to show in a descriptive way, by using secondary and primary sources of information, the quality of these stages involved in the implementation process of WLB practices and their relationship with the intended outcomes.

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1.2.1. Sub-objectives

- To gain an in-depth understanding of the WLB practices adopted by the IT company.
- To analyse the quality of the WLB practices design by exploring both its vertical fit and horizontal fit.
- To analyse the supportive environment for WLB by analysing the support of managers and organisation to the implementation of WLB practices.
- To analyse to what extent employees perceive WLB practices, and if there is a gap with intended WLB practices.
- To find out if employees are satisfied with WLB practices implemented in this organisation and the relationship with the level of WLB employees' perception.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of this study.



Source: Own elaboration.

The structure of this study consists of an introductory section that contextualises the issue of work-life balance. The second section discusses its origins and various definitions of the concept, as well as the factors and consequences arising from it. The third section focuses on work-life balance practices and their different modalities. On the other hand, the fourth section refers to the application of these measures, focusing on issues such as the favourable environment, the quality of work-life balance and the implementation of these practices. The final part, of practical nature, consists of a case study of a specific company to test the satisfaction experienced by the organisation's employees, and their perception of these measures.

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2. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In today's society, full of often conflicting commitments and responsibilities, WLB has emerged as a major issue both in the workplace and in society. The study on this topic has surpassed the organisational focus, transcending to the social sphere and becoming a public health issue. A work-life imbalance undoubtedly leads to a higher level of stress and unhappiness in life. Thereby, in addition to decreasing business performances, WL imbalance has negative consequences on the health of the person who suffers from it, such as high cortisone levels or increased heart attacks. (Sánchez-Hernández *et al.*, 2019, p.2).

Emphasising the importance of WLB, in this section we analyse: a) what this concept really means and its origins; b) the main hindering factors for WLB, c) the negative effects of a WL imbalance and positive effects of a WL balance.

2.1. Origins and definition of WLB

2.1.1. The origins of the work-life balance

The term work-life balance is by no means new or unique to our professional careers. This idea of limiting working hours has its origins in the manufacturing laws of the late 19th century. At that time, working hours were restricted for women and children. Around 1938, a total of 44 hours of work per week was established, except for those professions that required 24 hours a day availability. The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1980s helped to make WLB a relevant issue, popularising basic workers' rights such as maternity leave. Thus, the term took root (Raja and Stein, 2014).

The concept of "work-life balance" as such originated at the end of the 20th century, in 1986. It had a short-lived use in everyday language. However, such programmes existed almost 60 years earlier. One example was the W.K. Kellogg Company, which before World War II replaced traditional eight-hour shifts with shorter ones and found that it did increase efficiency and worker morale. The author Rosabeth Moss Kanter, with her book *"Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy"* (1977), already brought the issue of work-life

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balance from an up-to-date perspective to the forefront of research and organisations. In the 1980s and 1990s, companies started to look at this phenomenon and include it in their offerings. In the beginning, the focus was mainly on the issue of maternity.

This process has been changing and evolving until today, and has become a major issue. Nowadays, WLB does not distinguish so much between the sexes and also recognises other types of commitments besides work and family life (Lockwood, 2003).

2.1.2. Definition of WLB

As described above, WLB consists of «the possibility for working people to make compatible, on the one hand, the work aspect and, on the other hand, the personal aspect in the broadest possible sense, including family needs as well as personal and individual needs, leisure management...» (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2021, p.7). However, this is not the only definition proposed by the literature. In fact, there is no clear definition of the concept. In the following table 1, other definitions can be observed. In this project, I will approach the phenomenon based on the description proposed by the Ministry of Equality.

Table 1. Definitions of WLB.

AUTHORS	DEFINITIONS
Work–life balance defined by Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003, p.511)	<i>«Work–family balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter-role phenomenon»</i>
Work–life balance defined by the Ministry of Equality (2021, p.4)	<i>«The possibility for working people to make compatible, on the one hand, the work aspect and, on the other hand, the personal aspect in the broadest possible sense, including family needs as well as personal and individual needs, leisure management...»</i>
Work–life balance defined by Kirchmeyer (2000, p.80)	<i>«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»</i>
Work–life balance defined by Grzywacz and Bass (2003, p.257)	<i>«Balance is a combined measure whereby work–family conflict was subtracted from work–family facilitation, and family– work conflict was subtracted from family–work facilitation»</i>
Work–life balance defined by Fleetwood (2007, p.351)	<i>«Work–life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work»</i>

Source: Adapted from Kalliath and Brough, (2008, p.2-4).

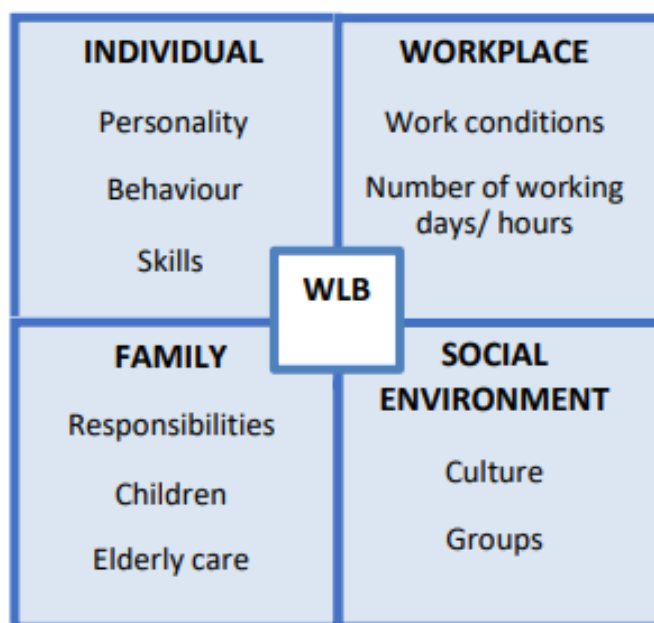
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The concept, as discussed above, remains difficult to define and operationalise. This may be largely due to paradigms suggesting that equilibrium consisted of portions of time and that the domains of work, home and social life were separate entities (Brough *et al.*, 2020).

2.2. Factors triggering work-life imbalance and its consequences

Work-life balance is a subjective concept anchored to the individual's perception which can be influenced by *multiple reasons*. Depending on the context of the individual, some factors will have *more weight* than others in this balance or imbalance. Analysing the literature, we identify a number of factors that might hinder WLB. In particular (see Figure 1), we divided these factors into four groups: a) individual factors; b) family factors; c) workplace factors, and d) social environment factors.

Figure 2. Factors triggering work-life imbalance.



Source: Own elaboration.

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2.2.1. Individual factors

The individual is the most important factor in this area. Depending on the individual's *personality*, work-life balance will be easier or more difficult to achieve. Regarding personality, to give an example, studies by two American heart specialists (Delecta, 2011) delineated two different types of personalities based on heart disorders and behaviours at the individual level: Type A and Type B. A person who fits into type B. A person who fits into type A would be one who is active, more passionate and competitive; someone of type B would have a calmer, more patient and balanced way of being. Given this, it is more logical to argue that type A fits in or is more focused on what would be a more efficient subject to work with. However, in this case, there would be a negative reflex to being able to reconcile work and personal life.

Cases such as workaholism, i.e., work-obsessed behaviour, which leads to the total destruction of any possibility of work-life balance, deserve special mention. People who develop this type of attitude often suffer from alienation, family problems and even health problems (Delecta, 2011).

2.2.2. Family

It is indisputable that one's role in the family has an impact on the issue at hand. This includes issues such as marriage, raising children, caring for elderly relatives at home, etc. All this influences the demands of responsibility and the imbalance between work and family life. Therefore, the different personal demands that each person experiences may or may not make it easier to reconcile work and family life. Those who have the responsibility of caring for the children or the elderly are inevitably obliged to put their careers or jobs at risk. This is undoubtedly a source of stress for them. This is the complete opposite of those who do not have any dependents and have total ease in reconciling all facets of their lives (Delecta, 2011).

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2.2.3. Workplace

Although it may not seem like it, the workplace environment is another factor. When one works within an organisation, no matter which one it is, certain demands are expected from the individual. It is precisely these efforts that can lead to an imbalance. It is worth mentioning that this variable has a greater influence on work-life balance than the family environment. As mentioned above, being part of a company requires time and skills. One of the most common efforts or objectives demanded in any organisation is to increase efficiency. Managers try to increase organisational efficiency by focusing on increasing employee loyalty. Working conditions, number of working days or working hours play a key role (Delecta, 2011).

In their study, Robak and Słocińska (2015), conclude the great significance of the social environment at work in the WLB. The social environment at work is understood as formal relationships that have a connection with the hierarchical order, as well as informal relationships based on personal contacts between employees. A positive assessment of this aspect results in a well-functioning organisation, where there is open communication and a pleasant atmosphere at the workplace, and where the rights of the employees are respected.

2.2.4. Social environment

Another factor that is noteworthy in this classification is the social environment. Especially in those countries with highly collectivist cultures which attach great importance to the feeling of belonging to a group and the responsibilities that this entails (Delecta, 2011). National cultures or norms concerning the support of work-life balance are based on egalitarianism, familialism and work-centredness. In order to investigate the background of state provision, it is common to analyse aspects such as the culture of a country, the aforementioned gender egalitarianism or the collectivist or individualistic tradition of a particular country.

Thus, in general, the national context should be studied from a longitudinal perspective through its own historical development and horizontally in comparison to other countries (Fan *et al.*, 2021). For example, in Japanese work culture, the quantity of time spent on work is prioritised over the quality of the work produced. Despite

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attempts to improve this aspect, work-life balance for nurses has not been achieved. Moreover, this sector may include workaholics, as the proportion of work is truly excessive from the outset (Makabe *et al.*, 2015). In many European countries, on the other hand, shorter working hours are very common. In fact, it has become one of the most common strategies for employees to achieve the desired work-life balance and satisfaction in both spheres of life (Beham *et al.*, 2019).

2.2.5. Consequences of an imbalance in work-life balance

Table 2 shows some of the consequences of both imbalance and balance in people's work and personal lives. These have been classified according to three different groups that we have identified as the most common and relevant: mental health, relationships with family and friends, and finally organisational outcomes.

Table 2. Consequences of an (im)balance in WLB.

Consequences	Work-life imbalance	Work-life balance
<p>Group A:</p> <p>Individual Mental Health</p>	<p>In multiple analyses it has been considered that stress at work and work-life imbalance can be part of serious problems in workers such as mood and anxiety disorders (Wang, 2006, p. 541).</p>	<p>There is a strong belief that those who enjoy work-family balance are satisfied with their jobs and life in general "<i>because they are being part of role activities that they consider important to them</i>" (Greenhaus et al., 2003; p. 515). In addition, they are mentally healthier as they experience a sense of harmony in their lives because their conditions allow them to meet all their demands, both work and personal (Haar <i>et al.</i>, 2014, p.5).</p>
<p>Group B:</p> <p>Familiar and social relationships</p>	<p>If the family environment is uncooperative according to Kinnunen et al. (2006), it "<i>is a source of stress, and has been considered the main antecedent of family-work conflict</i>" (Franco-González, (2020, p. 26).</p>	<p>If family and friends act as a barrier against negative events it will have positive consequences on the health of workers. It will also strengthen social relationships (Pradhan, 2016, p.4).</p>
<p>Group C:</p>	<p>Lack of balance leads to tensions within the organisation. Tensions that</p>	<p>There is extensive literature supporting and evidencing the theory of the many benefits</p>

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Organisational outcomes	lead to job dissatisfaction, thoughts of quitting and intentions of turnover (Fisher-McAuley <i>et al.</i> , 2003, p.14).	associated with WLB as a consequence of positive organisational outcomes, such as reduced work and personal conflict, high employee commitment to the company and increased employee job satisfaction (Chaudhuri <i>et al.</i> , 2020, p. 156).
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Source: Own elaboration.

Broadly speaking, what emerges from this analysis is the range of possible consequences of balance or imbalance between the two spheres of life: personal and professional. In each of the groups identified (A, B and C), articles are cited that discuss the most common consequences that can occur both in the case of balance and in the absence of balance.

For example, in group A, which refers to the mental health of the individual, Wang (2006) mentions the appearance of serious problems such as anxiety or mood disorders in case of imbalance. On the other hand, from the positive point of view, Haar *et al.* (2014) point out that workers who enjoy mental health experience feelings of harmony in their lives. If we turn to group B, relating to family and friendship relationships, as negative consequences, Franco-González (2020) comments that stress can appear if these relationships are not cooperative. If the opposite is the case, it will have a positive impact on the worker's health. Finally, from the perspective of organisational performance, Fisher-McAuley *et al.* (2003) cite problems such as job dissatisfaction and tensions in general. The opposite would be the case for balance, with a large number of benefits for the company, such as a high degree of employee commitment to the organisation, as pointed out by Chaudhuri *et al.* (2020).

3. WORK-LIFE BALANCE PRACTICES

As shown above, WLB encompasses many perspectives and factors. It is therefore difficult to define the term, but also to put it into practice and make it work properly. From an organisational point of view, many organisations adopt a set of WLB practices, i.e. practices aimed at improving the work-life balance of employees. However, adoption reasons might be different from one company to another (e.g., the fulfilment of government/ trade union requirements, strategic approach, etc.). In addition, it is acknowledged by WLB literature there is no single route for companies to

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enhance the employee WLB. Therefore, this section aims to identify and compare typologies of WLB practices based on different authors and, then, to describe the main WLB initiatives that comprise these bunch of WLB practices.

3.1. A comparison of WLB practices

In this section, attention is focused on a selection of 5 papers in order to show the discrepancies in the identification of WLB practices. According to Table 3, it is evident that the main and most common measures adopted in favour of WLB are: flexible start and/or finish times, telecommuting and financial support, followed by intensive working hours. However, it is also worth mentioning less considered practices such as improvements to the reduction of working hours due to legal guardianship or the adaptation of timetables to attend training courses. Table 3 shows the general classification based on of the different considerations made by the authors, which have been taken into account to carry out the classification, comparing them with each other.

Table 3. Comparison between WLB practices.

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4
	Measures to organise working time	Spatial flexibility measures	Measures relating to social improvements and benefits	Measures relating to improvements in legal permits
Ministry of Equality (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flexible start and/or finish times. - Intensive working hours on Fridays and/or on certain dates. - Flexible holidays. -Possibility to choose or change shifts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distance work. - Videoconferencing. - Online training. - Geographical mobility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health insurance. - Pension plan. -Life/accident insurance. -Financial assistance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extension of paternity leave. - Extension of breastfeeding leave. - Paid care leave. - Unpaid leave (leave of absence, unpaid days).
Sánchez-Hernández <i>et al.</i>, (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible working hours. - Job sharing. - Moving from full-time to part-time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work at home. - Videoconferencing. - Access to resources for part-time arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shopping assistance. - Medical services. - WLB training and education for workers and their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family care (children, elderly, etc.). - Family leave such as maternity and paternity leave.

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- Compression of working hours.	families. - Paid leave for the care of dependants.
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Table 3. Comparison between WLB practices (continued).

	GROUP 1 Measures to organise working time	GROUP 2 Spatial flexibility measures	GROUP 3 Measures relating to social improvements and benefits	GROUP 4 Measures relating to improvements in legal permits
López-Ibor <i>et al.</i>, (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible working hours. - Part-time work. - Job sharing. - Flexibility of schedule. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of videoconferencing. - Teleworking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of certain care services for family. - Monetary aid for the birth of child, large families, etc. - Personal and family counselling services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paid maternity/paternity and breastfeeding leave in excess of those established by law. - Facilitate leave of absence.
Cordón <i>et al.</i>, (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced or more flexible working hours. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monetary support for childcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maternity leave. - Parental leave. - Paternity leave. - Urgent family leave. - Childcare services.
Sargeant <i>et al.</i>, (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flexi-time. -Job sharing. -Part-time job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teleworking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employee assistance programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special maternity leave arrangements. - Household support services. - Family leave.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. A description of the main WLB practices

3.2.1. Measures to organise working time

This bunch of WLB practices refers to measures to organise working time. This area contains a series of measures that allow employees to carry out their professional

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tasks with a high degree of flexibility in terms of working hours, shifts and schedules. In this way, they have more leeway to distribute and organise the time they allocate to their work and personal lives. In this group, as noted in the above table, the main initiatives adopted have been the following.

- **Flexible working hours.** This means that the person can work as flexibly as possible within certain limits, for example, the obligation to work a total set of hours per week. Examples of such practices would be flexibility in the time of arrival and departure from work, the possibility to work part-time or to use a job share.
- **Flexibility in scheduling,** such as flexibility in the distribution of holidays and the use of leave days (López-Ibor *et al.*, 2010).

3.2.2. Spatial flexibility measures

These measures mainly refer to flexibility in the workplace. This means that it is not necessary for the individual to perform all work at a certain physical location. Thanks to the advancement of information technologies, this type of practice has become a reality and is nowadays the order of the day, although it also depends on the type of occupation carried out. As shown in the table above, there is broad consensus among all the authors and organisations in the expansion of these practices, which are mainly the following:

- **The use of videoconferencing,** which allows work meetings to be held without the employee having to travel to another city or country. This is a very good way of reducing costs for the company and reconciling work and family life for the employee.
- **Teleworking,** on the other hand, makes it easier for employees to complete their working day without having to be in person, using a computer and an Internet connection provided by the organisation (López-Ibor *et al.*, 2010).

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3.2.3. Measures relating to social improvements and benefits

This category includes all those measures through which companies offer support services to employees by providing a range of certain care services for dependent family members or by providing information and advice about such services. Of course, this involves a significant cost for the organisation, and is therefore common in companies where employment conditions are relatively good and stable. Among these measures, the following stand out:

- **Financial support for child and elderly care.** The company can offer financial support to pay for these services outside the company. Such support can be offered in various forms: money, discounts in local centres for these services, and special vouchers that can only be used to pay for these services (Bellido, 2000).
- **Monetary assistance for large families.** Anecdotally, in 2003 the Foundation *+Familia* was created with the aim of promoting and developing actions that, from different areas of life, improve the quality of life and well-being of families. This organisation was promoted by the Spanish Federation of Large Families, with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and a number of business groups (Núñez, 2007).
- **Personal and family counselling services,** such as courses focused on professional and personal growth and development (Suárez Santos and Pérez, 2010).

3.2.4. Measures relating to improvements in legal permits

This includes all measures intended to make life easier for employees who need to leave work temporarily for personal reasons. This category of practices entails even higher costs for the organisation, both organisational and monetary. Thus, such measures are also more likely to be considered in companies that are known to be concerned about the well-being of their employees. Examples of such practices include the following:

- **Maternity leave.** This is generally a paid leave that usually compensates almost the entire salary level available to the mother in her job. It may even start before the baby is born.

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- **Paternity leave.** This is a leave that often follows maternity leave and has different possibilities and particularities in different European countries. In general, it is a joint or transferable right between the two parents. However, some countries have already established non-transferable quotas for both parents (García and Morán, 2008).
- **Leave of absence to care for dependents.** The Spanish work-life balance law establishes rebates on social security contributions for organisations that replace employees on care leave (Campillo, 2010).

3.3. Institutional regulations of Work-Life Balance

This study focuses specifically on work-life balance in Spain. The legal framework concerning this issue is analysed in this section. Work-life balance policies experienced a major boost at the end of the 20th century, when the European Union approved for the first time a Directive (96/34/EC) recognising the right of the individual, man or woman to parental leave of at least three months.

At the state level, the first law regulating this area was Law 39/1999 of 5 November 1999 to promote the reconciliation of work and family life for workers. However, it is the Organic Law 3/2007 of 22 March 2007 for the effective equality of women and men, which really represents progress in this area, introducing substantial improvements in work-life balance rights (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2021). The objectives of Law 39/1999 on reconciling work and family life are:

- A. To incorporate those EU precepts that are pending transposition;
- B. To comply with the mandate of the Spanish Constitution, as set out in Articles 9.2 and 39.1 of the Constitution
- C. To strike a balance so that parental leave is not affected by employment;
- D. To obtain a reduction in working hours for those who are obliged to care for family members who need it
- E. To provide employees with facilities in order to combine work with their personal duties. The law also introduced a number of new aspects, such as adoption/ fostering leave and maternity and breastfeeding leave, among others.

Another law that marked a turning point was Law 3/2007 of 22 March. It sought to achieve effective equality between women and men with the following objectives: the

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prevention and elimination of every existing discrimination in the workplace based on sex and the provision of efficient policies to achieve this goal, i.e., total equality between the sexes in the workplace. Some interesting notes about this law are that it is the first legal text that lays out the foundations for paternity leave and explicitly recognises work-life balance as a workers' right (Martín-Llaguno and Guirao-Mirón, 2013).

Table 4. WLB regulatory initiatives according to each law.

LAWS	WLB INITIATIVES
Law 39/1999 of 5 November 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maternity and paternity leave. Sixteen uninterrupted weeks with the possibility of extending for a further two weeks. - Breastfeeding leave. This leave shall be determined by the employee within his or her ordinary working day. - Paid leave. For example, two days for the birth of a child. - Reduction of the working day for family reasons. - Leave of absence to care for family members for a period of no more than one or three years, depending on the case.
Organic Law 3/2007 of 22 March 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maternity and paternity leave. It introduces the improvement of an extension of two more weeks in the case of a son or daughter with a disability. - Breastfeeding leave. This may be increased proportionally in the case of multiple births. - Voluntary leave. The minimum duration is reduced to four months. - Leave of absence to care for family members. The maximum duration is extended from one to two years. - Reduction of working hours for legal guardianship. The maximum age of the child entitling to this reduction is extended (from six to eight years), and the minimum limit for this reduction is reduced to one eighth of the working day.
State Collective Agreement for Consultancy and Market and Public Opinion Research Companies (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paid leave. For example, fifteen calendar days in case of marriage or following maternity or paternity leave; four days in case of death of spouse, parents or children and one day for moving house - Leave of absence. A period of leave of absence of no more than three years is granted to care for each child. - Reduced working hours. This is given in the event that someone is caring for a disabled child under the age of twelve. Another example would be for the direct care of a sick or injured relative.

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from the laws.

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In addition to this, there are agreements between the company and the employees and specific collective bargaining agreements, which refer to all those agreements that are in written form and that refer to working and employment conditions (Vásquez, 1992). In the case of this project, we are going to analyse the case of a digital services and consultancy company. As this is a specific type of occupation, the applicable collective agreement is the State Collective Agreement for Consultancy and Market and Public Opinion Research Companies. In this agreement, the issue of work-life balance is conceived as a subject within the equality plans (Convenio Colectivo Estatal de Empresas de Consultoría y Estudios de Mercado y de la Opinión Pública, 2018).

Table 4 shows the evolution of the different practices. The first law 39/1999 of 5 November 1999 introduced a set of measures that have been improved by the equality law that was subsequently passed. With regard to the Collective Bargaining Agreement in question, the concern for the welfare of employees can also be seen, offering measures that truly ensure the work-life balance of workers.

3.3.1. Data on practices being implemented by sector

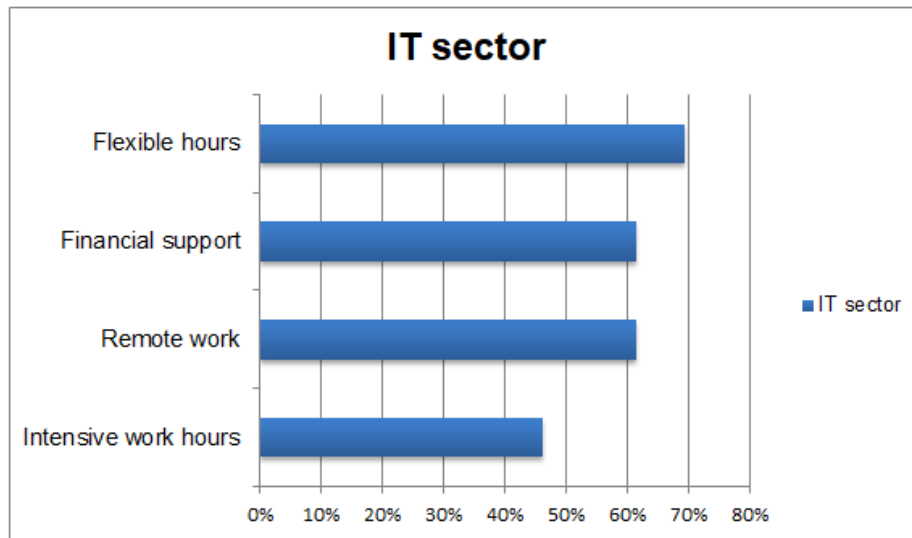
In this section, I will briefly highlight, through the Ministry of Equality, which are the most developed WLB practices in the Spanish context. Then, given that this study focuses on the IT sector, I will visualise the specific data for this sector. According to the Ministry of Equality (2021), the most implemented practices in companies are the following:

- Practices related to flexibility concerning the organisation of working time, such as flexible start and finish times (71.6%) and intensive working hours in the summer months (52.6%).
- Measures involving flexibility in the workplace are of great importance and have a high implementation rate (62.9%).
- Practices that have to do with social benefits and assistance to employees are quite common in companies, such as, for example, financial assistance for the birth of children and schooling (55.2%).

However, in the case of the information and technology (IT) sector, a specific sector of the case study company, the WLB practices most widely implemented are those shown in Figure 3.

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Figure 3. Most implemented WLB practices in the IT sector.



Source: Adapted from Ministry of Equality (2021), p. 26.

From the analysis of the most adopted WLB practices at a national level, according to the Ministry of Equality, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Predominant presence of flexibility measures within organisations, with flexible start and finish times and intensive working hours in the summer months standing out.
- Spatial flexibility measures such as teleworking are becoming increasingly important.
- Social benefit measures such as childbirth allowances follow the ranking.
- Paternity leave is increasingly present. However, the percentage of its actual implementation is below the previous ones.

However, if we focus on the specific sector that has been selected for the study, i.e., the IT sector, we see that the ranking coincides to a large extent with that reflected above at the general level. The only difference is that social benefit measures have a slightly higher (almost unnoticed) share than special flexibility measures. Otherwise, they have very similar features.

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4. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK OF WLB PRACTICES

Despite the fact that many WLB practices have been introduced and implemented in organisations, the literature has not provided an appropriate framework (or tool) to measure and validate the process of implementing these initiatives.

Therefore, how can we get a picture of the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation process of these practices and whether the expected outcomes are being achieved? Drawing from the works of Bardoel *et al.* (2008) and Ryan and Kossek (2008) and borrowing ideas from the HRM implementation literature (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Wright and Nishii, 2013), I establish the main areas of analysis to get a true picture of the WLB implementation process and its main outcomes.

In this study, the implementation of HR practices (i.e., WLB practices) is understood as a multi-stage process that begins with the decision or design to introduce or change an existing practice (Trullen *et al.*, 2020). In turn, HR professionals or middle managers are responsible for incorporating and communicating the intentional HR practices into daily organisational life, and thus being experienced by employees (Bondarouk *et al.*, 2018).

4.1. Quality of WLB practices design

In this study, the quality of WLB practices design is understood as «the extent to which comprehensive planning processes are used to establish the business case and align the work-life strategy with the organisation's priorities» (Bardoel *et al.*, 2009, p.253). It is essential that there be a strong connection between WLB and the company's strategy.

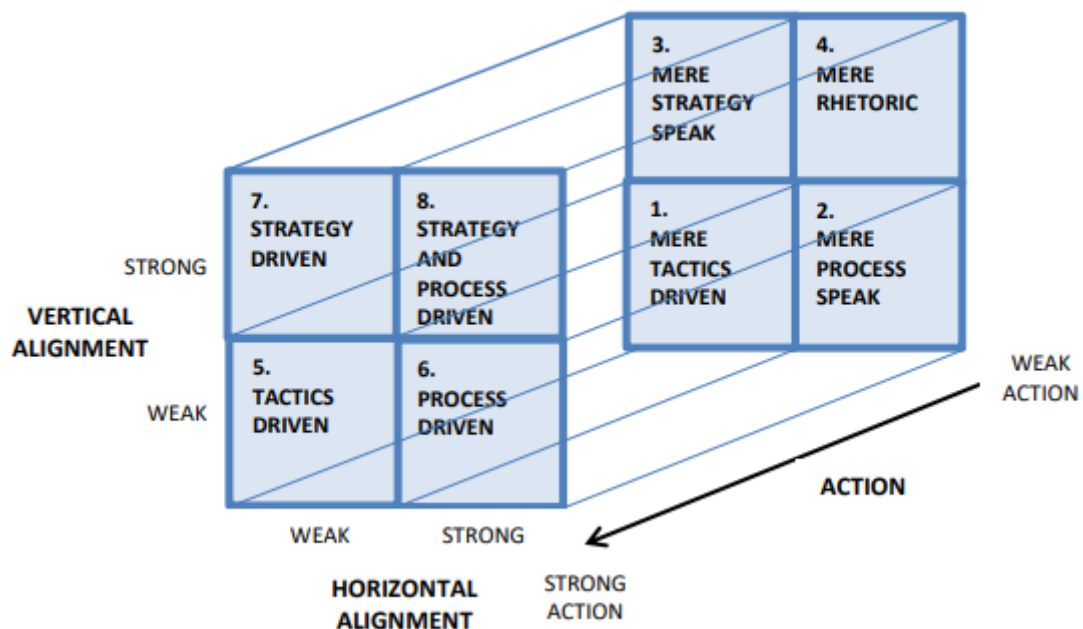
In this way, the organisation is strengthened and is able to create synergies to achieve the set strategic goals. If this is not the case, contradictory effects are likely to occur. This approach is one of the main reasons why the quality of the design of WLB practices is so important. In this sense, Delery and Doty (1996) identified three possible theoretical approaches to be applied to human resource strategies in order to explain organisational performance. One of them is the configurational approach, which argues that for HRM practices to be most effective they must be: a) coherent with each other (i.e., horizontal fit) and b) aligned with organisational aspects such as strategy (i.e., vertical fit).

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On the one hand, **horizontal fit** is concerned with whether the measures employed by the company actually fit into a logical system or 'package' of practices that help improve and support the effectiveness of others. In order to experiment with this fit, it is essential to detail how each practice works in achieving organisational goals. These authors pointed out that there is a myriad of possible combinations of measures (i.e., equifinality principle) that will produce exactly the same organisational outcome. Based on this assumption, it follows that it is key to focus on the availability of certain practices that are of interest, rather than thinking about whether the organisation is making use of a particular type of selection device, for example.

Vertical fit, on the other hand, is defined as the alignment of HR practices with the specific context of the organisation (Delery, 1998). According to Gratton and Truss (2003), vertical fit is a dynamic process and it will need to vary depending on the circumstances or context in which the organisation is operating at the time. As is well known, circumstances rarely remain constant. It is therefore essential to apply fluid dynamics that allow for as much flexibility and variability as possible. In addition, it is key to maintain a strong link between the overall vision of the company and the goals and philosophy of the organisation.

Figure 4. The Three-Dimensional Model of People Strategy.



Source: Adapted from Gratton and Truss (2003, p.77)

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According to Gratton and Truss (2003), a strong horizontal and vertical fit is essential to carry out the organisational strategy, and hence to be experienced by employees. However, it is not enough to simply design quality practices; they must also be implemented properly. Thus, a quality design is the first step to achieving the expected outcomes, but it is not enough by itself. By way of illustration, Figure 4 shows the different situations (eight in total) that could arise according to Gratton and Truss in this implementation process.

In a context where the *execution or action process is weak*, four situations may occur (Gratton and Truss, 2003):

- A. Mere tactics driven.** This would obviously be the worst case, since there would be no coherent link between the practices and the organisational strategy, neither among themselves.
- B. Mere process speaks.** This situation (i.e., low vertical fit and strong horizontal fit) may occur when there is a strong disconnection between the senior HR team and the business leadership, or when the senior HR team has low strategic or business skills but high levels of process expertise. As a result, HR policies are developed in a sophisticated way that is isolated from business imperatives. This expertise is not translated into action, often due to a lack of line support for HR initiatives that are seen as unrelated to business objectives (Gratton and Truss, 2003, p.78).
- C. Mere rhetoric.** In this case, there is a strongly articulated people strategy that is linked to the company's strategy and also shows strong links to internal HR policy, but the whole is not put into practice in the day-to-day behaviour of managers or reflected in the experiences of employees. The HR team may be highly skilled in policy development, but may have weak implementation capabilities or may have unsupportive senior management. The people's strategy looks good on paper, but it is just reality on paper.
- D. Mere strategy speaks.** This combination may occur when the people strategy is clearly articulated but is not translated into a coherent set of HR practices or implemented by line managers. The HR leadership team may be very close to the business and have high-level strategic skills, but for whatever reason it is not able to translate these business objectives into HR practices.

On the other hand, in a context where the *execution or action is strong*, the following situations may arise:

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- A. Tactics driven.** This combination characterises the traditional "administrative" HR function that focuses on the implementation of individual HR policies with limited relationship to overall business goals and objectives or to each other. This variation might be associated with HR teams, which are not considered a core business function, but rather "clerks of works" who manage the support function, often for a set of business objectives that is no longer appropriate.
- B. Process driven.** This combination occurs in organisations where the HR team has weak business or strategic skills but excellent HR process skills, coupled with the capability to translate these skills into practice.
- C. Strategy driven.** In this case, we note that the implementation of business objectives is primarily a line management responsibility. Consequently, there is a strong vertical drive, often embodied through performance management processes. However, some of the subtleties of reinforcing HR practices are lost due to poor horizontal alignment.
- D. Strategy and process driven.** In many ways, this represents the "ideal type" of people strategy: HR policies that are consistent and aligned with business objectives and strategies, all implemented effectively.

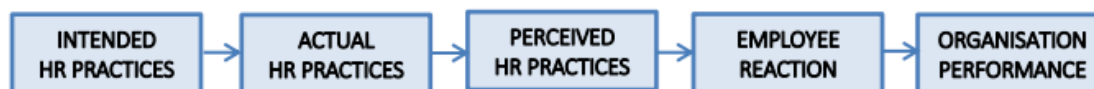
In summary, and bringing this vision to WLB practices, I can assume that the quality of WLB design is essential for the organisational objectives to be met (in particular, employees' WLB perception). However, without a correct execution and real involvement or support of the actors involved, employees will hardly be able to experience this WLB practices, and, in turn, WLB perception.

4.2. Quality of WLB practices execution

As we have seen in the previous section, the quality of WLB practices design must be accompanied by the quality of WLB practices execution. In this study, we understand the execution quality when: WLB practices are perceived by employees as intended or designed (Gratton and Truss, 2003; Wright and Nishii, 2013). To provide theoretical coverage for this section, we explain the rationale based on the model of Wright and Nishii (2013).

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Figure 5. Process Model of SHRM.



Source: Adapted from Wright and Nishii (2007, p.10).

- **Intended HRM practices.** In this illustration, the practices that are intended in the HR department are reflected. These practices are the result of the development of a strategy that seeks to achieve the design of an HRM system or measure through which the decision-makers within the company believe that it will deliver effective and desired results for the employees. This can be linked to various factors such as organisational strategy or external influences. However, the bottom line is that the decision-makers have made a proactive analysis of the situation and have identified a set of HR measures that are optimal for business success.
- **Actual HRM practices.** According to authors such as Truss and Gratton (1994), the above picture is described as "actual HR practices". This means that not all the practices that are proposed are actually implemented afterwards. It also happens that those that are implemented do so in a different way to that initially proposed (Mintzberg, 1978).
- **Perceived HRM practices.** According to the model, real HR practices exist objectively speaking. However, they need to be perceived and interpreted subjectively by each and every employee in the group. As a result, the process goes down to the individual level, where there can be considerable variation due to the variability of actual HR practices.
- **Employees' reaction.** Depending on which practice is implemented, each employee will react differently, because each person processes information differently. The organisation's main goal is to design and implement an HR strategy that leads to positive attitudinal reactions from employees and higher cognitive skills relevant to the job and the company.
- **Organisation performance.** This is the last step in the model described above. Basically, it is about translating the above process into positive results based on productivity, quality and customer satisfaction. This is verified through financial ratios such as profit or return on assets, i.e., ROA. In this model, for organisational results to accrue, employee reactions must be consistent enough with each other to have a positive effect at the workgroup level.

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One of the aspects that the authors themselves highlight as critical in this process is the role of communication (Wright and Nishii, 2013). They comment that, without an appropriate communicative of HR practices, employees may perceive such practices differently, and therefore behave in a heterogeneous way (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Not surprisingly, therefore, there has been a high level of interest in the HRM implementation literature to know what communication features should be present in an HR system in order to convey the organisational message in the right way (see the review of Ostroff and Bowen, 2016).

Analogously and specifically, the role of communication (i.e., quality of communication) is also considered essential to achieve a successful execution of WLB practices. According to Ryan and Kossek (2008), variability occurs in the degree to which there are formal written policies about WLB within companies. If these are different for different organisational units, employee awareness is hindered to some extent. Another way in which quality is diminished is when written policies are poorly communicated, limiting the knowledge, availability and applicability of the policy or measure to individual situations. An example of a WLB practice that is not perceived by employees would be when an employee believes that they are entitled to flexitime once it is announced, but when they want to apply it, they find that they cannot because it is not universal. Or because they do not have the support of the supervisor, which makes it difficult to adopt it. This situation of creating unmet expectations can have undesirable effects.

In this whole process, the role of the implementers, as discussed in the following section, is key, as they are the ones in charge of applying the intended practices to current ones, as well as communicating them. In the following section we will discuss the importance of supervisor and organisational support in creating the necessary context for the implementation of WLB practices.

4.3. Supportive environment for WLB

As discussed in the previous section (4.2), the low degree of support from the organisation and particularly from the implementers to these WLB practices can lead to their partial or non-execution, or hinder communication of their benefits or even of their existence, reducing their use to a minimum. Therefore, it is a very important transversal

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factor in the implementation process of WLB practices. In this study, organisational and supervisors' support means «*the extent to which steps have been taken to build a culture to support work-life balance initiatives and demonstrate leadership commitment*» (Bardoel *et al.*, 2009, p. 253).

4.3.1. Supervisors (or implementers) support for the WLB

According to Ryan and Kossek (2008), supervisors (or implementers) support by itself is a key attribute of WLB implementation. Depending on their level of commitment and support, supervisors can reinforce or create barriers to implementation or break down barriers (see Table 5).

Table 5. Breaks down barriers and reinforces/ Creates Barriers.

Supervisors or Implementers support for the WLB	
Breaks down barriers	Reinforces/ Creates Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for policy use recognizes individual needs and value preferences • Support promotes feeling of respect and inclusion • Removing obstacles to policy use signals that employee is valued • Looks at how implementation will affect the workload and social justice perceptions in workgroup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support can prevent individuals from being able to fully engage in the workplace • Lack of support for policy use can be a form of subtle discrimination • Discourages employees from using a policy by making it difficult to use • Signals a lack of appreciation for individual needs and preferences

Source: Ryan and Kossek (2008, p.300).

As shown in table 5, a lack of support from supervisors can lead to the creation of barriers to full contribution and engagement. While the adoption of measures may aim to promote inclusion, what is crucial is whether inclusion actually occurs in their implementation. Without the support of supervisors, employees may feel excluded. More examples can be provided in this key role of the implementers. For example, Lyness *et al.* (2001), found that managerial support was the factor that best predicted the use of the WLB initiative. Managers have a strong influence on working hours, for example, through the scheduling of employee training and holidays. If managers are in

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a position to offer real support tools to their staff, a balanced work-life balance model will emerge.

Supervisor support has shown to play a key role in the experience of work-family conflict, as supervisors are responsible for checking the implementation of WLB policies. They often have final approval over decisions that directly affect workers. A supervisor must also guide the activity of their employees, clarifying roles and pointing out potential obstacles. If the supervisor manages his or her job effectively, the results will be positive. For example, if the supervisor advocates a workload reduction policy, it will mean getting employees to work the same hours they are paid for, not more or less. As discussed above, the supervisor's support for the use of the WLB policy affects inclusion. If this is not the case, the company may not function as it should and workers who are not supported may feel excluded.

In addition, other studies conclude that supervisors who support employees WLB have a more engaged team that is less likely to quit (Smith and Gardner, 2007). It is precisely the fact that managers are proactive in developing WLB policies that makes this issue crucial (Maxwell, 2005). Straub *et al.* (2018) also consider the supervisor to be a key figure. The successful implementation of WLB practices depends on the supervisor. Their support is a key element in achieving beneficial results. If this is not the case, the results can be disastrous. Combining good allocation decisions with a negative attitude can lead to a perceived lack of support or sabotage the use of work-life policies.

4.3.1. Organisational support

On the other hand, organisational support for WLB practices is also important. According to Bardoel *et al.* (2009), this organisational culture is promoted with the involvement of top management, with the allocation and reallocation of resources necessary for the development and execution of WLB practices. Whereas supervisor-level support for WLB could be considered a more proximate support, organisational support is a distant issue (Daverth *et al.*, 2016). In fact, employees could perceive or experience WLB support from their supervisor but experience no organisational support at all, or vice versa. If this happens it could be detrimental to the successful execution and communication of the designed WLB practices.

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4.4. Demonstrate value of WLB practices

Lastly, WLB practices should demonstrate organisational value. According to Bardoel *et al.* (2008, p. 254), demonstrated value is understood as: «the extent to which the work-life initiatives are monitored to demonstrate value to all stakeholders». On the one hand, an important piece of evidence is employee satisfaction with WLB practices. I focus on this aspect, since it is consistent with the definition of the effectiveness of the implementation of a practice: «effective implementation as the satisfaction employees' show with the HR practices (Van Waeyenberg and Decramer, 2018 p. 96).

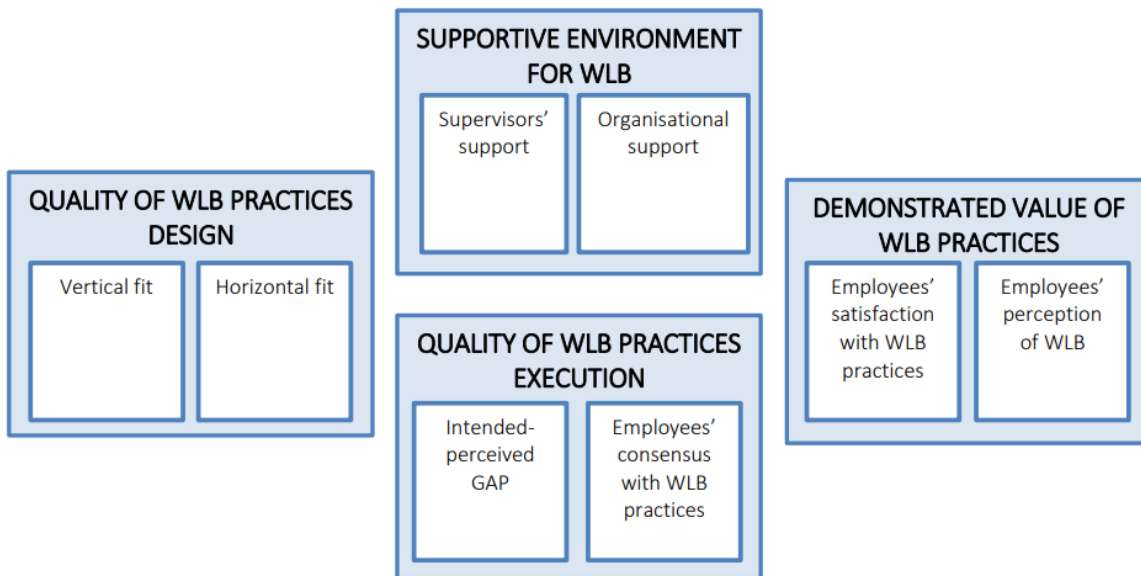
On the other hand, another piece of evidence is the measurement of the impact of WLB practices. Obviously, I consider that the most important point is to effectively get employees to perceive WLB. As mentioned above, satisfaction with work-life balance practices is closely linked to employees' perception of them. Beyond these two aspects considered in this work, others can also be analysed, such as the degree of performance objectives achieved as a result of the increase in WLB, corporate image, reduction of employee turnover, etc. In short, all those that have strategic reasoning (Bardoel *et al.*, 2008).

4.5. Overall picture of WLB practices implementation

Everything that has been previously developed is now presented schematically, in order to facilitate understanding and allow the reader to place each concept within its corresponding group. Thus, the graphical summary of the implementation of the practices would be as follows:

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Figure 6. Overall figure of WLB practices implementation.



Source: Own elaboration.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Case of study

The methodology chosen for this project has been the case study. Case studies are research procedures that examine something in particular. The possibilities for this modality are very broad. In this case, it is a case study on a particular company where the information available has been provided by employees and a project manager of the organisation in question. The data were collected by means of surveys using the Google Forms platform and subsequently provided to the informants through a contact person, also an employee of the organisation. The scales and questionnaires were drawn up with reference to some of the authors cited in Table 6.

In more detail, the procedure consisted of the previous selection of a company, as mentioned above; the carrying out of surveys aimed at the company's employees on aspects that were considered relevant to analyse the issues related to WLB practices implementation that are of interest to the study; and, finally, the interpretation of the results obtained.

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Table 6. Scales used in the study.

Stages and features analysed		Source, items and informants
Quality of WLB design	Vertical Fit	Gratton and Truss (2003). 4 items. Project Leader.
	Horizontal Fit	Gratton and Truss (2003) 4 items. Project Leader.
Quality WLB practices execution	Intended-perceived WLB GAP Employees' consensus with WLB practices	Ministerio de Igualdad (2021). 21 items Informants: Project leader and employees.
Supportive environment for WLB	Organisational support for WLB	Own. 1 item. Project Leader.
	Supervisors' support for WLB	Thomas and Ganster (1995). 7 items. Informants: Employees.
Demonstrated value of WLB practices	Employees' satisfaction with WLB practices	Kim and Ryu (2017). 1 item. Informant: Employees.
	Employees' perception of WLB	Kanya and Karatepe (2020). 4 items. Informant: Employees.

Source: Own elaboration.

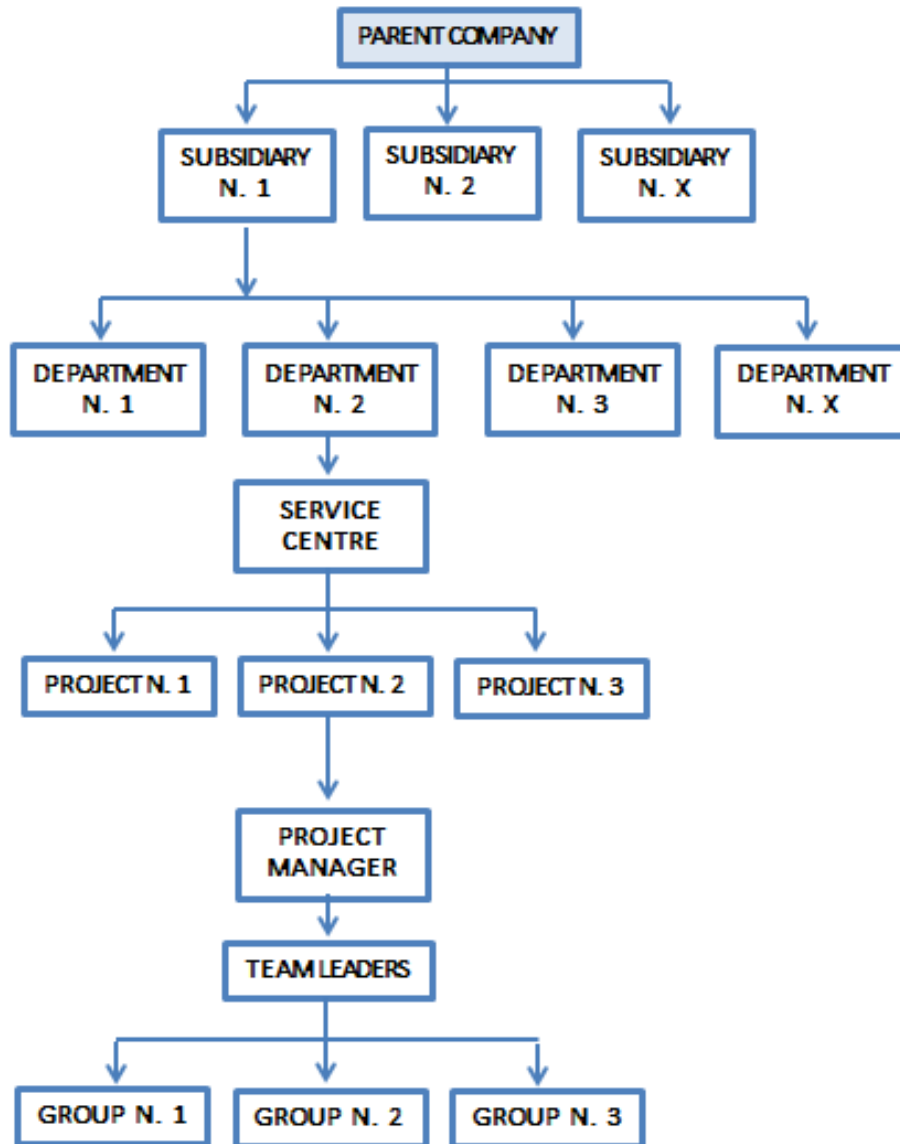
5.2. Brief explanation of the organisation

As already mentioned, in this Project I analyse a case study of a company belonging to the digital consultancy sector, but for reasons of *confidentiality*, the identity of the organisation will not be revealed. Thus, a description of the company will be given, keeping the company's anonymity as much as possible.

The organisation under study is a recently created company, the result of the merger of two companies dedicated to the world of digital services. It therefore focuses on offering mainly technological and consultancy services, as well as being a publisher of business software. It is a company with a presence in almost 30 countries, with more than 45,000 employees and a turnover of around 4.5 billion euros. The company's mission is to guide customers, partners and employees towards bold decisions by leveraging digital technology to build a future that is positive for each and every one of us. All this through procedures that are as sustainable as possible. The focus is on technology, but also on the organisation's ability to help the world move forward.

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Figure 7. Organisation chart of the company.



Source: Own elaboration.

The company is headquartered in its home country. In turn, the group has several subsidiaries around the world, including Spain. In the Spanish subsidiary, the organisation has a number of departments specialising in different areas such as software banking.

This study will focus on the service centre, which carries out various projects for clients and entities determined by the parent company. In the project under study, there are fifty people divided into three groups working under the direction of a project manager and team leaders. Thus, the simplified organisation chart of the company would be as shown in the image below. This company maintains a leading position at

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the European level. At the same time, it strives to create alliances that have a positive impact and drive innovative and revolutionary developments in its sector.

For all of the above reasons, choosing this company as a case study seemed like a good idea, as I know that this organisation attaches great importance to human capital, focusing its HR policies and initiatives on fostering talent, encouraging team spirit and caring for people, and I would like to verify that this is the feeling perceived by its employees.

6. RESULTS

In the following section, I analyse and comment the main results presented by the company under study. Firstly, the demographic data of the sample will be presented, followed by calculations and comments related to results about the quality of the design of work-life balance practices, their execution, the supportive environment for WLB practices and finally, the value demonstrated.

6.1. Demographic data

In order to carry out the study on the implementation process of work-life balance practices adopted in the selected company, a sample of 22 employees in total was used, with the following demographic variables, in order to know and evaluate the same, as well as to know the results.

In terms of gender, 59.1% of the respondents were men, while the remaining 40.9% were women. Of these, the age range is between 24 and 46 years old.

The percentages relating to the number of years they have been working in the company are mainly concentrated in 1 and 2 years. "Most of us are young, that's a real reason. Another reason is that the demand in the sector is very high and other companies can hire new workers," says one employee.

Of the total number of employees surveyed, we differentiate between the 3 team leaders (13.6%) and the rest of the employees (86.4%). However, within this group, we classified each of them according to their function, as specified in the table below.

The civil status of the respondents is very varied, with the majority of the sample being single and divorced. 54.5% have no children, while 45.5% are fathers or mothers

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of one child. In the case of having a dependent relative in their care, the percentage is repeated but this time in reverse: 45.5% do not have this condition but 54.5% do.

All these statistics are broken down in the following table.

Table 7. Demographic variables of the sample.

Gender	M	F					
	59.1%	40.9%					
Age	24	25	27	30	31	32	34
	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	13.6%
	35	36	38	40	42	43	44
	13.6%	13.6%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	9.1%	4.5%
	46						
	4.5%						
Civil status	Single	Married	Divorced	In a relationship			
	31.8%	22.7%	31.8%	13.6%			
Children	0	1					
	54.5%	45.5%					
Dependent family members	0	1					
	45.5%	54.5%					
Years in the company	1	2	3	4	5		
	27.3%	27.3%	13.6%	13.6%	18.2%		
Position in the company	Automator	Java	Team	API Tester	Manual		
		Developer	Leader		Functional		
					Tester		
	27.3%	13.6%	13.6%	4.5%	40.9%		

Source: Own elaboration.

It is worth mentioning that the project manager of the analysed organisation was also surveyed, bringing the sample number to 23 in the end.

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6.2. Results of quality WLB practices design

Table 8 shows the results obtained by the Project Manager of the company regarding the quality of the design of WLB practices. This block is based on two criteria: the fit of the WLB practices with the corporate strategy (vertical fit) and the fit of the WLB practices with each other (horizontal fit). For each question or item, statements are established, with a minimum of 1: totally disagree and a maximum of 7: totally agree. Thus, the conclusions drawn are very positive. If we look at the table, we can easily see that all the scores given by the Project Manager are very high. All values are either 6 or 7, the latter being the most frequently used. The only items with a value slightly lower than the established maximum are both in the vertical fit group and are the following:

- *“Employees' work-life balance issues are actively represented in the group's main decision-making processes.”* In this case, the assessment may be slightly lower than in the other cases because the company's top management takes the demands of its employees into account when making decisions; however, many other factors are part of this process and it may sometimes be difficult to balance all the interests at stake. Despite this, the Project Manager's response shows that employees' work-life balance issues are actively represented in the group's key decision-making.
- *“Work-life balance objectives are regularly reviewed to ensure their continued relevance to strategic organisational objectives.”* On this occasion, it is probably the case that, due to reasons or issues of a different nature, work-life balance objectives are sometimes not reviewed as they should be in order to ensure or check their alignment with the strategic objectives of the organisation. However, judging by the scores, such a situation should rarely occur.

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Table 8. Results in relation to the quality of the design of WLB practices.

VERTICAL FIT		HORIZONTAL FIT	
ITEMS	SCORE	ITEMS	SCORE
1. Employees' work-life balance issues are actively represented in the group's main decision-making processes.	6	5. There is a clear statement of the work-life balance strategy that demonstrates how each individual work-life balance practice supports this broader strategy.	7
2. There are clear statements by the company of the work-life balance strategy and how it supports the corporate strategy.	7	6. Work-life balance practices are developed taking into account other work-life balance practices within the organisation.	7
3. The different hierarchical levels are actively involved in developing the strategic objectives of work-life balance practices.	7	7. Work-life balance practices are regularly reviewed to ensure their continued relevance to the overall work-life balance strategy.	7
4. Work-life balance objectives are regularly reviewed to ensure their continued relevance to strategic organisational objectives.	6	8. When a new work/life balance practice is developed, a great deal of effort is made to ensure that all work/life balance practices are mutually supportive.	7
MEAN	6.5	MEAN	7

Source: Items from Gratton and Truss (2003).

As far as the other items are concerned, there is nothing to complain about, as they all have the highest scores. In addition, the average for both modalities is excellent, with the vertical fit being 6.5 and the horizontal fit 7, i.e., the highest possible rating. From the latter, it can be concluded that the organisation in question really makes a lot of effort to ensure that all work-life balance measures are mutually supportive.

6.3. Quality of WLB practices execution

In this section I show (see table 10) the results regarding the level of gap between the intended WLB practices and those perceived by employees (i.e., I-P gap) and the degree of employees' consensus with WLB practices perceptions. To facilitate interpretation, table 9 categorizes different levels of these variables (i.e., high, medium

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and low). Those with higher I-P gaps and those with lower consensus level deserve special attention (red colour).

It is important to note that I consider that **any GAP is negative**, whether positive or negative. For example, whether it is +4 or -4, the reality is that there is a substantial difference between intentional and experienced. This denotes that, at the very least, there have been substantial changes in practice, e.g., managers applying the practice or adapting it, or some kind of miscommunication.

Table 9. Categorisation of the levels of the variables.

Degree of I-P Gap			Degree of Consensus		
High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
>±3	±3-±1	<±1	<±0.5	±0.5-±1	>±1

Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, table 10 show easily identifiable WLB practices with values that are not entirely desirable. The causes for this may be of different natures. What is clear is that the difference may be because the intended one is not perceived or because the perceived one is higher (e.g., adaptation).

For example, in **item 4**, this refers to the option for employees to have the possibility to “shape” their working day to some extent, team leaders show a high level of discrepancy between what is implemented and what is perceived. This is probably due to the responsibility they have to deal with, which differentiates them from other employees. We conclude that, although they can count on it, it hardly fits in with their role within the company. In addition, we observe that the degree of consensus is really low for both team leaders and the rest of the surveyed staff, which is really striking. From this, we deduce that each employee has a personal situation that leads to an individualised view or opinion on the issue under study.

Another noteworthy item is **item 8**, on the organisation of training and/or meetings during working hours. As can be seen, the I-P and consensus (SD) indices are very high and low, respectively. The difference between what is implemented and what is perceived can be explained by the fact that employees do not perceive that training is organised by their superiors. "Sometimes we have to train ourselves", says one employee. This is why the degree of consensus is low, as there will be people who consider that the company offers them the training they need, and others who do not.

Continuing with the analysis, the prominent (this time negative) value of the employees' P-I in **item 11**, referring to unpaid leave, is striking. The fact that the index

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is negative indicates that this practice is perceived to a greater extent by the workforce than is actually the case. In other words, it is widely accepted that the employee is absent from work for a specific period of time and forgoes remuneration. Employees point out that in this type of situation, being of a formal nature, they take the applicable Collective Bargaining Agreement as a reference.

With regard to improvements in leave of absence for legal guardianship or care of dependents referred to in **item 29**, we see that in the case of team leaders the I-P score is 4.67 and in the case of other workers, 3.11. These data suggest that the organisation should improve this aspect, offering more efficient and perceptible measures.

At the other end of the analysis, we see measures that are well considered and that are well implemented and perceived, such as teleworking (12), financial aid for the birth of children and schooling or childcare tickets (16).

Table 10. Results regarding the quality of implementation.

ITEMS/ WLB PRACTICES	PROJECT MANAGER	TEAM LEADERS N=3			EMPLOYEES N=19		
	SCORE	I-P	MEAN	SD	I-P	MEAN	SD
1. Flexible entry and/or exit times.	7	0.33	6.67	0.58	0.89	6.11	0.94
2. Intensive working hours on Fridays and/or on certain dates.	7	0	7	0	1.74	5.26	1.85
3. Intensive working day in the summer months.	7	0.67	6.33	0.58	1.05	5.95	0.85
4. Timetable of hours or the possibility of concentrating more hours in a certain day or specific period and thus accumulate hours of free disposal.	7	3.33	3.67	2.89	1.84	5.16	2.17

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Table 10. Results regarding the quality of implementation (continued).

ITEMS/ WLB PRACTICES	PROJECT MANAGER	TEAM LEADERS N=3			EMPLOYEES N=19		
	SCORE	I-P	MEAN	SD	I-P	MEAN	SD
5. Possibility of choosing or changing shifts.	5	-1.67	6.67	0.58	-1.42	6.42	0.61
6. Personalised distribution of the working day	6	2	4	0	1.79	4.21	0.92
7. Possibility of reducing meal times and bringing forward the time of departure.	6	1.67	4.33	0.58	1.79	4.21	0.54
8. Organisation of training and/or meetings during working hours.	7	4.67	2.33	2.31	3.26	3.74	1.52
9. Flexible holidays.	7	2	5	0	1.95	5.05	0.91
10. Possibility of taking occasional days off.	6	1.67	4.33	0.58	1.47	4.53	0.77
11. Unpaid leave.	1	-2.67	3.67	2.89	-4.05	5.05	2.22
12. Remote working.	7	0	7	0	0.79	6.21	0.85
13. Videoconferencing.	7	0.33	6.67	0.58	0.89	6.11	1.56
14. Online training.	7	2.33	4.67	0.58	2.42	4.58	0.77
15. Geographical mobility.	7	0.33	6.67	0.58	0.63	6.37	0.60
16. Financial aid for the birth of children and schooling or childcare ticket.	3	0.33	2.67	0.58	0.58	2.42	0.90
17. Subsidised restaurant ticket or service.	2	-3	5	2.65	-2	4	2.24

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Table 10. Results regarding the quality of implementation (continued).

ITEMS/ WLB PRACTICES	PROJECT MANAGER	TEAM LEADERS N=3			EMPLOYEES N=19		
	SCORE	I-P	MEAN	SD	I-P	MEAN	SD
18. Bus service or transport subsidies.	2	-2.67	4.67	2.31	-2.47	4.47	2.29
19. Medical insurance.	5	0.67	4.33	2.31	-0.05	5.05	2.12
20. Life/accident insurance.	5	-1.67	6.67	0.58	-1.11	6.11	1.33
21. Pension plans.	5	3.33	2.67	0.58	3.74	2.26	1.19
22. Advantageous banking terms, loans or advances.	6	3.33	2.67	1.53	2.68	3.32	1.60
23. Discounts on the purchase of products or services.	5	1.67	3.33	2.31	0.63	4.37	2.48
24. Extension of paternity leave.	7	1	6	1.73	2.53	4.47	1.58
25. Extension of statutory breastfeeding leave.	7	2.67	4.33	0.58	2.47	4.53	0.77
26. Extension of statutory maternity leave.	7	2.67	4.33	0.58	2.32	4.68	0.48
27. Paid leave for care.	7	2.33	4.67	0.58	2.63	4.37	0.50
28. Improvements to the reduction of the working day due to legal guardianship.	7	3	4	0	2.37	4.63	0.50
29. Improvements in leave of absence for legal guardianship or care of dependent persons.	7	4.67	2.33	1.53	3.11	3.89	1.52
MEAN	5.86	1.15	4.71	0.95	1.12	4.74	0.64

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Source: Own elaboration.

In addition to the above, we also have data on vertical and horizontal adjustment in table 8. With all this, we have all the necessary tools to categorise the type of implementation on the basis of Gratton and Truss (see figure 4). Our context leads us to the conclusion that the situation in which the organisation finds itself resembles a combination of mere rhetoric (4) and strategy and process driven (8).

We recall that in the case of mere rhetoric, action is weak, while vertical and horizontal alignment is strong. Thus, it can be said that the personal strategy maintains a strong link with the business strategy, as well as with the internal policies of the organisation, which is very positive a priori. However, it also has, as mentioned above, strategy- and process-driven characteristics. In many ways, it represents the "ideal type" of people strategy: HR policies that are coherent and aligned with business objectives and strategies, effectively implemented. In this case, vertical and horizontal alignments are strong, as is action. We deduce from this explanation that the logical consequence would be to move from 4 to 8, with the failing factor being action.

From the above, we conclude that there is still room for improvement as many practices are not being fully perceived as intended.

At the end, table 10 shows overall values for the intention and perception of WLB practices (1.12) as well as the standard deviation of employees' perceptions (0.64). In these cases, the results should ideally be as close to 0 as possible. Thus, we can state that, in general, there is a middle-low substantial difference between intentional and experienced WLB practices and within employees' perceptions. This means that employees largely perceive the practices implemented by the organisation in a homogeneous way. However, as noted above, there is still room for improvement in the implementation and communication process.

The standard deviation is almost close to the desired value, which shows that there is agreement or conformity in most aspects of all people belonging to a given group.

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6.4. Supportive environment for WLB

6.4.1. Organisational support

Organisational support consists of analysing the extent to which the organisation is considered to enable, favour and support the creation of a favourable environment to implement WLB practices and achieve the expected outcomes. This condition is measured by the Project Manager, where, as in previous cases, the minimum value is 1: totally disagree and the maximum value is 7: totally agree. In the survey conducted, the organisational support block consists of a single item to which the Project Manager has assigned the highest value. Therefore, we conclude that the organisation fully supports the implementation of work-life balance measures and adapts its objectives through the provision of all kinds of resources.

Table 11. Result in relation to organisational support.

ITEM	SCORE
1. The organisation supports the implementation of work-life balance practices and their objectives through the provision of all kinds of resources, training, awareness-raising, manuals and protocols for the use of the practices, etc.	7

Source: Own elaboration.

6.4.2. Supervisor/implementer support

Next, I measure, through employees, supervisor/implementer support for WLB practices. Specifically, I try to find out to what extent employees feel that those implementing WLB practices support them through a number of specific behaviours. As in the previous cases, the minimum value is 1: strongly disagree and the maximum value is 7: strongly agree. With 7 being the highest value, we can state that the staff give (4.72) a medium value to the task of supervisors and implementers, which is partly positive and shows that they perceive to some extent the company's concern for the well-being of the human factor. However, there is a dissonance between organisational support (7) and supervisor support (4.72), which is indicative of an area for improvement.

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Table 12 shows the mean of each item so that we can see the differences and comment on them as well. The rating scale is identical to the previous ones.

Differentiating within the group of workers between team leaders and the rest of the colleagues, it can be seen that the mean values of the items between the two classes are quite similar, with the exception of item 3, which refers to the level of understanding of the supervisor/executor with the employees in their efforts to reconcile work and family. This difference in values is a consequence of the fact that, in the case of team leaders having more volume and responsibility at work, they have less time to worry about issues related to their personal sphere. In the case of the others, there is more scope for compatibility in terms of work-life balance.

Another aspect to be mentioned, which could be considered complementary to the previous one, is that team leaders give a high score to the role of the supervisor/executor in not blaming family responsibilities on work-related issues, as reflected in item 5.

Table 12. Results in relation to supervisor/implementer support.

ITEMS	TEAM LEADERS	EMPLOYEES
	N=3 MEAN	N=19 MEAN
1. I am allowed to change my working hours in order to adapt my work to my family responsibilities.	2	2.47
2. Listen to my problems.	6.33	6.32
3. He/she is not critical of my efforts to combine work and family.	2.67	5.21
4. I have juggled my work tasks to try to adapt them to my family responsibilities.	5	5.47
5. Does not hold my family responsibilities against me with regard to work issues.	6.67	6.05
6. He/she is understanding and sympathetic.	6.33	6.21
7. Does not show resentment about my needs as a working parent.	6.67	6.63
MEAN	4.71	4.74
TOTAL MEAN	4.72	

Source: Own elaboration.

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6.5. Demonstrated value of WLB practices

The aim of this block is to find out to what extent employees are satisfied with WLB practices and, specifically, to what extent they consider that they enjoy a good work-life balance.

Employees' satisfaction with WLB practices. To measure the former, a single item is taken into account. Basically, employees were asked whether they were generally satisfied with WLB practices. The minimum score was 1: strongly disagree, and the maximum score was 7: strongly agree. In total (N=22) (both team leader and employees), the mean score was 6.13. In comparison, though, team leaders (6.33 mean score) are more satisfied than employees (5.94) This discrepancy between the two groups is due to the individual circumstances of each person, which vary according to their personal situation.

Employees' perceptions of WLB. In this case, it was measured through a 4-item scale. The average score for both team leaders and employees (N=22) is 5.73. In this case, there are no significant differences between team leaders (5.83) and employees (5.64).

Table 13. Demonstrated value of WLB practices.

	EMPLOYEES
	N=22
ITEMS	MEAN
1. I currently have a good balance between the time I spend at work and the time I have available for non-work activities	5.74
2. I have no difficulty in balancing my work and non-work activities	4.64
3. I feel that the balance between my work demands and non-work activities is currently about right	6.33
4. Overall, I believe that my work and non-work life are balanced.	6.23
TOTAL MEAN	5.73

Source: Items from Kanya and Karatepe (2020).

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7. DISCUSSION

In this section I summarise the implications and results of this project. The main objective of these pages is to check how, within a given company, the family reconciliation measures that senior management intends to implement are really perceived by employees, what degree of satisfaction they have with these WLB practices, and, in turn, the degree of WLB experienced by employees.

In order to verify this, we focus on the case study of one of the leading organisations belonging mainly to the digital consultancy (IT) sector, with presence in a large number of countries around the world. Within this complex company, the focus of the study was placed on a specific project: the service centre. Once the field was defined, surveys with different sections were carried out in order to gather as much information as possible on the aspects that were considered fundamental. The employee survey was answered by 22 people in different positions within the organisation, in addition to the project manager, who had a survey exclusively for himself. In total, the sample amounted to 23.

From this, a series of results were obtained and analysed. In a first initial phase, the demographics of the sample, i.e. the characteristics of the individuals surveyed, were observed. In general terms, it was found that the workforce was fairly gender-balanced, mostly young, all of them with less than 5 years of experience in the company and with a dependent, be it a child or other family member.

As for the results concerning the quality of the design of work-life balance practices (from the manager's point of view), these were generally positive. Slight decreases in value were found only in two items: «*work-life balance issues of employees are actively represented in the main decision-making processes of the group*» and «*work-life balance objectives are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant to the strategic objectives of the organisation*».

From this, it was deduced that this was due to the fact that many other factors come into play within an organisation, which can sometimes make it difficult to bring all the interests or objectives present together. In spite of this, it became clear that the company really did make a great deal of effort to ensure that all work-life balance measures are mutually supportive.

On the other hand, the quality of the implementation of these practices was analysed. This analysis was somewhat more complex than the previous one, as it involved the responses of a group of 22 people, and not 1, as in the case recently discussed. Logically, each of these individuals has his or her own personal

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circumstances and experiences that condition his or her opinion on each of the items, giving rise to a diversity of points of view on the same subject. The issues with the highest level of "unanimity" were teleworking, childbirth allowances and schooling or childcare vouchers.

We then categorised the company under study based on Gratton and Truss in order to draw a conclusion about the situation in the organisation. In this way, we were able to see what shortcomings it contained. Basically, we realised that the personal strategy has a strong link to the business strategy, as well as to the internal policies of the organisation, but these were in dissonance with other aspects within the organisation. Another striking aspect was that the mean of organisational support (7) and supervisory support (4.72) was somewhat different, which is indicative of organisational improvement, either in terms of design quality or in terms of communication.

Finally, in order to fulfil the purpose of this project, we asked the 22 employees surveyed how satisfied they were with the company, and to what extent they felt they enjoyed a good work-life balance. Overall satisfaction was 6.13 out of 7, which indicates that the staff's assessment shows almost outstanding levels of satisfaction. The level of perceptions decreases slightly, as this is a more complex section, showing that there is room for improvement in the company.

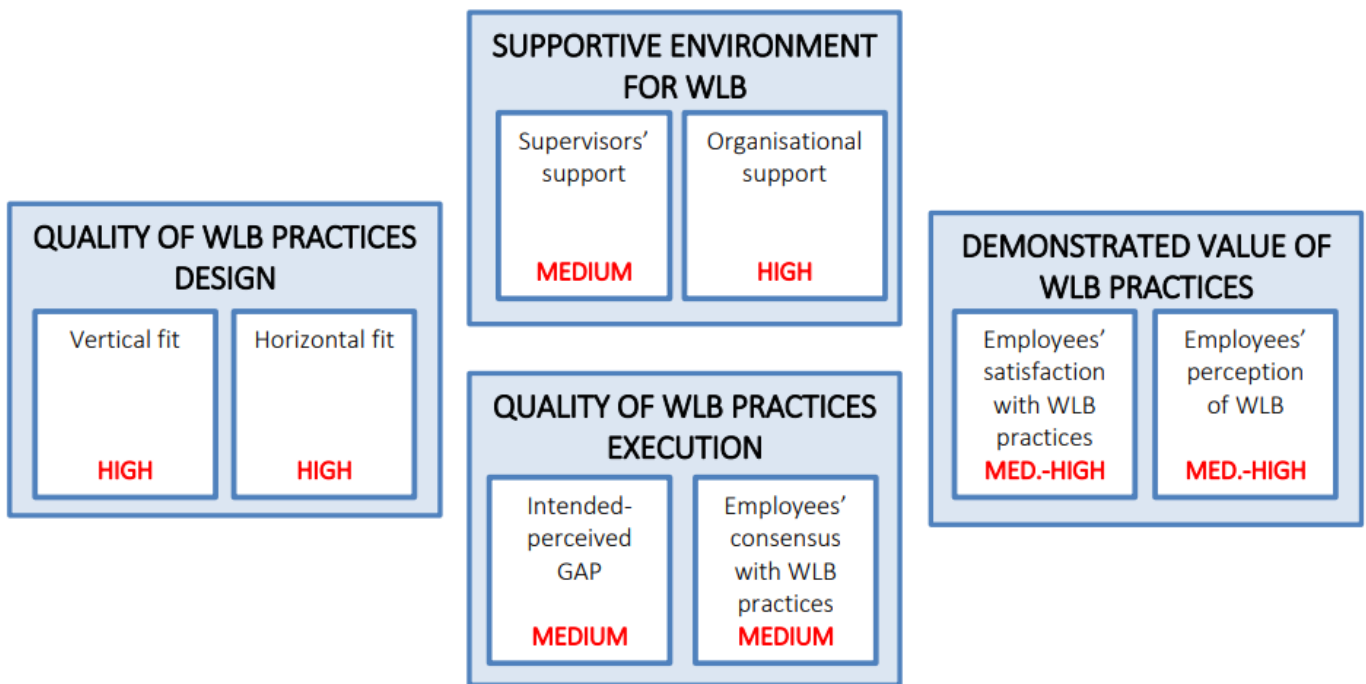
To correct those shortcomings that we detect among the intended-perceived, I believe it is important to build on many small changes rather than major changes. Also, if those changes and ideas come from the bottom up, as in the workers, then those ideas are more aligned with the organisation's goals and can be implemented more easily. In my view, continuous improvement is as much about mindset as it is about actions. The company needs to start looking at the long-term impact of the work it is doing and understand, for example, that a quarterly drop in performance can be tolerated if it means that, in the long term, the company is in a better position.

7.1. Practical implications

Finally, this sub-section shows the overall assessment of each aspect of the process of implementing WLB practices. In summary, we can see in figure 8 a summary of each of the processes we have discussed.

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Figure 8. Practical implications.



Source: Own elaboration.

Firstly, regarding the quality of WLB practices we see that both the vertical (6.5) and horizontal (7) fit are excellent. However, these indicators have been assessed by only one person, the project manager. Probably, both data would have been more reliable if perhaps more time had been available to gain access to a larger number of senior managers within the company analysed.

Secondly, in the supportive environment for WLB, we found that although there is a high level of organisational support (7), at the supervisor or implementer level it is not so high (4.72). To address this mismatch and improve it, the company could make more training resources, incentives or include supervisors in the design of policies, for example, available to its employees. The lack of these resources inevitably affects the quality of performance and communication within an organisation. As a result, it may have affected employee satisfaction in some respects.

Thirdly, in quality of WLB practices execution the results are average (1.13 and 0.79) depending on the scale used. This is a rather complex aspect that addresses individual circumstances of a diverse nature. To improve the results, the company could make improvements to the practices it is implementing or even propose new ones that it has never implemented before. One example is hybrid working, which combines the best of two worlds: remote and face-to-face work performance. The key here is to strike a balance that is in line with the type of contract workers have, the

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culture of the company and the laws in place. Another option can be to create holiday and absence management strategies that we can manage from HR software in order to improve workers' productivity and time management.

Lastly, in terms of the value demonstrated, employees' satisfaction with work-life balance practices is almost excellent (6.13), while their perception is medium-high (5.73). Both values are very similar and a direct relationship between the two can therefore be sensed. It should be noted that, as a limitation, it would be advisable to carry out a study with a large number of companies and increase the size of the sample to be able to extrapolate whether this relationship exists empirically. In line with this, some further limitations of this work are discussed below.

7.2. Limitations

This paper contains theoretical explanations about work-life balance at work, as well as a research study on the subject in order to address it from a practical perspective.

As we have seen from the calculations and analyses, the perception of the employees in the sample is very positive. This indicates that they are happy to work for the company and are therefore committed to the cause. It can be said that they feel that they are an integral part of the group and that they all contribute to achieving the proposed objectives.

Despite these favourable conclusions, there is always room for improvement. Personally, I feel that the methods used for the analysis are inaccurate in that they do not accurately represent the relevant group. Thus, the sample is biased. Another area for improvement is prior knowledge of the issue.

Of course, the present project has had one major limitation: the sample size. This is a company with more than 3,000 employees in Spain alone. Therefore, the results of the study only reflect approximately 0.66% of what it should be, i.e., they are reduced to a much lower number than the ideal one, missing a very high amount of information of interest for this research. As a consequence, the results obtained could serve to form a small "idea" of the perception experienced by the workers of that particular organisation. Basically, this results in a lack of data that diminishes the reliability of the conclusions drawn.

However, it is worth mentioning that our research work has kept its focus on a particular business project: the service centre and the whole human factor involved in

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it. So we could say that the present project reflects the results obtained specifically in that plan.

In addition to the above, I consider that the work is limited by the decline of the analysed organisation in providing useful data for the development of the work.

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