Examination of the Employee Work-Life Balance Within Healthy Organizational Cultures

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A Thesis

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Under the Supervision of Dr. John S. Caputo

Under the Mentorship of Giovanni Caputo

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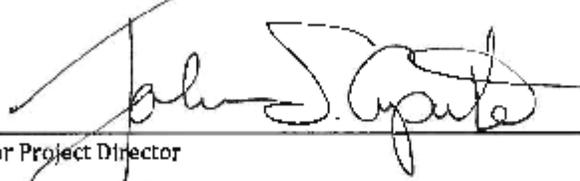In Partial Fulfillment

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By

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We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the work-life balance of employees within the U.S. communications industry, specifically focusing on how employees can build collaborative relationships with their colleagues while maintaining active lifestyles outside the office. The effects of a healthy work-life balance on organizational culture has become a popular topic in American organizations during the past decade, and this research used focus groups and interviews to help determine how leaders can encourage employees to prioritize their professional and personal obligations.

Study participants were asked questions developed around Edgar Schein's organizational culture research, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and communication theories about balance and influence, including the social exchange and social penetration theories. Self-reported answers showed they are heavily motivated by human interaction, flexibility, clearly defined job expectations and efficiency, compensation and benefits, and career growth. Those who reported high-quality inter-office relationships also conveyed stronger feelings of job satisfaction, which ultimately may lead to higher productivity. According to these findings, leaders can enhance these collaborative relationships by fostering a community of open, honest dialogue and consistently considering employees' individual needs inside and outside the office, which positive supports Schein's views about organizational culture.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Americans today put in more office hours than their European counterparts (Prescott, 2004). With only 24 hours in a day, it can be difficult —— and stressful —— to find extra time to devote to life outside of work. The increasing demands of their day jobs have left many hard-working employees wondering how they can maintain active and healthy personal lives while also excelling at professional duties. It can become even more complicated to properly prioritize work and personal lives when it is not clear how one's employers and co-workers feel about the elusive work-life balance.

The Problem/Goal

Importance of the Study

The work-life balance has become a major area of scholarly research in recent years (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007; Marisalo 2008, as cited by Gronewold & Wenzel, 2009) as it becomes clear that learning the appropriate work-life balance may help leaders get the best work out of their employees while also encouraging positivity in and out of the office. This study examines how employees can build collaborative and effective relationships with their colleagues while maintaining active lifestyles outside the office.

"Organizations are tremendously influential in determining how American workers negotiate the demands of employment and the demands of the rest of their lives" (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007, p. 228). Communication scholars have found that the culture of a company can affects employee behavior in a number of ways, including how much time and energy they devote to their daily tasks. Edgar Schein (2010), in particular, has driven the study of organizational culture, which he has found helps employees properly acclimate to an organization while preserving shared values imperative to the company's business goals.

However, employees who do not feel satisfied with their coworker relationships or overall job satisfaction may not be productive members of the organization. Research has shown that employees who feel they spend more time working than doing anything else in their lives may begin to feel dissatisfied with their jobs, leading to a lack of productivity (Perlow & Porter, 2009). This sense of imbalance between work and personal life can cause stress to both the individual and the organization, which makes it an important concern for American businesses.

In addition to Schein's research about organizational culture, communication theories about balance and social influence have provided context about the employee work-life balance, including the social exchange theory, which assumes human behavior is determined by the perceived rewards and costs of interactions with one another (Griffin, 2009), and the social penetration theory, which explores the depths at which people form interpersonal relationships (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Since previous research has shown that organizational culture influences employee behavior and productivity, one should assume interpersonal relationships among colleagues also directly impact behavior and productivity. Healthy organizational cultures that emphasize collaborative relationships should therefore produce more productive and satisfied employees, who feel their individual needs are being met.

Focusing on the communications industry, compiled of businesses that widely disseminate information, this study examined the employee work-life balance within healthy organizational cultures by considering the influence on collaborative relationships helping employees maintain active lifestyles outside the office. It then aimed to determine possible organizational policies that lead to enhanced employee satisfaction and commitment.

Definitions of Terms

The following key terms and concepts are used throughout this study:

Communications industry: A diverse group of businesses focused on broadly disseminating information. For this study, the term encompasses public relations, marketing, telecommunications, journalism, and publishing organizations.

Cultural norms: Shared behavioral expectations of a group of people within their organization.

Employee satisfaction: A person's contentment with his or her job and organization, which is usually impacted by how the job or organization helps him or her meet personal needs and motivations.

Hierarchy of needs: The belief that humans aim to meet needs in the following order: survival, safety, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

Organizational culture: The shared assumptions, beliefs and norms of employees within an organization, which are passed onto new employees and inform them how to properly think, feel and act. This will be defined in formal detail in Chapter Two.

Social exchange: Humans choose to interact with one another based on the perceived rewards and costs they expect when exchanging information.

Social penetration: When interpersonal communication moves from superficial levels of information to deeper and more intimate levels, allowing people to become closer with one another.

Work-life balance: The concept of prioritizing work and personal responsibilities in a way that affords a person the most satisfaction in all facets of his or her life.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters of this study further examine the employee work-life balance within U.S. communications organizations. Chapter Two will review previously published literature about work-life balance, organizational culture and relevant communication theories. The literature review will begin by articulating the study's theoretical, philosophical, and ethical assumptions. It will then go on to review research about Edgar H. Schein's organizational culture theory, employee needs and motivations, and the employee work-life balance. The final section of this chapter will provide rationale for the study and introduce the two research questions.

Chapter Three will lay out the study's scope and methodology. Chapter Four will provide the details of the study, including data collected and results. Chapter Five will detail the study's limitations and conclusions, while also providing suggestions for future research about the work-life balance.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This qualitative research study is intended to examine how employees can build collaborative relationships with their colleagues while maintaining active lifestyles outside the office. The research will revolve around an examination of employee work-life balance to create a healthy organizational culture. Relevant literature related to the communication theories of organizational culture, social exchange and social penetration help explore different perspectives throughout the past decade, and it should provide the reader with proper background on the topic of work-life balance within organizations.

The first part of this chapter discusses the theoretical, philosophical and ethical assumptions considered when establishing the components of this study. The next sections of the chapter will describe important findings from literature about organizational culture, employee needs and motivations, and the employee work-life balance, as well as the research's implications on this current examination on employee work-life balance in healthy organizational cultures. The chapter's final section determines the rationale and research questions for this study's methodology and execution, which will be discussed in future chapters.

Theoretical, Philosophical, and Ethical Assumptions

"Communication is a process of relating" (Condit, 2006, p. 3), and it is at the heart of every relationship, which can be cultivated through high-quality interactions and empathetic understanding. Carl Rogers, a phenomenological psychologist, spent most of his career emphasizing the value of these qualities through his humanistic theory that honest and open communication is the only way people can create and maintain strong relationships (Demorest, 2005).

Communication theories about balance and influence, such as the social exchange and social penetration theories, explore the ways individual people develop interpersonal relationships and help determine an organization's culture. Human beings build strong relationships in every sector of their lives, and their interactions within the workplace are no exception. Edgar Schein (2010) has explored the basic underlying assumptions behind organizational culture, including the belief that social validation, or the shared experiences within a group, works to instill certain behaviors and attitudes in team members.

From a humanistic perspective, these assumptions help members find their place within an organizational community and form conscious and unconscious convictions that determine how they will interact with one another. "Participation is vital, for people's perspectives change once they are involved. … Developing shared values is thus more about asking people for their input than it is about telling them what is or what is not important" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 125).

If leaders wish to encourage healthy organizational cultures, they need to pay attention to these conscious and unconscious convictions, as well as the way they communicate organizational policies and rules to their employees (Schein, 2010). Many philosophers believed the interpersonal relationships we develop through dialogue help determine one's morality. In fact, Martin Buber's dialogic ethics explore the idea that "dialogue is a synonym for ethical communication. …Dialogue is not only a morally appropriate act, it is also a way to discover what is ethical in our relationship" (Griffin, 2009, p. 81).

This phenomenological perspective emphasizes that people live for others as much as they live for themselves. Dialogue is the only act in which human beings can discover "actual life" (Griffin, 2009, p. 81), empathize with one another and establish community. Leaders,

therefore, have a moral responsibility to establish community among their employees and promote open dialogue within their organizations. "If people are patient with one another, challenge one another to grow, and do not exaggerate the offensiveness of mistakes, this mentality can open up communication, creativity, and team spirit" (Spitzer, 2000, p. 221). When an employee feels his needs are being met and his opinions are being listened to, he will strive to become an integral member of the organizational culture.

Relevant Literature

Schein's Research on Organizational Culture

Schein's work indicates that researchers need to be aware of the extreme importance of culture in all organizational studies because it affects employee behavior and attitude in many ways. For the purpose of this literature review, Schein's influencers and references before 2001 were not reviewed. It is recognized that much of his work is rooted in the research of other scholars, but the time constraints for this project did not allow for research of his influencers' work. Schein's research alone will help establish a historical root for the current research around the effect of employee work-life balance within organizational culture.

Throughout the years, Schein and other scholars have made significant strides in the study of organizational culture, but the definition for it has unwaveringly focused on the shared assumptions, norms and values a group passes onto its newest members (Schein, 1984; Schein, 1996; Schein, 2010). According to Schein's updated, formal definition of organizational culture, derived from anthropological definitions:

> The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared
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> basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of
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> external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well

enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new

members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation

to those problems (Schein, 2010, p. 18).

In terms of organizational life, this definition means that culture is used to teach new

employees acceptable habits and behaviors to help them properly acclimate within the group.

New employees will then pass on these assumptions to the next round of newcomers, and the

organizational culture will persist, acting as a "mechanism of social control" to help shape

employees' perceptions and assumptions (Schein, 2010, p. 19). For example, when an employee

begins working for a new company, she will observe her colleagues' work habits and begin to

emulate them as a means for fitting in, even without explicit instruction to do so. She may begin

to stay in the office late just because her colleagues do, and she assumes it is the correct way to

act. The assumption that she should work late socializes the new employee to a cultural

expectation based around working longer hours.

In his work, Schein states that cultural assumptions like this are often taken for granted

and rarely questioned (1984). Organizations use this to their advantage in maintaining stability,

which can make implementing change difficult and stressful (Schein, 1986). "Therefore, any

challenge or questioning of a basic assumption will release anxiety and defensiveness" (Schein,

2010, p. 29). Each organization creates its own language and other artifacts or behaviors that

help reinforce the culture among its members, which is how the assumptions persist through new

generations of employees.

Schein has suggested that many organizations are hesitant to break cultural norms

because leaders may fear of losing control and causing their staff anxiety (Schein, 1993a). This

fear can manifest itself by allowing negative assumptions to drive the organization's culture,

even when productivity and employee satisfaction drops. Using the earlier example of working

long hours, a leader within an organization who implicitly promotes working late may recognize

the need to change this dynamic and encourage a healthy work-life balance, but he may feel that

imposing limitations on employee work hours would cause undue stress and may even result in

failure. Schein (1993a) recognizes that leaders need to unlearn bad habits and assumptions, but

because of past failures with change, it can be difficult to take that step. It is necessary, however,

for the leaders to make the initial steps toward cultural change, which means that they must

somehow demonstrate to employees that balancing work and personal lives is a priority.

This qualitative research study on employee work-life balance within organizational

cultures will be conducted through phenomenological observation and interviews, which Schein

suggested is the most natural way to collect organizational data (1993b). He stated that it is

important for organizational scholars to avoid misinterpretations and to take care not to project

their own assumptions into their research (2010), so the research will be reported as objectively

as possible, noting any biases along the way, such as the researcher's personal views of work-life

balance as a member of Generation Y (Gronewold & Wenzel, 2009), which will be discussed

later in this review. The study will explore different organizations' assumptions and perceptions

about how employees balance their work and their personal lives. According to Schein, basic

cultural assumptions are based on teaching individuals the best way to build relationships within

a group and create a productive culture (2010). When an organization socializes its employees

based on group behaviors and basic assumptions, though, the individual's needs and motivations

may become neglected.

Employee Needs and Motivations

Although organizational culture focuses on the needs of a group within an organization, researchers need to acknowledge that these groups are ultimately made up of individual human beings with unique needs and motivations. Tara Shankar and Jyotsna Bhatnagar (2010) noted that humans make choices to pursue personal desires and satisfy their individual needs. Em Griffin (2009) elaborated on how these choices influence interactions with other people through John Thibaut and Harold Kelley's social exchange theory, which considers individual needs in relation to other people and shows how social interactions are regulated by all parties' perceived rewards and costs. A person will ultimately communicate with others in a way that best meets his personal needs with little risk.

To determine the core of employee needs and motivations, many scholars (Shankar & Bhatnagar, 2010; Schein, 2010; SHRM, 2010) reference Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which states that humans aim to meet needs in the following order: survival, safety, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Yukl, 2009). Some organizational research explores the hypothesis that the degree to which basic physiological needs are met may affect employee satisfaction (Ryan, Bernstein, & Brown, 2010). If one were to assume though that most employees have already met their survival and safety needs by finding secure employment, then most employee motivations should revolve around the needs of belonging to the organizational culture, feeling confidence in one's role within the organization, and having a balanced sense of satisfaction in one's job and all other areas of life. In his critical theory of communication in organizations, Stanley Deetz noted that many employees become more invested in their organizations, which grants the companies ultimate control over their personal lives. "Management insists that allegiance to the company should come before family, friends,

church, and community. Through the process Deetz calls *consent,* most employees willingly give that loyalty without getting much in return" (Griffin, 2009, p. 266). Deetz believed workers voluntarily give organizations consent because they prefer not to disrupt the status quo and instead fit into the already established corporate culture.

On a positive note, the organizational culture has the opportunity to fulfill an employee's sense of belongingness by creating "a strong sense of camaraderie by promoting openness, collaboration, friendships and teamwork" (SHRM, 2010, p. 7). Interpersonal relationships formed in the workplace may also help employees achieve this sense of belonging. Employees may be motivated to become more effective members of an organization if they feel included within a supportive culture, which may explain how certain subcultures begin to form within the larger organization. Clifford Geertz's cultural approach provides insight into how different departments within organizations may unconsciously separate themselves based on their organizational identities: "For example, employees in the sales and accounting departments of the same company may eye each other warily" (Griffin, 2009, p. 251). Culture is developed based on shared interpretations, and colleagues within different departments may form different ideas and rituals in the workplace based on their shared experiences.

Research based on the social penetration theory also supports the idea that open dialogue more easily occurs when people feel closer to one another (Ayres, 1979). The social penetration theory, developed by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, assumes that people build strong relationships through self-disclosure and, over time, connections become more intimate (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002). Social "interactions progress gradually and systematically from exchanges of peripheral information to more intimate concerns as a function of favorable reward/cost outcomes (Ayres, 1979, p. 1979).

Kelly McMillan and Simon Albrecht (2010) used research based on the social exchange theory to determine that an organization's communication climate also contributes to employees' perceptions of organizational support and commitment. They found a strong relationship between communication and social exchange constructs and outcomes, suggesting employee communication may play an imperative role in developing collaborative relationships (McMillan & Albrecht, 2010).

Based on these principles, leaders within an organization should feel a responsibility to encourage this supportive environment if they want to retain employees and motivate excellent job performance, and they can best create this type of environment by giving employees meaningful rewards (SHRM, 2010). Possible rewards leaders can offer for collaborative communication may include financial incentives, independence on the job, or increased benefits and recognition.

Leaders may also find it beneficial to reward employees who demonstrate healthy work-life balances, as employees may be more engaged in the office if they feel equally as engaged in their personal lives. Empirical evidence shows that employees with flexible work schedules and options may produce a higher-quality work performance (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007; Drago, Wooden & Black, 2009), which may indicate that employees place a high value on successfully completing their work tasks so they have time to focus on their personal tasks.

Researchers are also finding that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming a key indicator for employee motivation and attracting job candidates, even when lower-level employees aren't directly involved in CSR efforts (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2008). Employees may interpret a company's social and ethical responsibility to mean that the company also places a high value on personal values, such as a healthy work-life balance (Bhattacharya, et

al., 2008; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008). Valentine and Fleischman reflect that research on this topic is limited and should be further observed through a longitudinal study (Valentine & Fleischman, 2008).

Cheney, Zorn, Theodore, Planalp, and Lair (2008) examined "meaningful work," or the idea that work should inherently mean something to employees and their well-being. When organizational culture helps employees fulfill their personal needs, the employees will be motivated to stay employed with the company, although it is not yet clear to what effect this motivation will have on a balance between work and life. It is also not apparent to what extent this motivation will be able to encompass all employees within all industries. Through an examination of organizational culture, employees within private communication organizations will be asked many questions revolving around Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The answers should build on this earlier research and begin to determine what needs specifically must be met for employees to feel a healthy work-life balance.

Employee Work-Life Balance

" 'Balance' between work and home lives is a much sought after but rarely claimed state of being" (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009, p. 704).

Researchers state that employee work-life balance is based on individual experience and perceptions, which makes it a difficult concept to clearly define (Shankar & Bhatnagar, 2010). One person's idea of balance could very well be another's idea of imbalance. Interestingly, Cowan and Hoffman (2007) noted that much of the early research about work-life constructs focused heavily on the organizational perspective rather than the individual, which indicates a gap in literature that needs to be filled. In later research, Cowan and Hoffman (2008) also found that terminology itself causes confusion, as scholars struggle to select the most accurate

description of the phenomenon. Other possible variations of "work-life balance" include: "work-family" and "work-personal integration" (Cowan & Hoffman, 2008), "work-nonwork interference" (Schieman, Glavin, & Milkie, 2009), work-home conflict (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009), "work-family enrichment" (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and "work-life conflict" (Fonner & Roloff, 2010). For the sake of simplicity, this research will use "work-life balance."

In terms of the increase in interest around work-life balance, Shankar and Bhatnagar observed that, "There seems to be an assumption that the scale of balance is tilting more towards the work sphere (that work predominates) and hence the need for a balance with life" (2010, p. 76). Perlow and Porter (2009) surveyed 1,000 people in the professional services industry and found that 94 percent of them put in more than 50 hours a week, with nearly half that group working more than 65 hours a week. If employees believe they work more than they do anything else in their lives, they may begin to feel unfulfilled in their personal lives, leading to the high concern to create a healthy work-life balance.

One area gaining particular interest from researchers is the gender bias involved in work-life balance issues (Younis, Zulfiqar, Arshad, & Imran, 2011; Slaughter, 2012). As the workplace continues to reframe the traditional viewpoint of women as professionals versus women as homemakers, organizations are trying to manage their employees' potential to its fullest without compromising their work-life balance (Younis et al., 2011). American women are finding that current organizational policies and assumptions make it difficult to find a solid balance between their home and work responsibilities, as highlighted by Anne-Marie Slaughter's claim that "I still strongly believe that women can 'have it all' (and that men can too). I believe that we can 'have it all at the same time.' But not today, not with the way America's economy and society are currently structured" (2012, p. 1).

Although this study will mainly focus on the American ideals behind work-life balance, it is important to note the cross-cultural differences that may become apparent in today's organizational culture, and many U.S. companies now have multinational branches across the world (Caputo et al., 2002). The global economy has begun to demonstrate many implications regarding the work-life balance. "With globalization and a transition in advanced economies to a base of knowledge and service work, we see greater organizational flexibility" (MacEachen, Polzer, & Clarke, 2008, p.1021). Labor statistics show that American employees work nearly 50 percent more hours than those in Europe (Prescott, 2004), which may stem from different cultural assumptions and expectations about the workplace (Schein, 1984).

Another group of employees that may be more concerned with the work-life balance than others is Generation Y (Gronewold & Wenzel, 2009). As members of Generation Y enter the workforce, organizations are seeing an emphasis on work-life balance and may be feeling pressure to change the way they operate so they can appeal to and attract the younger group of employees. Gronewold and Wenzel used focus groups made exclusively of Generation Y members (born in 1982 or later) to stimulate dialogue about work, career, and the work-life balance, which led to a conclusion that Generation Y expects to work for companies that follow the mantra, "I work to live, I don't live to work." Many of the focus group participants did, however, acknowledge that they expected there to be an imbalance at times (Gronewold & Wenzel, 2009).

As noted earlier, this research study may be influenced by the researcher's bias as a member of Generation Y and experience working with organizations that encourage a healthy work-life balance. This perspective will provide a solid understanding and background for the implementation of work-life initiatives that have been popping up: many human resources

departments and leaders are learning to incorporate initiatives into their organizations that will appeal to the "fun" environment young workers say they're looking for (SHRM, 2010; Shankar & Bhatnagar, 2010). Although the depth and breadth of work-life initiatives will vary depending on industry and organization, some possible examples include parental leave (Boren & Johnson, 2008), flexible work schedules (Cowan and Hoffman, 2007; Drago, Wooden & Black, 2009), teleworking options (Fonner & Roloff, 2010), and lifestyle campaigns (Zoller, 2004).

Although these programs are often designed as a way to foster a healthy work-life balance, many researchers believe that these initiatives are not necessarily positive. Just because a company offers a lifestyle program doesn't mean it will be put into practice (Boren & Johnson, 2008; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010), and some scholars believe that the programs are actually meant to increase the amount of control organizations have over employees' lives (Cowan & Hoffman, 2008). Work-life initiatives can be ambiguous (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010; Mescher, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010), and the corporate messaging of the programs may even implicitly suggest that work-life balance is an employee privilege instead of a right (Mescher et al., 2010; Cowan & Hoffman, 2008). Zoller (2004) found that workplace health promotion initiatives, such as providing fitness centers or health testing, may lead to employee disenfranchisement when employees aren't solicited for feedback before program implementation, and Boren and Johnson (2008) discovered that peer resentment and perceived guilt caused many eligible employees to avoid utilizing work-life programs (2008).

Many of these scholarly articles focus on the downfalls of work-life balance initiatives, but there seems to be a lack of literature about the good these programs may bring to an organization. There also seems to be a lack of agreement on the type of theory work-life balance researchers should be using, even though "work–life balance programs are one of the central

support mechanisms available to employees in managing work and family demands" (Jang, Park, & Zippay, 2011, p. 136).

Rationale

As organizations continue to make strides to help employees balance work and home lives, scholars need to continue to critically address the topic of employee work-life balance (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). In recent years, many researchers have acknowledged the relevance of work-life balance, but a lack of definitive theory and information about the subject still remains.

This present qualitative study will address the types of organizational programs and philosophies that may lead to enhanced employee satisfaction and fulfillment and, using focus group research, will attempt to determine a direct link between the employee work-life balance and a healthy organizational culture, which leaders and employees alike can use to their advantage in the workplace.

Research Questions

R1: How can employees build collaborative relationships with their colleagues while maintaining active lifestyles outside the office?

R2: What types of organizational policies will lead to enhanced employee satisfaction and commitment?

CHAPTER THREE: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of the Study

This study explored American employee perceptions of maintaining a healthy work-life balance throughout their careers. A purposive sample of twenty employees within the communications industry was selected to participate in focus groups and interviews that explored the following research questions:

R1: How can employees build collaborative relationships with their colleagues while maintaining active lifestyles outside the office?

R2: What types of organizational policies will lead to enhanced employee satisfaction and commitment?

Focus groups enabled the study to focus on reactions and behaviors of people (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, & Piele, 2010). Forty potential participants were recruited through email and chosen based on their availability and experience within the U.S. communications industry. Participants represented a range of age groups, ethnicities, job types within their organizations, relationship statuses, and genders. The researcher acted as a moderator to lead the groups through carefully planned discussions (Rubin et al., 2010), and the candidates' diversity of demographics helped provide perspective on employee needs and expectations.

Each focus group lasted 120 minutes and occurred outside business hours during the course of one week. The groups took place in a living room setup, and food and beverages were provided to help create a casual and comfortable atmosphere for the participants.

A third focus group was canceled due to time conflicts. Seven one-on-one interviews were scheduled with participants instead, allowing the study to continue with its target purposive sample size of twenty. The participants also represented a diverse range of age groups,

ethnicities, job types within their organizations, relationship statuses, and genders. The

interviews were conducted via phone, and each lasted approximately 30 minutes and occurred

over the course of one week.

Methodology of the Study

Edgar Schein's important conclusions about organizational culture within the past thirty

years helped shape the methodology of this study. The research was conducted via qualitative

research through phenomenological observation and interviews, which Schein suggested is the

most natural way to collect organizational data (1993b). He stated that it is important for scholars

to avoid misinterpretations and to take care not to project their own assumptions into their

research (2010), so the findings will be reported as objectively as possible, noting any potential

biases along the way. Focus groups methodology allowed the researcher to obtain an

understanding of employee behavior through intensive group interviews (Rubin et al., 2010).

This research used focus group and interview methodology that aimed to expand on

current communication theory and research within the fields of work-life balance and

organizational culture. Ethnographic research methods were considered, but the limitations on

theory application to a broad group of American employees seemed too restrictive to properly

address this study's research objectives. The focus groups and interviews conducted in this study

will help apply new findings to contexts outside the communications industry, leading to

information about the effect of work-life balance on organizational culture that is transferable to

organizations throughout the United States.

Focus groups allowed the researcher to directly observe dialogue from employees within

the U.S. communications industry. The employees' perspectives and first-hand experiences

helped provide a balanced and objective viewpoint about how employee needs are met within

their organizations and what they feel organizations could do better to encourage an appropriate

work-life balance. Two focus groups, composed of seven and six people, respectively, worked

through a list of eight open-ended questions intended to trigger open and honest discussion. (See

Appendix A for the study's questions.) The focus group conversations maintained the sanctity of

natural dialogue flow and human interaction. The researcher remained unobtrusive, but acted as

a facilitator to obtain clarity on responses and to direct the conversation back to the general

questions when the groups got too far off topic.

     The one-on-one interviews also provided context about how employees in the

communications industry view the work-life balance. Although the individual interviews did not

have the same dynamics as an open-ended conversation with other people, the participants

seemed more candid in providing their professional perspectives directly to the facilitator.

     As the group members and individual interview respondents discussed the questions

around work-life balance and organizational culture, the researcher remained as objective as

possible and took extensive notes, observing participants' answers, tone of voice, nonverbal

gestures, changes in tension, how often participants spoke or didn't speak throughout the

discussion, and topics that appeared to gain the most participant interest or disinterest. The focus

group discussions were captured on an audio recording to ensure accurate reflection on

participant feedback and dialogue.

     Once the focus groups and interviews were completed, all field notes, analytical memos,

and recordings were carefully examined. Analysis of the data from each focus group began

immediately following the conclusion of each meeting, using analytical memo writing to help

separate the information into preliminary categories revolving around the research objectives.

Analyzing right away led to better interpretation of key information. Coding the data allowed the

researcher to begin seeing patterns and themes in respondents' answers. Any potential biases were also noted.

Research Ethics

Because this research study required voluntary human participation, the researcher needed to conform to professional standards of conduct (Rubin, 2010). "Empirical researchers need to remain systematic and objective in the many choices they make when designing measures, selecting and observing participants, analyzing their data, and reporting, the results of their studies" (Rubin, 2010, p. 204).

This study required the approval of each participant, as well as the written and verbal acknowledgment that their responses would be kept confidential. Their physiological and psychological comfort was considered during all aspects of the focus group and interview sessions, allowing the researcher to balance her research needs while respecting the needs of the participants. The respondents were briefed about the nature of the study and reminded that they could say as much or as little about any given topic.

Coding for Confidentiality

To maintain the confidentiality of focus group and interview participants, the researcher coded all focus group dialogues and respondents' perspectives. Participants were briefed before each focus group and interview and were given confidentiality agreement forms indicating that all data included in the final study will be presented in aggregate form to protect their identities.

Focus groups will be denoted with the letter F, and will be listed chronologically. For example, the first focus group will be referenced as F1, the second as F2, and the third as F3. Respondents within focus groups will be denoted with the letter R, and will be listed chronologically by when they addressed the researcher's questions. For instance, the first speaker

in the first group will be referenced as F1-R1, and the first speaker in the second group will be referenced as F2-R1.

Interview participants will be indicated with the letter I, and will be listed chronologically. For example, the first respondent will be referenced as I1, and the second respondent will be referenced as I2.

Reliability

Focus groups inherently provide reliability checks as participants share their opinions through group conversation (Downs & Adrian, 2004). "Since different members of the group have different levels of knowledge, they learn from one another" (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 213). Because of this, focus groups provide researchers with instantaneous feedback that can help them be efficient in their data collection. However, due to their qualitative nature, focus groups are highly dependent on the researcher's interpretation, which may lead to subjectivity in the overall results (Downs & Adrian, 2004). The unskilled facilitator may fall victim to sloppy analysis, which is why this study was recorded for future review. The interview results are also dependent on the researcher's interpretation and lack the checkpoints and feedback that additional group members could provide.

Data collected during the focus groups and interviews will be examined further in Chapter 4. Information will be analyzed based on the theories and literature covered earlier in this thesis. Results from the focus groups will provide the primary substantiation for this study, with the interviews being treated as supplementary support.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE STUDY

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to explore the employee work-life balance within the communications industry, a broad field that encompasses many different professions. Twenty communications professionals volunteered to participate in focus group and interviews that provided insight on the employee perception of a healthy work-life balance within their current organizations. The data collection took place over the course of two weeks, and research questions were formed around the earlier-mentioned hypotheses, questioning the importance of collaborative relationships among employees and possible organizational policies that would best enhance job satisfaction.

Data Analysis

As discussed, this study used qualitative research methodology that expanded on current communication theory about organizational culture. Based on Edgar Schien's beliefs that phenomenological observation and interviews provide the most perspective on organizational culture (1993b), this study used two focus groups and seven one-on-one interviews. Manual coding of direct observation notes allowed the purposive sample to be broken into five categories. These categories, cross-checked for internal and external consistency, provided further insight about the employee work-life balance within the communications industry. The focus groups were considered the primary source of research data since they evolved into natural dialogues among participants. The personal interviews provided supplemental support and perspective.

As noted in Chapter 3, data was coded for confidentiality, and participants were asked to sign a confidentiality form (See Appendices B, C, and D).

The study observed the opinions of people from a range of demographics (See Appendix E). Female participants made up a slight majority with 55 percent, and of the twenty research participants, 85 percent were white. In terms of age, 55 percent of the participants were between ages 21 and 30, 30 percent were between 31 and 40, and 15 percent were 41 or older.

Results of the Study

Organizational Tenure

When collecting demographics data, study participants were asked how long they had been employed with their current companies. Their self-reported answers suggested 30 percent have been employed with their company for less than one year, 45 percent have been there for one to three years, 10 percent have been there for three-and-a-half to five years, and 15 percent have been there for more than five years. One respondent (I6) had been employed with his company for sixteen years, which represented a large gap from the second-longest employee (F2-R1), who had been at his company for six years.

This question acted as an ice-breaker topic and did not instigate much conversation among the focus group participants. I6 expressed delight when he realized his sixteen-year anniversary was the same day as his one-on-one interview: "I have good relationships (with my colleagues) build on trust and mutual respect. … I wouldn't have lasted 16 years without those good relationships."

Workplace Perks

When the participants were asked "What is your favorite part about working for your organization?" 95 percent responded favorably. F2-R5 abstained from the question. The first focus group covered a range of positive employment perks, including interaction with clients and colleagues, networking opportunities, and diversity of tasks, allowing for innovation and the development of problem-solving skills. "I like coming up with new and innovative ways of connecting with people – meaningful ways to market in a genuine way. It's almost like psychology" (F1-R5).

The majority of the second focus group raved about flexibility options, saying their employers allow them to telecommute or work unusual schedules when necessary. "There's arguments against working from home, but personally, there's no real bearing on my productivity. I would argue I'm even more productive when I work from home. I wake up, and log on immediately, working the entire time" (F2-F6). F2-R6's comment about productivity was echoed, as F2-R1 mentioned working from home allowed him to also be a stay-at-home father, while F2-R2 said she could do domestic chores or run errands during slow periods.

Not all members of the second focus group had the freedom to frequently work from home, although they expressed that they would appreciate the flexibility: "My team is significantly less flexible about it, which is weird. It doesn't matter where I am – my team is all over the place. Does it matter if you're calling me on my cell or on my desk phone?" (F2-R4)

Interview data also supported flexibility, human interaction, and diversity of projects as top reasons the respondents stay with their current employer. "The variation keeps me learning new things, but provides consistency that means I can expect what's coming next and how to prepare" (I3).

Workplace Perks

Other (18%)
Diversity of projects (22%)
Human interaction (22%)
Flexibility (31%)
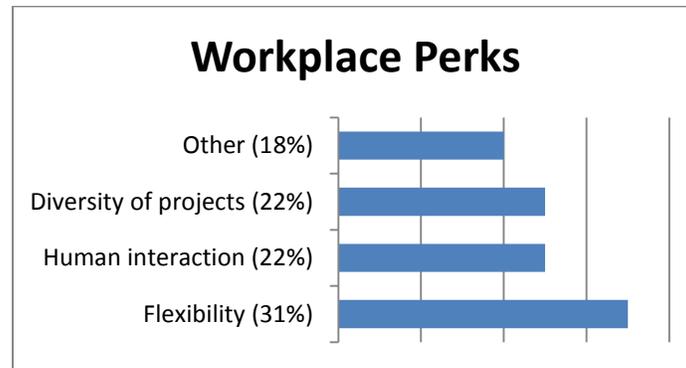
Personal Needs

Discussions about flexibility, human interaction, and diversity of tasks continued when participants were asked, "What personal needs does your company help you meet?" Participants in the first focus group seemed most inspired by the opportunities granted to them when they worked collaboratively with other colleagues. "My company is very open-door, surrounding me with a lot of really smart people. Working alongside to learn, not just reading training documents and attending meetings. I can schedule one-on-ones with anyone in the company whenever I want if I'm curious about other teams and departments, and that's really valuable to me" (F1-R4).

F1-R7 recognized the necessity of teamwork when dealing with difficult clients: "My client is a bit cut-throat and they fire agencies all the time – but there's a team growing around us and my great co-workers are supportive, and it's nice knowing we're in the same boat. We have lots of support from the inside." Other participants throughout the study acknowledged that internal support is crucial in maintaining employee satisfaction, particularly when managing tasks across teams. Many respondents noted that colleagues pitch in for them so they can take time off for vacations without worrying about work. "My work goes in waves, so when it is slow, I am encouraged to take time off to relax and recharge my batteries. This is important

because when work is going strong, it's very demanding, and there is little time for relaxation"
(I1).

Other personal needs mentioned include health insurance benefits, volunteer time,
commuting perks, professional affiliations, and the capability to work remotely.

Personal Needs

Category	
Other (29%)	
Diversity of tasks (12%)	
Human interaction (20%)	
Flexibility (37%)	
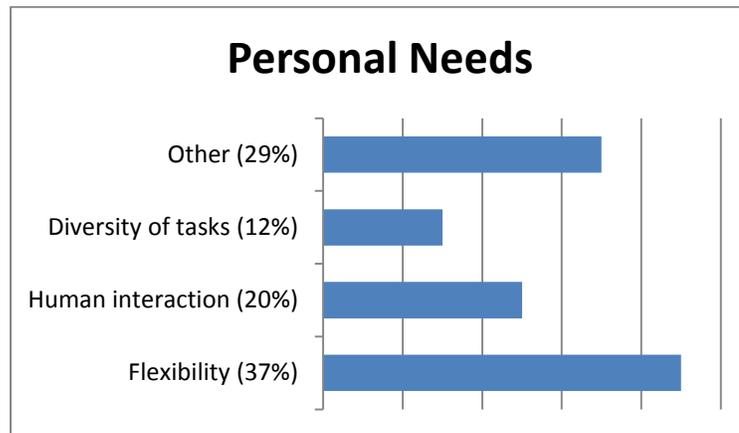
Organization's Limitations

Conversations became heated and negative when the participants were asked, "What do
you feel your company is lacking in terms of helping you find an appropriate balance between
your work and personal lives?" Client and management expectations were frequently referenced:
"You always hear when something is bad, never good" (F1-R3). Multiple participants
acknowledged that they work more than they're paid to work. "Clients don't realize we have a
personal life, and they're only paying us for 40 hours a week. They work 70-80 hours a week, so
it's expected for us to do work on weekends. We can't say no to them, so we work a lot of
overtime" (F1-R7). A majority of respondents (85 percent) said they work outside normal
business hours at least some of the time, although sometimes it's when they're paid to be on call
or they have important deadlines looming.

Senior leadership was frequently blamed for the need to work longer hours, with respondents saying the top-down effect of seeing their managers work long hours made them feel they too needed to work excessively. "It's not really how long you work, it's how visible you about your work" (F2-R6) was an idea that respondents believed was indicative of the American workforce compared with European and Canadian countries.

As the discussion continued around this topic, it was asked whether this idea of working long hours would cause someone to leave their job. F1-R3 spoke without any disagreement from the other group members: "If you can't handle it, then it's probably not the industry for them. I've seen one or two people leave, but most people realize it comes with the territory."

Micromanagement, a topic that would later come up frequently, was also introduced during this question. Other downfalls to respondents' jobs included compensation and shortage of staff members.

Organization Limitations

Expectations (45%)
Micromanagement (9%)
Compensation (18%)
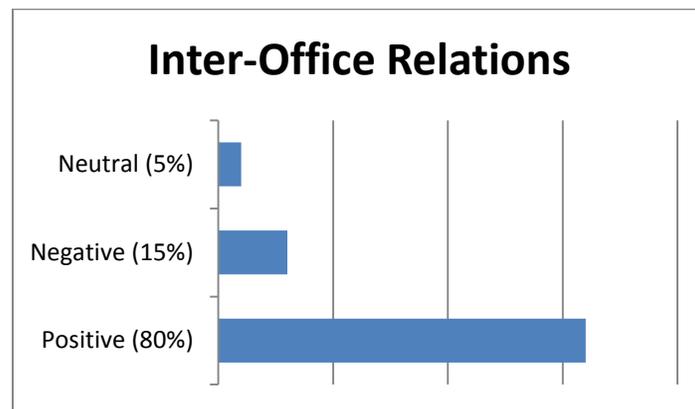Other (4%)
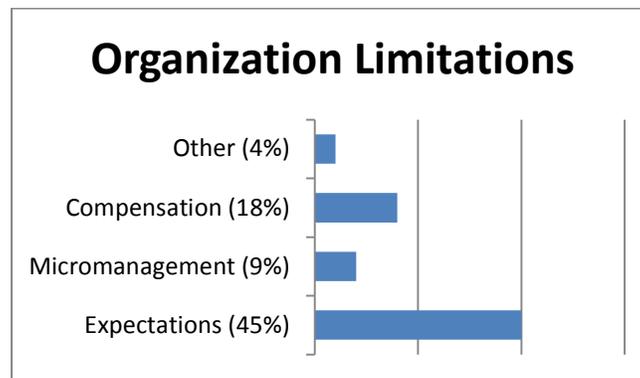
Inter-Office Relations

The tone of the conversations became positive again as respondents discussed the question "How would you describe your relationships with your colleagues, and how do they affect your personal job satisfaction?" Most respondents (80 percent) felt their relationships with colleagues were strong and collaborative, which led to a good working experience. "The work

relationships I've had at this job are the best that I've had at any of my post-graduate jobs. They're one of the only things that keep me here other than compensation" (F2-R6).

Even though he enjoys his colleagues, I1 acknowledged that having friendships with colleagues can have both positive and negative implications: "We're very comfortable talking about anything and everything, but when it comes to management and leadership, there is that gray area between my boss and me, so much that I would say she's not a very good boss, or at least not a person I'd look up to or model myself after." F1-R1 reported that he sometimes struggles with this same issue as the manager of five direct reports.

Of the four respondents who do not have close relationships with their colleagues, three were negatively affected by their inter-office interactions, and one was indifferent.

Improving Overall Employee Satisfaction

Respondents were quick to reference compensation when asked "How could your company improve its overall employee satisfaction?" Other areas they acknowledged organizations need to work on are guaranteeing job stability and career growth, minimizing micromanagement, providing constructive criticism, giving recognition, and avoiding internal politics.

One respondent said his company could not improve his job satisfaction because he views it as a means to an end, and he prefers to focus his energy and happiness into other areas of his life. "I don't have any job satisfaction. As long as I'm paid fairly and have equitable market value benefits and I'm not getting screwed or micromanaged, I'm good. I don't get my satisfaction in life from work – I get it from everything else. I work to live; my job is not my end all, be all" (F2-R1). This statement seemed to make the other group members uncomfortable as they debated with him about the personal merits one can achieve through work: "Work isn't my whole social world, but it's one big sphere" (F2-R2), which F2-R6 followed up with "If I have to be somewhere for eight to nine hours a day, then I want to get some sort of fulfillment out of it. I'm wasting one-third of my life if I don't enjoy work."

Overall Employee Satisfaction

Other (18%)	
Recognition (18%)	
Flexibility (9%)	
Job stability (18%)	
Compensation (36%)	
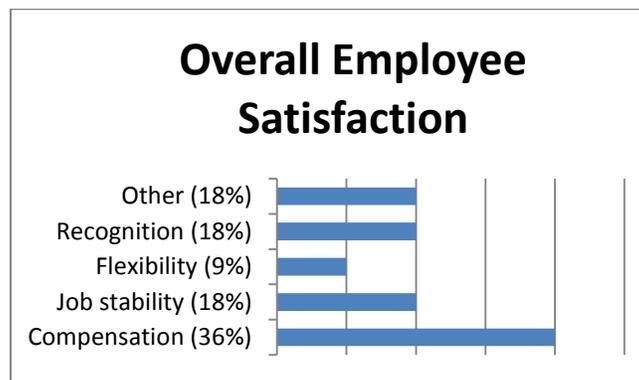
Encouraging Healthy Work-Life Balance

Respondents were finally asked, "What can all companies do to reach a healthy balance between work and personal lives?" Many of the topics from earlier resurfaced as participants noted the need for employees to be paid fairly for the hours they work and for America to follow Europe's example of enjoying vacation time and holidays.

Some respondents referenced the need for employees to work more efficiently rather than longer hours. "We need to instill flex models like ROWE (Results-Only Work Environment) –

the only regulation is that you're getting your job done. No one cares how long it takes to get your job done" (F2-R3). "The current environment is that if you get everything done fast, you get more work. ROWE rewards employees for working smarter and faster" (F1-R5). The groups acknowledged that an environment focused on results rather than hours worked would help limit internal competition within the culture of companies, making it easier for employees to focus on the tasks at hand instead of organizational politics. Multiple participants commented that their own innate competitiveness and fear factor lead them to attempt to outwork their coworkers, which may lead to employee conflict.

Respondents noted that flexible work environments would help productivity while also improving employees' quality of life by allowing people to create their own schedules that also allow for healthy breaks, such as taking naps or exercising. "Paying attention to the beats and rhythms of your body would be beneficial to a lot of people" (F1-R4).

Encouraging Work-Life Balance

Category	
Other (11%)	
Better compensation (2%)	
Reduce micromanagement (5%)	
Work-life programs (13%)	
Manage expectations (13%)	
Flexible schedules (25%)	
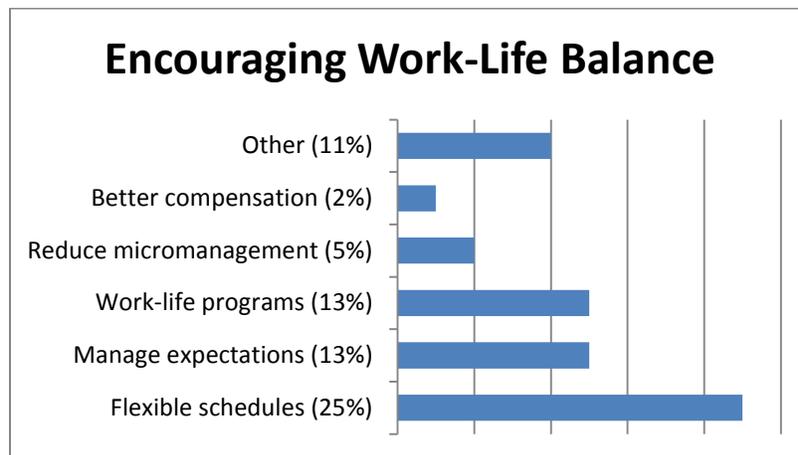
Discussion

As noted earlier in the chapter, conversations from the focus groups and interviews centered around five common categories: human interaction, flexibility, job expectations and efficiency, compensation and benefits, and career growth. These five themes were represented consistently throughout the study, indicating their significance to employees. Comments had

positive, neutral and negative connotations, and each topic influenced possible considerations for

employees to achieve a healthy work-life balance.

R1: How can employees build collaborative relationships with their colleagues while maintaining active lifestyles outside the office?

The topic of human interaction appeared to most influence participants' responses

throughout the study, which supports the idea that organizational culture acts as a social control

that teaches individuals how to act within the workplace (Schein, 2010). Shared assumptions

within an organization help motivate employees, and those who relate well with their colleagues

often find that these personal relationships are more important in their career fulfillment than

economic motivators (Schein, 2010).

The study participants who claimed to get along with their colleagues also seemed to be

the respondents who demonstrated the highest amount of career satisfaction, even when

complaining about their compensation or other benefits. "It comes down to feeling like you're

part of the team. Being a nameless, faceless cog in the machine isn't why I come to work. I

prefer to have friendships with my coworkers and hang out with them outside work" (F2-R6).

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor's social penetration theory (Caputo et al., 2002) would suggest

that the respondents who enjoy working with their colleagues are often more intimate with one

another and have a more substantial investment in developing collaborative relationships.

When employees feel connected with their colleagues, their "commitment, enthusiasm,

and drive are intensified: people have a reason for caring about their work" (Kouzes & Posner,

2003, p. 123). Evidence from this study showed that the opposite holds true when teammates do

not form a collaborative relationship: "There is one person I don't get along with very well and

unfortunately have to sit next to her every day. She brings down my productivity, increases my stress levels, and causes me to go home from work complaining about her, which is not good for my work-life balance or job satisfaction" (I3).

Employees learn how to work with one another by following the examples set by their leaders. Some study participants said a high-quality and respectful relationship with one's direct manager leads to the most productive work environment. The respondents with the most positive opinions of their leaders also expressed the most positive opinions of their colleagues, which supports research that efficient communication about shared values helps form unity between team members (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Respondents suggested team-building workshops, all-company meetings, and after-hours events to begin building collaborative and open relationships with colleagues. It's also important in today's always-connected world to encourage face-to-face interactions when possible. "You need to trust the people you work with. Sometimes even just happy hours help build relationships. I work with people in Portland more than my Seattle office some days, so it's great to go down there and meet them face to face" (F1-R5). This further supports Kouzes and Posner's belief that leaders should encourage open, honest relationships among their employees: "Renewing community and commitment to common purpose can make a strategic contribution to a company's success and adaptation over time" (2003, p. 144).

R2: What types of organizational policies will lead to enhanced employee satisfaction and commitment?

As noted earlier, leaders have a responsibility to properly articulate an organization's culture and expectations (Schein, 2010). "Even casual remarks and questions that are *consistently*

geared to a certain area can be as potent as formal control mechanisms and measurements. If leaders are aware of this process, then being systematic in paying attention to certain things becomes a powerful way of communicating a message, especially if leaders are totally consistent in their own behavior" (Schein, 2010, p. 237).

Daily interactions and clearly communicated expectations from leaders help employees form their symbolic interpretations of corporate culture (Griffin, 2009). When expectations aren't communicated in a consistent way, employees may express frustration and confusion around work-life balance policies: "Our senior leadership doesn't practice what they preach or set a very good example. No one takes a lunch. I take one. They're not paying me to work 10 hours a day – they're paying me to work eight. People on my team fall under the trap of 'if the directors are working, I should work,' but we're not being paid as much (as the directors)" (F2-R4).

This theme of compensation presented itself across the focus groups and interviews, demonstrating that employees are usually willing to work longer and harder if they feel they are being paid properly, which supports John Thibaut and Harold Kelley's social exchange theory (Griffin, 2009). To find a proper work-life balance, employees will exchange their time for money. If they don't feel they are being compensated properly — either through salary, benefits, or another personal need — they will adjust their work-life balance accordingly.

One way employees may feel validated in the workplace is through a clear career path and job description. Study participants expressed disdain when discussing promotion schedules and proper recognition for their efforts in the workplace, which supports research that "for employees to remain motivated, recognition is essential" (SHRM, 2010, p. 7). If an organization does not have a clearly defined approach for recognizing hard work, it risks disrupting employee

satisfaction, which may in turn hinder productivity. When a company's expectations are inconsistent, the entire organization risks incompatible assumptions among its employees, leading to conflicting behaviors (Schein, 1984). "Nobody knows what they're doing or where they're going. You can create your own job, but where do you go from there?" F2-R2 asked, and F2-R4, who works for the same company, said "Our promotion schedule is one of the most frustrating things I've ever seen in my professional career. The ladder is clear, but the timing is subjective."

Another area that organizations may consider improving is their policies on flexible work schedules. Cowan and Hoffman (2007) found that their research participants actually defined work-life balance as flexibility, which suggests that employees outside the communications industry are also motivated by a flexible workplace.

Even though he did not feel an invested interest in his coworkers' lives, F2-R1, who works remotely, said working from home was ideal because it allowed him to completely disengage from his job while off the clock, which helps support the idea that remote employees report less work-life balance conflict (Fonner & Roloff, 2010). F2-R1 believed being in the office led to too much micromanagement and stress, making it more difficult to accomplish tasks in a timely manner. Although this respondent's perspective challenges the concept that collaborative relationships are imperative in building healthy work-life balance, it highlights the unique needs each individual employee must meet.

It is worth mentioning that organizational policies will not enable the perfect work-life balance for all employees at all times. "The physical environment of work, commuting distance, work hours, salary, and regular benefits all have a material standing that cannot be ignored or completely accounted for by blanket appeals to a 'discursive perspective'" (Cheney et al., 2008,

p. 158). That said, study participants made it clear that organizations should attempt to consider employees' personal needs and motivations if they wish to get the most productivity during work hours.

      Chapter Five will further explore the study's limitations and possible areas of future research on the work-life balance.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

The research and literature reviewed in earlier chapters helped provide context about the employee work-life balance in healthy organizational cultures. Although the study directly examined the U.S. communications industry, the following conclusions can be extended to the greater American workforce.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations, particularly amplified by limited resources and time. First, it was difficult to find potential candidates for focus groups who could all meet at the same time and location. Ironically, many potential candidates could not join the groups because they had to work outside their normal business hours. This led to the cancellation of a third focus group and the necessary reorganization of the study methodology. To maintain a healthy sample size, the study was modified to incorporate one-on-one interviews, but the results may have been hindered from the varied research tactics.

Limiting the participants to one industry was necessary in controlling the study's integrity, but it further restricted the candidate pool. Many of the respondents worked for the same communications organization, which may have led to dialogue heavily reflecting that company's unique work-life policies and philosophies.

Finally, there was no moderator or facilitator to help conduct the focus groups and interviews, which did not allow for completely unobtrusive observation. Although careful notes were taken and group conversations were recorded, important non-verbal cues or opportunities to better guide the discussions may have been missed.

Further Study or Recommendations

The findings from this study provide several opportunities for further exploration of the employee work-life balance. As mentioned in the literature review, much of the current work-life balance research focuses on the organization instead of the individual (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007), which make it difficult to obtain a humanistic perspective when creating work-life balance initiatives from which all employees will personally benefit. As psychologist Carl Rogers found through his phenomenological research, honest and open communication is the only way people can build strong relationships (Demorest, 2005), so it is necessary for further observation of employees communicating with one another in the workplace.

The American workforce would benefit from further exploration of flexible schedules, such as the results-only work environment, which study participants proposed as a possible motivator for working more efficiently in a shorter amount of time. For example, the respondents who have the option to work from home or create their own schedule often mentioned improved quality of life because they have more autonomy for completing errands and household duties. A possible longitudinal study could follow employees with flexible work schedules and measure their perspectives on work-life balance over the course of one year, examining whether the perceived balance fluctuates during peak periods of work.

Future research should examine salary's effect on the work-life balance. Compensation was a hot topic of conversation among the focus groups, and it would be interesting to see if higher-paid employees experience a healthier work-life balance. A study that compared the American and European work-life balances would also be useful in acknowledging ways to improve employees' quality of life. Many study respondents mentioned the longer hours Americans put in at the office; a comparison of one global organization's international offices

may provide some insightful observations for leaders to help foster stronger work-life balance among all their employees.

A final recommendation would be to use the findings from the study to develop a work-life balance initiative that organizations within the communications industry could easily implement. Previous research has focused on negative aspects of such programs (Zoller, 2004; Boren & Johnson, 2008), but using tangible ideas from this study may help create an ideal program that all employees can use, not just a select few. For instance, some respondents mentioned that their companies use work-life initiatives as an excuse to make the office "more fun" with pool tables or other activities that only some employees take advantage of. They would prefer a program that offers a better quality of life to all employees. The future study could further address the perks a successful work-life balance program would entail. Eventually, the initiative could be duplicated outside the communications industry to other sectors that have high rates of stress and employee dissatisfaction.

Conclusions

The work-life balance has become an important issue among American employees as they find themselves working long hours while also trying to maintain active personal lives. Through focus groups and individual interviews, this study examined the effects of the perceived work-life balance among employees within the U.S. communications industry, focusing on how collaborative inter-office relationships and organizational work-life initiatives may affect employee productivity. Study participants answered questions based on the hierarchy of needs and the communication theories of organizational culture, social exchange, and social penetration.

Respondents' perceptions of their work-life balance seemed most influenced by human interaction, which is consistent with earlier research about the importance of dialogue in forming relationships. High-quality interactions, empathetic understanding, and open communication are the basis for forming collaborative relationships (Demorest, 2005), and for organizations to build trusting, collaborative work environments, they must encourage leaders to cultivate culture through a humanistic perspective, which requires that people build community through dialogue. As noted earlier, Martin Buber and other philosophers believe that dialogue is morally appropriate, as well as the only truly ethical way for people to form relationships with one another (Griffin, 2009). Interpersonal relationships developed through dialogue help all people relate with one another within a community, cultivating high-quality interactions and empathetic understanding. Applied to the workplace, these philosophical and theoretical assumptions show that dialogue can help employees build relationships that make them feel they are part of a morally responsible community, in which they will feel a sense of belonging and pride that motivates them to work harder to maintain their position within the organization.

Organizational culture affects employees both inside and outside the office since it teaches employees the company's shared assumptions and cultural norms (Schein, 2010). Employees discover through many conscious and unconscious social controls how to behave, including how they should balance their work with their personal lives. Behaviors are regulated through employees' perceived rewards and costs (Griffin, 2009), and participants from this study and previous research indicate that these shared assumptions are typically dictated top-down from their leaders.

When leaders do not consistently articulate policies and expectations, respondents said they feel frustrated, which echoes Schein's belief that the leadership team has a responsibility to

be aware of how it presents information to employees (2010). Dissonance stemming from unclear expectations can lead to improper work-life balance, which this study shows should be a major concern for employers who want to get the most productivity from their employees. Although it is near impossible to find the appropriate work-life balance that works for all employees at all times, leaders need to consider the personal needs and motivations of each individual employee. To do this, they need to foster a collaborative community through open and honest dialogue that appreciates all employees — inside and outside the office.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you worked with your organization?

2. What is your favorite part about working for your organization?

3. What personal needs does your company help you meet?

4. What do you feel your company is lacking in terms of helping you find an appropriate balance between your work and personal lives?

5. How would you describe your relationships with your colleagues, and how do they affect your personal job satisfaction?

6. How could your company improve its overall employee satisfaction?

7. What can all companies do to reach a healthy balance between work and personal lives?

8. What other feedback do you have about today's discussion?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I agree to participate in this focus group discussion about the employee work-life balance.

I understand that information collected during this discussion will be used only in a thesis presented to the faculty of Communication and Leadership Studies, School of Professional Studies, Gonzaga University.

My identity and the identity of any others involved will remain confidential.

The facilitator will not use my name or personal identifying information in anything that is written about this focus group.

My participation is voluntary; I do not have to answer questions or speak unless I choose to. I agree to respect the privacy of the people who participate in this focus group. I will not share any identifying information or details about the discussion outside of this group.

I have read and understood the information above, and I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group discussion.

_____   _____
Name   Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I agree to participate in this interview about the employee work-life balance.

I understand that information collected during this interview will be used only in a thesis presented to the faculty of Communication and Leadership Studies, School of Professional Studies, Gonzaga University.

My identity and the identity of any others involved will remain confidential.

The facilitator will not use my name or personal identifying information in anything that is written about this interview.

My participation is voluntary; I do not have to answer questions unless I choose to.

I have read and understood the information above, and I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group discussion.

_____   _____

Name   Date

APPENDIX D: WORK-LIFE CATEGORIES

Coding	Category	Description	No. of Comments	Other Notes
C1	Human interaction	Employees' contact with managers, coworkers and clients	65	Includes positive and negative mentions
C2	Flexibility	Ability to work remotely and/or work a flex schedule	29	Includes references of ROWE model
C3	Job expectations and efficiency	Comments regarding working smarter, not harder	39	Includes perceptions about working outside normal business hours
C4	Compensation and benefits	Sentiment about employee salary and other perks	49	Includes positive and negative mentions of salary, corporate responsibility initiatives, maternity leave, insurance, vacation, etc.
C5	Career growth	Opportunities to develop one's career with current employer	22	Includes at-will employment and the internal competitiveness or "fear factor" people feel to outwork their coworkers

APPENDIX E: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CODING

Focus Group 1, Oct. 21, 2012
F1-R1: Male, white, 41+
F1-R2: Female, non-white, 31-40
F1-R3: Female, white, 21-30
F1-R4: Male, white, 21-30
F1-R5: Male, white, 21-30
F1-R6: Female, white, 31-40
F1-R7: Female, white, 21-30

Focus Group 2, Oct. 23, 2012
F2-R1: Male, non-white, 31-40
F2-R2: Female, white, 31-40
F2-R3: Female, white, 21-30
F2-R4: Female, white, 21-30
F2-R5: Female, white, 31-40
F2-R6: Male, non-white, 21-30

Personal Interviews, Oct. 25-29, 2012
I1: Male, white, 31-40
I2: Male, white, 21-30
I3: Female, white, 21-30
I4: Female, white, 41+
I5: Female, white, 21-30
I6: Male, white, 41+
I7: Male, white, 21-30