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# An exploratory study of work-life balance, conflict and enrichment experiences of frontline hospitality employees in a UK context

Isobel Winfield, Nottingham Business School

## Abstract

This research project aims to inform the current literature on the work-life balance, conflict and enrichment experiences of frontline hospitality employees in a UK context by considering the perceptions of participants from Organisation X, with the view to making recommendations for practitioners and academics.

From an interpretivist perspective, the author examined perceptions of the work-life balance, conflict and enrichment experiences of frontline hospitality employees by conducting semi-structured interviews with five participants. Key findings were established from transcriptions using thematic analysis.

The findings indicated time and strain-based conflicts emerge as a result of the organisation's overreliance on key individuals, who identify themselves as being members of a core group of staff within the labour force. Little evidence emerged of behaviour-based conflicts as a result of the overextended time and strain-based conflicts and the impact these have on the life and personal dimensions. Enrichment factors such as an allegiance to work, and relationships with colleagues emerged from the findings, and an acceptance of poor work-life balance that is attributed to the nature of the industry was also evident.

Data was collected using a limited sample of participants drawn from one organisation, compromising the generalisability of the conclusions and their reliability in application to the wider UK context.

This study used purposive sampling in order to obtain participants that conform to certain demographic criteria which is currently underrepresented in the work-life balance literature. The criteria used was: marital status as single, with no children or elderly parents. This study is based in a UK context which is also currently underrepresented in the literature.

**Key Words:** Work-life Balance; Conflict; Enrichment; Frontline Hospitality Employees; Personal Dimension

## 1. Introduction

The literature surrounding the work-life balance (WLB) debate is extensive and continually developing; in the first instance, authors discussed the spheres of 'work' and 'family' and the conflict that arises in balancing these two opposing aspects of an individual's life (Frone et. al., 1992). The debate then saw a linguistic shift from 'work-family' to 'work-life' balance, in order to reflect the broader sphere of influence that this subject now encompassed (Lewis et. al., 2007). In recent years, the individual's personal life adds a third dimension that needs balancing amongst their work and life responsibilities (Adame-Sánchez et. al., 2016).

The composition and requirements of the workforce have evolved in recent years as a result of the demographic shift in the age at which individuals are getting married and having children. This has implications for the WLB debate, as many of the policies implemented in organisations are to cater to those individuals with family commitments (Fiksenbaum, 2013). In this new demographic composition, this is individuals aged 30-34 (Office for National Statistics, 2016). This leaves a significant proportion of the labour force unable to access WLB policies as a result of their lack of family commitments that, in the eyes of the modern employer, would constitute the need for access to such policies. This underrepresentation is reflected in the current WLB literature, given that participants of key studies typically describe the WLB issues that arise as a result of family commitments such as caring for young children (Wong and Ko, 2009; Lövhöiden et. al., 2011).

Exploring the phenomenon of the WLB dilemma in the context of the hospitality industry specifically provides an interesting opportunity for investigation, as the conditions of this labour-intensive industry lend themselves to work-life imbalance (Lövhöiden et. al., 2011; Zhao and Ghiselli, 2016). Such conditions include; long and anti-social working hours, irregular scheduling, limited autonomy over own schedule, and significant interaction with customers (Deery and Jago, 2009; Magnini, 2009; Chiang et. al., 2010; Bharwani and Butt, 2012).

The current literature outlines the need for a distinction between the concepts of WLB, conflict and enrichment, and for the purpose of this study, a common understanding is required (Carlson et. al., 2009; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). Concepts such as work-life conflict (WLC) and work-life enrichment (WLE) represent linking mechanisms between work and non-work that are fundamentally distinct from the overarching concept of WLB. A summative characterisation of an individual's engagement in, and enjoyment of, a multitude of roles across the work and life dimensions (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Carlson et. al., 2009; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). WLB represents more than simply the absence of WLC or the presence of WLE, it is subjective to the individual and their perception of their current balance (Warhurst et. al., 2008).

This research project endeavours to explore frontline hospitality employees' perceptions of their WLB, conflict and enrichment experiences, with a purposively selected sample, under the age of 30, with no children or elderly dependents, in order to inform this previously under empirically-researched demographic. Qualitative data will be collected using semi-structured interviews with five participants from an independent luxury hotel, bar and restaurant located in Oxfordshire, which will be known throughout the study as Organisation X. By using thematic analysis, patterns will be developed from the findings and conclusions will be drawn to inform the research questions.

The following study will inform the reader of four key sections. Firstly, the literature review; the author will evaluate WLB and hospitality literature, including pivotal previous studies and overarching conceptual theories relevant to this study. Secondly, the methodology; the justification for the chosen research and sampling methods will be outlined. Thirdly, the findings and discussion, within which the author will present findings from interviews with participants from Organisation X, and discuss the implications of these for existing and future research, as well as from a practical perspective for hospitality managers and HR practitioners. Lastly, the conclusions and recommendations, within which the author will evaluate the inferences made from the findings and discussion and outline future practical and academic recommendations. It is important to note at this stage that there are no conflicts of interest within this study.

## **2. Critical Literature Review**

### **2.1 Contributions to the Work-Life Balance Debate**

There are three critical tensions in modern society contributing to the debate on WLB. Firstly, employment has risen to become increasingly competitive, demanding and intense, which diverts energy away from other aspects of life (Carlson et. al., 2003; Lewis et. al., 2007). This work intensification emerged as a result of organisations becoming “lean and mean” in response to the turbulent, post financial crisis economy, in which employees are pressured to increase productivity in the same amount of time. Therefore increasing pressure and strain on the workforce and negatively impacting their overall quality of life (Warhurst et. al., 2008).

Secondly, an increased perception in the importance of wellbeing, and that time and energy spent to connect and socialise with others is crucial to the support of such wellbeing and all-round personal development. Adame-Sánchez et. al. (2016) and Lewis et. al., (2007) argue that such important aspects of life are diminished by the rising demands of employment Green (2013, p. 151), discusses the challenge surrounding the subjectivity of the notion of wellbeing, and how employees could have juxtaposed ideas around what factors contribute to such wellbeing.

Lastly, the ways in which men and women experience and negotiate their roles, identities and relationships with each other have become crucial to the ways work and home life are harmonised (Lewis et. al., 2007). This last factor is perhaps the most significant contributor to the emergence of the WLB debate, as the demise of the traditional family model, and the rise of women in employment, has had serious implications for men as the traditional breadwinners and their consequential heavier involvement in child and eldercare and other family commitments (Crowley, 1998; Duxbury and Higgins, 1991). This represents a significant change in the demographic composition of the labour force, and an increase in dual-career couples, which creates a far more symmetrical family unit; therefore creating a growing need for WLB policies in the modern organisation and the availability of these policies to both men and women (Fiksenbaum, 2013; Hakim, 2005). Despite significant growth in female participation in paid work since the 1980s, there remains less reciprocal change among men in terms of their involvement in unpaid care work for children or elderly dependents (Lewis et. al., 2007). However, an emergent trend in the literature indicates that working fathers have become increasingly involved in parenting, and are now facing the same struggles that have long challenged working mothers in the pursuit of WLB (Pomerance, 2013).

## **2.2 Work-Life Balance, Conflict and Enrichment**

The WLB debate has grown in prominence as a response to the above mentioned factors. In recent years, organisations are increasingly offering a variety of policies and interventions to assist employees in finding the balance, as it is not an issue that can be resolved with a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy (Fiksenbaum, 2013; Wong and Ko, 2009). WLB is typically categorised as an individual having "a measure of control over when, where and how they work" (Hyman and Marks 2008, p. 197). Initiatives such as; teleworking, flexitime, job sharing and employee assistance programmes (Dolcos and Daley, 2009; Downes and Koekemoer, 2011; Fiksenbaum, 2013) are evidence of an effort from organisations to give their workforce such control. Despite the widespread implementation of WLB policies, research shows a disparity between employer's WLB intentions, and employee's actual WLB experiences; this is due to the fundamentally naïve assumption that the spheres of 'work' and 'life' are inherently separate entities that can be differentiated between and balanced (Warhurst et. al., 2008). Low utilisation rates of WLB policies also contribute to this disparity. Poor utilisation has been attributed to the stigma surrounding the use of such policies and the perceived adverse effect this may have on an employee's career progression prospects (Allen, 2001; McNamara et. al., 2013).

WLB literature is constantly evolving and is contributing to the debate on the distinction between concepts such as balance, conflict and enrichment (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). The WLB dilemma presents both positive and negative interdependencies; the negative are known as WLC and the positive are known as WLE

(Lövhöiden et. al., 2011). Much of the current literature stipulates that an absence of WLC, or a presence of WLE would indicate a successful WLB (Carlson et. al., 2009; Frone, 2003). This alludes to the theory found in popular discussion that satisfying the balance is a matter of canny self-organisation (Warhurst et. al., 2008). As the WLB dilemma has received growth in academic attention, it is important to make a distinction between these three concepts, and for the purpose of this study, to investigate the implications these may have in a hospitality context.

WLC is categorised under three key headings used widely in the literature; time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. These different forms of conflict are shaped by, and associated with, different consequences (Steiber, 2009).

Time based conflict (TBC) arises when time devoted to one role makes it difficult for the individual to fulfil the requirements of another (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). That is to say, that the demands of work and home “compete for a finite amount of an individual’s time” (Magnini 2009, p. 122). The allocation of time between the two roles may be influenced by work and home centralities; defined as the level of importance that individuals assign to each role (LeBoeuf et. al., 2010). Therefore, conflict will emerge when an individual values both work and home roles with high importance, but cannot fulfil this importance sufficiently, and distribute their time in a manner consistent with their preference (Carlson et. al., 2003; Crowley, 1998). When faced with such TBCs, individuals are required to make a difficult trade-off between two competing roles as no alternative adequately satisfies the demands of both (Bagger et. al., 2014). The key challenge presented by TBCs is their typical characterisation as a “zero-sum” exercise; in that, the more time spent in one role directly takes time away from the other given that the individual’s time is a fixed resource (Bagger et. al., 2014; Steiber, 2009). TBC is not simply limited to the amount of time devoted to one role or another, but also includes factors related to scheduling and predictability of hours; for instance, the interference that may occur as a result of being asked at short notice to work overtime (Steiber, 2009). Given the nature of hospitality and the typical requirement of its employees to work long hours and irregular shift schedules, TBC is abundant in this industry (Magnini, 2009).

Strain based conflict (SBC) arises when strain from participation in one role makes it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The literature illustrates that SBC can present mechanisms such as energy depletion, emotional exhaustion, sleeping difficulties, irritability, or social withdrawal (Deery and Jago, 2009; Kinman, 2009; Steiber, 2009). Strains such as these, which are produced in one role impede the successful fulfilment of another. For example, “a hotel or restaurant manager can arrive home so mentally exhausted that it is difficult to substantively interact with family members” (Magnini 2009, p.122). Strain-based WLC may have a significantly pronounced effect on hospitality frontline employees given the high stress levels associated with these customer-facing

positions (Netemeyer et. al., 2005). The intense customer-facing aspect of frontline hospitality roles requires a degree of emotional suppression in order to satisfy compliance with organisational display guidelines; this has significant consequences for the SBC experiences of these individuals (Kinman, 2009).

Behavioural based conflict (BBC) arises when specific behaviours required by one role are incompatible with the behavioural norms and expectations of another (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). BBC is linked to identity theory; a concept in which individuals in modern society are required to adopt a variety of different identities or “multiple selves” (Brenner et. al., 2014, p. 232) that are governed by the different interactions with others that an individual will undertake in their various walks of life. Identity theory states that individuals hold multiple different identities which are adopted depending on which sphere of life they are acting in. For example, a woman could hold the identity of ‘mother’ in her home life, and the identity of ‘hotel manager’ in her work life, both of which will mandate vastly different norms, values and ideals (LeBoeuf et. al., 2010). The degree to which an individual associates themselves with each of their identities will affect how much interference is experienced (Wayne et. al., 2006).

### **2.3 Work-Life Balance, Conflict and Enrichment in the Hospitality Literature**

Of the three abovementioned categories of WLC, TBC, and specifically the long-hours culture, have been found in the current hospitality literature to be the most abundant and influential contributor to poor WLB in modern employment (Deery and Jago, 2009; Warhurst et. al., 2008). Kodz et. al., (1998) define ‘long hours’ as working excessive hours on a continual and constant basis, rather than only at occasional peaks to meet specific business needs; a characteristic that is fundamental in a hospitality environment. It is argued in the current literature that these long hours are responsible for the industry’s inherent turnover culture, in which employees uphold the normative belief that turnover behaviour is appropriate (Iverson and Deery, 1997). Institutions that cultivate a long-hours organisational culture often receive negative attention, with frontline employees struggling to achieve a WLB, while their organisations profit from such “sacrificial labour” (Ross 2008, p. 33). However, this is inconsistent with the findings presented by Wong and Ko (2009), who conclude that hospitality employees rarely question long working hours or unpredictable scheduling, given that this is an assumed and typical characteristic of the industry.

Wong and Ko’s (2009) study provides a strong focus for this investigation of WLB in the hospitality industry. Wong and Ko (2009) examine WLB in the context of a long-hours culture, and explore employees’ perceptions of their WLB experiences and issues, with a specific focus on the hospitality industry in Hong Kong. The study utilised a mixed-method approach of data collection involving interviews with 24 participants, and questionnaires being completed by a sample population of 230 respondents, indicating that the study had widespread reach and that outcomes of the research are conclusive of the context

population. The study's results concluded that hotel employees do not feel they have enough time off work, This TBC (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) is attributed to innate characteristics of the hospitality field, such as the long-hours culture and physically demanding nature of the work required. This preference to have more time off work is attributed to the increasing number of Generation Y workers in the labour market today, and the different expectations these individuals pursue (Wong and Ko, 2009). In a topical article featured in *The Economist*, it is cited that Generation Y workers are looking for "a workstyle to match their lifestyle" (Anon 2006, p. 1) and that this requirement has in part contributed to the growing trend for WLB initiatives in the modern workplace as these workers are demanding more from their employers than previous generations (Harris, 2007). Wong and Ko (2009) note that despite the long-hours culture contributing to hotel employees' WLC, (as conflict is experienced as a result of a lack of autonomy over their own schedule), long hours are a widely recognised and accepted fact of life within the sector.

Wong and Ko's (2009) study found that an allegiance to work had a positive correlation to hotel employees' WLB, as those who upheld a certain degree of loyalty and commitment to their organisation were willing to work the long hours dictated by the industry. Such allegiance to work and willingness to accept the culture and conditions of the hospitality industry, to some degree contradicts the driving force of the WLB debate, by indicating that employees who gain pleasure from their work are not likely to want to balance it with other activities (Gregg, 2011). In a sense, the desire to achieve WLB assumes a Marxist understanding of work as alienating, therefore employees who benefit from an allegiance to work are less likely to feel this way inclined or suffer from WLC (Gregg, 2011; Sehwat, 2016). In this particular study, the authors attribute the employees' allegiance to work to the Chinese cultural inclination for employees to maintain 'face' in front of management. Such commitment to the organisation is typically driven by the desire to obtain job security and career progression opportunities (Wong and Ko, 2009).

Lövhöiden et. al. (2011) study provides a strong foregrounding for this research paper. The study investigates WLB experiences in the Scandinavian hotel industry. It utilised a qualitative data collection method of in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected hospitality middle managers, allowing the data collected to provide detailed, descriptive insight into the participants' experiences of WLB, conflict and enrichment. The study provides a different perspective to the work of Wong and Ko (2009), as it investigates the effect of both WLC and WLE. WLE can be defined as "the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role" (Greenhaus and Powell 2006, p. 73), and can be responsible for positive spill over, enhancement, and facilitation in an individual's other facets of life (Wayne et. al., 2006). Positive spill over refers to the transfer of positively valenced skills, behaviours, and values from one dimension to another, which results in a beneficial effect experienced in the receiving domain (Hanson et. al., 2006). The authors of the study found that hospitality managers are able to experience WLE through undertakings

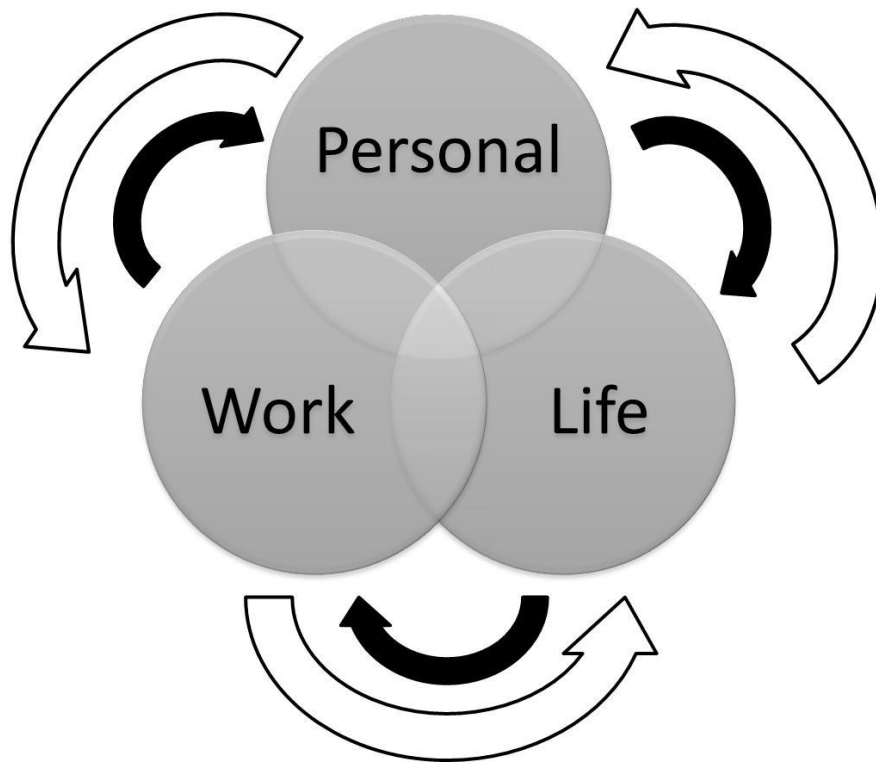


such as caring for colleagues, team-building exercises or excursions, and extra-curricular activities; such activities detract from the stress and burnout that typically derive from customer-facing hospitality positions (Lövhöiden et. al. 2011).

The allegiance to work as found in Wong and Ko's (2009) study was also identified in the sample population used for Lövhöiden et. al. (2011) study in the Scandinavian hospitality context. However, rather than this allegiance providing a factor of WLE to the individual, it was found to result in employees often feeling obliged to assist their colleagues by covering shifts at short notice, or altering their shift schedule altogether. This allegiance to work and sense of obligation to colleagues undermines the anticipated WLE that such interactions should encourage, by creating time and strain-based conflicts for employees and unsettling the balance.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework the author will use to guide this research paper. The figure below has been developed from the traditional view of WLB, as it was perceived when the issue first emerged in academic literature with an individual balancing the two distinct spheres of "work" and "life", as evolved from the previously termed sphere of "family" (Warhurst et. al., 2008). Figure 1 is representative of today's WLB literature, which involves the three spheres of 'work', 'life' and 'personal' dimensions. The personal dimension is a necessary addition to the WLB debate given the new demographic composition of the modern labour force (Adame-Sánchez et. al., 2016). WLB interventions prior to this linguistic shift were commonly termed "family-friendly", which alienated those employees who are single with no children, but still need to satisfy their WLB (Wong and Ko, 2009). The filled arrows surrounding these three spheres, moving clockwise in the conceptual framework represent Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) three sources of WLC that influence the spheres interdependently; TBC, SBC and BBC. The unfilled arrows surrounding these three spheres or dimensions of WLB, moving counter-cyclical represent the WLE factors that are under-represented in the current literature (Lövhöiden et. al., 2011). The author intends to investigate the application of Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) categories of WLC to this particular context, and to explore the enrichment factors that can be identified by participants to fill the counter-cyclical arrows on the conceptual framework, and inform the currently under empirically-researched area of the WLB literature. Exploration of these two areas will inform the author of the participants' overall perception of their WLB experiences as a whole.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

### **3. Research Questions**

From the review of the literature, the following research questions have been posed for this study:

1. What work-life conflicts do frontline hospitality employees experience in a UK context?
2. What work-life enrichment factors do frontline hospitality employees experience in a UK context?
3. What are frontline hospitality employees' perceptions of their work-life balance experiences in a UK context?

### **4. Methodology**

#### **4.1 Research Approach & Design**

This study establishes an interpretivist theoretical perspective, as the author is investigating a reality that cannot be objectively determined, but rather, is socially constructed and open to interpretation, with words and events holding different meanings to individuals (Husserl, 1965; Thomas, 2011). Interpretivist research endeavours to gain an understanding of the world through the eyes of the study participants, and the findings are based on the authors' interpretation of these participants' understanding (Crotty, 1998). According to Goldkuhl (2011, p. 137) "The aim of understanding the subjective meanings of persons in studied

domains is essential in the interpretive paradigm”, and for the purpose of this study, the understanding of the participants from Organisation X will provide the foregrounding for analysis.

Due to the subjective nature of WLB (Warhurst et. al., 2008), and the requirement for participants to provide detailed, expressive insights which are not possible to gain from quantitative data collection methods, such as surveys (Bryman and Bell, 2007), qualitative data was the focus for this study. The use of quantitative data in this instance would have been beneficial to the research in terms of providing statistical data representative of the entire context population (Hair et. al., 2007), but to obtain detailed responses from participants, qualitative data was selected as the most appropriate methodology.

## **4.2 Research Methods**

Semi-structured interviews were utilised for this study as they enabled the author to incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, which elicited data grounded in the experience of the participant, as well as data guided by existing concepts in the WLB literature (Galletta, 2012). The semi-structured interview format allows the researcher to guide the interview using pre-planned questions in order to somewhat dictate the flow of conversation. However, there is also scope for respondents to direct conversation towards subject areas the author may not have anticipated and provide in-depth responses (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The purpose of partly structuring the conversation is to allow participants to produce a dialogue about their experiences freely, without interference from potentially misguided prompts by the interviewer (Zikmund et. al., 2012). This was an important motivation in the decision to utilise semi-structured interviews for this study. The participants' demographic is underrepresented in the current literature, therefore there is minimal empirical knowledge to provide a foundation for the direction of conversation. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed scope for unprecedented topics to arise; a more structured or rigid research method would not have allowed these trends to come to light.

The use of focus groups was considered as a data collection method, as the beneficial interactive nature in which participants challenge, justify and elaborate on one another's responses allow scope for the conversation to prompt debate and rationalisations; all of which will provide in-depth detail and uncover hidden facets of the issue (Hennink et. al., 2015). However, as is testament to the very focus of this research, the participants faced complex time constraints which did not enable the entire group to be available at any one time. As a result, individual semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate method in this instance.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out face-to-face, lasting 20-30 minutes in order to gain descriptive detail from participants in their answers. Interviewees were provided with

participant information sheets prior to participation to inform them of the nature of the study and what to expect from the interviews.

### **4.3 Sampling Strategy**

Purposive sampling was utilised in this study. Participants were recruited based on their conformation to specific criteria (Blumberg et. al., 2008), which in this instance was their marital status as single, with no children or elderly dependents. Although this sampling method produces a bias, in this instance it is a preferential bias, as the requirement was to involve participants who serve a specific purpose consistent with the study's objective (Collingridge and Gantt, 2008). The objective was to investigate individuals who meet the above criteria as they are currently under represented in the WLB literature.

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling; this method yields a study sample through referrals made among a group of individuals who share characteristics, or criteria that are of research interest (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). The author gained access to a small number of frontline hospitality employees within Organisation X, and utilised this initial connection to make further contact with others suitable for the study sample (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

The author acknowledges that the use of five participants within the sample is somewhat limiting in terms of generalisability. However this study intends to substantiate the accounts of these five participants' through in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to contribute to the discussion in the current literature on WLB. It is noted in the current literature that studies utilising small samples of participants are useful in providing reliable indications for the direction of future research (Boddy, 2016). In this instance, this research paper could be used as a basis for further research, rather than drawing generalisable conclusions based on the context population.

#### **4.3.1 Participants' Profiles**

All of the interviewees had British nationality, their ages ranged from 22-26 years and none of the participants had children or senior dependents. See a full summary of participants' profiles in Table 1.

In terms of marital status, all participants were single and none were cohabiting with a partner. This sample composition is appropriate for the investigation into WLB of those individuals who do not have typical commitments as would be expected from the 'life' dimension of WLB, and who are interested in development of the personal dimension as indicated by Adame-Sánchez et. al. (2016).

Participant number	Gender	Department	Position	Nationality	Age	Marital status	Number of dependents
1	Male	Restaurant	Head Waiter	British	26	Single	0
2	Female	Restaurant	Asst. Head Waiter	British	25	Single	0
3	Female	Bar	Asst. Bar Manager	British	22	Single	0
4	Female	Bar	Bar Staff	British	23	Single	0
5	Male	Restaurant	Chef De Rang	British	24	Single	0

**Table 1:** Participants' Profiles

#### **4.3.2 Ethics statement**

It is important to note that the correct ethical procedure surrounding undergraduate research at Nottingham Trent University's Nottingham Business School was duly followed in this instance. Permission was granted from management within the organisation, and participants were provided with full information about the nature of the project prior to giving full consent to participate, and granting permission for the author to take and store audio recordings of interviews. Participants were made aware that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and the organisation has been respected in this instance. In line with Nottingham Business School guidelines, the undergraduate researcher gained ethical approval from a Research Supervisor. The author experienced no conflicts of interest in the undertaking of this research and data collection.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

Analysing data is the process of transforming data into information that the author can use to draw conclusions and form recommendations (Lancaster, 2005). In this instance, the author recorded and transcribed interviews with five participants and held the files securely throughout the analysis process. Once the interviews were transcribed, thematic analysis was used to draw out key themes, see Figure 2. Thematic analysis is a foundational method for quantitative analysis which is used to identify, analyse and report patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The aim of thematic analysis is not to summarise the data, but

rather to identify and interpret key features that emerge from the qualitative data set to the author, guided by the overarching research questions (Clarke and Braun, 2017). In this instance, the author was able to draw themes from the data using coding to reveal key trends that can be categorised under the research questions of the paper, namely; experiences of WLC and WLE, the participants' responses to these, and their overall perception of their WLB.

Theme	Subtheme	Proportion of respondents
Time-Based Conflict	Inherent characteristics of the industry.	100%
	Working too many days consecutively.	80%
	Limited autonomy over own schedule.	100%
	Antisocial working hours.	60%
Strain-Based Conflict	Customer facing environment as draining.	80%
	Physical strains from employees being on their feet. all day.	80%
Behaviour-Based Conflict	Absence of BBC due to lack of another role.	60%
Enrichment	Friendships within the workplace.	100%
Acceptance of Poor WLB	Allegiance to work; being happy and willing to participate in work despite poor WLB.	100%
Distinctions Between Employees	Acknowledgement that some employees are more committed to the organisation/industry than others.	80%
	The organisation's overreliance on stronger members of staff.	100%

**Figure 2:** Thematic Analysis

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Work life conflict

Questions surrounding the factors that have negative implications for the individuals' experiences of WLB prompted answers that can be categorised using Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) classifications of WLC; time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts. These findings inform the research question;

1. What work-life conflicts do frontline hospitality employees experience in a UK context?

### **5.2.1 Time-Based Conflict**

For the participants of this case study, the life and personal dimensions which counter the time-based requirements of the work dimension, do not involve any concrete commitments other than the pursuit of personal development. Therefore, rather than conflict arising when time devoted to the work role makes it difficult to fulfil the requirements of the other dimensions (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), individuals of the sample population did not have anything to fulfil in the life and personal dimensions. In this instance, 'conflict' is not an adequate term linguistically for the experiences of the participants given that the time demands from the work dimension are too great, that no other such commitments can even be entertained. This emerged from the interviews by multiple uses of the phrase "I do try". Participants utilised the phrase when discussing their commitments outside of the work dimension, and the activities that they "try" to participate in. The use of the verb "try" implies that the participants endeavour to take part in developmental activities outside of work, but do not succeed.

Although the long-hours culture is an embedded characteristic of the hospitality industry (Deery and Jago, 2009), the findings demonstrate that the hours themselves are not the root cause of WLC in this instance, and that an unsustainable conflict arises when too many days are worked consecutively.

Participant 5, *"It's not the hours because I am happy to do the long shifts; it's more the number of days in a row that you do. Doing nine days on then one or two days off ... I can't go on doing that for the rest of my life"*.

Limited autonomy over one's own schedule is another common theme in TBC that arises in frontline hospitality staff experiences (Wong and Ko, 2009), and the participants of this study are no exception.

Participant 1, *"On a weekly basis I have no control. Whatsoever"*.

This is contradictory to Hyman and Mark's (2008, p. 197) definition of WLB as an individual having "a measure of control over when, where and how they work". By this definition the participants from this organisation cannot gain a WLB under the current arrangement.

### **5.2.2 Strain-Based Conflict**

Participants noted experiences of strains, such as physical exhaustion and energy depletion, which affects their ability to make the most of their limited time outside of work. They are so physically exhausted that they are unable to engage in activities that would fulfil development in the 'life' and 'personal' dimensions.

Participant 5, *"I do try to do some exercise but I'm usually so knackered, the thought of going to the gym isn't appealing whatsoever"*.

The statement above arose in conversation about the individual's pursuits outside of work, and highlights the direct implication that exhaustion has on the individual's ability to engage in personal development activities, such as exercise, outside of work. This is harmonious with evidence in the current literature citing energy depletion and exhaustion as typical SBCs experienced by frontline hospitality employees (Deery and Jago, 2009). It emerged from the interviews that such energy depletion and exhaustion is not only a result of the drain on the individuals' time resources, but rather that the nature of the work itself is described as exhausting, as is made evident by the statement below;

Participant 1, "*We had pedometers fitted and there were certain members of staff walking 20 miles a day*".

As is noted in the literature, it is not just the physical strains that can impact an individual's life and personal dimensions outside of work. There can be mental and psychological strains produced simultaneously (Deery and Jago, 2009; Kinman, 2009; Steiber, 2009). A common theme that emerged from the interviews surrounded the customer-facing aspect of the role and the strains that this factor produces.

Participant 2, "*You also have to be in front of the guests and keep that smile on so it's not only physically, but it's also quite mentally draining*".

Kinman's (2009) study observed a substantial relationship between components of emotional labour, such as compliance with organisational display guidelines and emotional suppression, and perceptions of strain-based WLC experiences for frontline service staff. This is synonymous with the findings from this group of participants. It is observable from the interviews that displaying emotions deemed correct and appropriate by the organisation can be mentally draining for the participants, and produce negative spill over into the 'life' and 'personal' dimensions such as fatigue.

### **5.2.3 Behaviour-Based Conflict**

Little data emerged regarding Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) behaviour-based category of WLC within the sample population. However, this may be attributed to the fact that the interviewees in this sample were purposively chosen to participate in the study as their marital status was single, and they did not have children or elderly dependents, which indicates a lack of other such major "roles" outside the work dimension. The WLB experiences of variations to the typical family unit are underrepresented in the literature, in particular, the single person household (Warhurst et. al., 2008). As was noted in the discussion around TBCs experienced by the participants, the individuals spend such a significant proportion of their time in the workplace that they are unable to substantively fulfil their life and personal dimensions. For this reason, there are no roles external to the workplace that their behaviour may conflict with, given that they do not have the time to create, develop or consolidate these roles.



Participant 3, *"I don't have a life outside of work"*.

According to Wayne et. al., (2006), the level of interference experienced between the roles is influenced by the degree to which the individual associates that role with their identity. In this instance, the participants wholly associate themselves with their identity in hospitality, and given the TBCs that seclude them from development outside of this dimension, no interference or BBC is experienced. Despite the fact that this conclusion may allude to a positive connotation, the author would argue that this lack of another identity or role for the individual to participate in or experience interference with, is testament to the core of the WLB issue in frontline hospitality staff.

### **5.3 Enrichment Factors**

As previous discussion summarises, it was found in the interviews that as a result of TBCs, and the participants' disproportionate involvement in the work dimension, no opposing roles exist or are substantively developed in the life and personal dimensions. One of the implications of this finding is that enrichment factors emerging from the work role, have no opposing role to benefit from the positive spill over. However, it emerged from the interviews that within the work dimension, participants are able to fulfil and develop more than just their role as an employee. In this instance, the work dimension of the WLB debate contains both professional and social roles. Considering this emergent evidence, enrichment factors for the participants in this study organisation, permeate the boundaries between the two roles within the one dimension, rather than as Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) definition stipulated with the permeation occurring across the boundaries between two separate dimensions. With this distinction in mind, the following findings inform the research question;

2. What work-life enrichment factors do frontline hospitality employees experience in a UK context?

An allegiance to work was noted by several of the participants, which is consistent with the findings from Wong and Ko's (2009) study of frontline hospitality staff in Hong Kong. In this case, the allegiance to work experienced by participants was found to be mutually reinforcing in both the professional and the social roles within the work dimension, meaning that positive spill over occurred bilaterally.

Participant 3, *"I wouldn't want the bar to suffer because I wanted the Saturday night off ... I would want to help out and help the more junior staff so that the bar ran smoothly on the Saturday night which is obviously one of our busiest nights"*.

Participant 4, *"It doesn't really feel like work though because we enjoy our shifts so much"*.

This demonstrates the individual's commitment to the organisation by indicating their personal preference to ensure that the bar was running smoothly on a busy Saturday night shift. The commitment this demonstrates in the participant's professional role prompts

positive spill over into the social role as a result of helping more junior colleagues on a busy shift.

## **5.4 Responses to Conflict and Enrichment**

One of the principal aims of this study is to gain an understanding of frontline hospitality employees' perceptions of their WLB experiences as a whole, and a significant contribution to this will be their responses to the abovementioned conflict and enrichment. Despite the current literature being dominated by a conflict perspective (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), this study will still need to consider the participants' experiences of WLC to consolidate the evidence of such in this particular context, in addition to insights relating to the participants' experiences of enrichment. The following findings inform the research question;

3. What are frontline hospitality employees' perceptions of their work-life balance experiences in a UK context?

### **5.4.1 Acceptance**

One of the key findings from the interviews with the participants was the view that these employees are willing to accept their poor WLB, and attribute much of the experienced conflict to innate characteristics of the industry. Several of the participants reflect on when they first joined the industry, and recall statements that were made to them such as Participant 5's statement below;

Participant 5, "*With hospitality you're sort of told from the start ... say goodbye to your weekends*".

The participants acknowledged that the conditions of working in hospitality do not lend themselves to achieving WLB, and that they were aware of this from the beginning, causing their lack of WLB to become an accepted characteristic. The participants articulated their views on their WLB experiences with little aversion, and while they were able to recognise that their balance was unsatisfactory, their attitude towards the issue was not negative or unforgiving, which is testament to their acceptance of the embedded characteristic of the industry. Such acceptance of the poor WLB that a frontline hospitality employee can expect to encounter within the industry is evident in the literature, and the findings from this study can contribute to the discussion (Deery and Jago, 2009; Wong and Ko, 2009; Lövhöiden et. al., 2011).

### **5.4.2 Distinctions between Employees**

Lack of staff in hospitality as a result of the industry's inherent turnover culture (Iverson and Deery, 1997) has prompted the creation of a core group of reliable staff within Organisation X, who suffer the brunt of the long working hours, and work multiple days consecutively. The participants repeatedly refer to this core group as being more committed to the organisation, and have a greater perceived passion for the hospitality industry. As a result of their greater

commitment to the organisation, the members of this core group are made more vulnerable to experiencing WLC and enrichment factors.

Participant 1, *“Some people ... will come and stay for six months and then they say no, this isn't for me, and then they leave”*.

Participant 2, *“Hospitality is so fickle. People walk in and out of jobs all the time ... if we found 24 committed staff on top of the number of staff we have right now ... that would be great”*.

Participant 5, *“You're always going to have those kind of side liners that aren't in it for the long run, and they never really get into it properly ... with the staff always turning around it's hard to get a bigger core good group of staff”*.

From a conflict perspective, the core group of staff suffer significant TBC as a result of the organisation's overreliance on these individuals and their subsequent increased participation in the work dimension. TBCs in this instance involve participants working multiple days consecutively as a result of the organisation not being able to rely on members of staff outside of the core group to deliver a successful service during the organisation's busiest shifts.

Participant 5, *“We're supposedly meant to do 5 days on 2 days off but that never really happens if I'm honest ... I'd say I mostly do 9 days on and then 2 days off”*.

From an enrichment perspective, the core group benefit from the bilateral positive spill over from the professional and social roles within the work dimension, by experiencing the relationships built between colleagues which act as an antidote to the greater experienced TBCs.

Participant 3, *“If you're just looking at the balance in terms of hours, then you'd think mine was a mess, but it doesn't feel that way because I'm enjoying myself at work. Yeah, I'm missing out on socialising with people outside of work, but I'm also spending my own Friday night working with people that I love.”*

This finding is supported by empirically-grounded evidence presented by Lövhöiden et. al., (2011) in which frontline hospitality employees achieve satisfactory WLE experiences by caring for colleagues. The relationships between employees within this core group are formed in the professional role within the work dimension, but are developed and enjoyed in the social role, which is further evidence of the bilateral positive spill over between the roles and consequent enrichment. This social gratification is evidence of the existence of “multiple selves” (Brenner et. al., 2014, p. 232) within the work dimension, which contradicts the existing literature which indicates that an individual will adopt different identities or roles, when participating in different dimensions (LeBoeuf et. al., 2010), whereas in the case of Organisation X, multiple roles for the individual are found in one dimension. The benefits that emerge as a result of this enrichment align with the evidence presented by Lewis et. al.,

(2007) and the importance of individuals socialising and connecting with others to cultivate their personal wellbeing. The participants from Organisation X face such time constraints that they are unable to fulfil this outside of the work dimension, and participation in this core group while at work provides an opportunity to do so.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

In view of resolving hospitality's "turnover culture" (Iverson and Deery, 1997) this study provides valuable insights and implications for hospitality managers and HR practitioners in terms of the current WLB experiences of frontline hospitality employees, and what actions could be taken to improve them. It is notable from this research that participants are willing to accept the long-hours culture (Deery and Jago, 2009), and the limited autonomy over their own schedule (Wong and Ko, 2009), but struggle with the unsustainable TBC that emerges as a result of working too many days consecutively. This has implications for Organisation X and the wider hospitality context, as such unsustainability prompts poor retention. Action must be taken in order to create a more sustainable working pattern and retain key individuals.

Another prevalent finding from this study is insight into the creation and development of a core group of staff within Organisation X, which has many interesting facets for the WLB debate in this context. Firstly, the core group is described as somewhat elitist, with membership only earned once an individual has proved that their commitment and passion matches that of the group's existing members. Secondly, despite the elitist and aspirational ethos of the core group, it is these individuals that suffer the brunt of the work-life imbalance within Organisation X, as a result of management's overreliance on these individuals. Lastly, given the participants' disproportionate investment of time into the work dimension, this core group provides an element of social gratification that the individuals cannot gain in a non-work context, as a result of their inability or capacity to sustain social development in the life or personal dimensions.

### **6.1 Recommendations for Academia and Practitioners**

Further investigation into the formation and development of the core group would greatly benefit the academic discussion around WLE, as it is currently acknowledged within the literature this area is underrepresented (Wayne et. al., 2006). Further investigation into this core group would be beneficial to hospitality management and HR practitioners. The participants acknowledged that the expansion of the core group would minimise the WLCs experienced, as they would not be expected to work too many days consecutively. Given that this study did not provide evidence to certify Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) rationale of BBC, as a result of the employees' disproportionate involvement in the work dimension and their subsequent lack of capacity to develop an opposing role in the life or personal

dimensions, further research into the complexities within this aspect of WLB, would be beneficial.

In order to ease the TBCs that arise as a result of participants from Organisation X working an excessive number of days consecutively, the author forms the recommendation based on participants' own views that an injection of human resources would reduce the TBC experiences of all employees. It is noted however, that in order to be a sustainable and effective solution, the new recruits will need to be suitable so as to aid the core group of employees, and display traits such as commitment to the organisation, passion for hospitality and intent to remain within the industry.

## **6.2 Reconsidering the Conceptual Framework**

It is important at this stage to reconsider the conceptual framework, and what the outcomes of this study can contribute to the debate on WLE. The conceptual framework, as presented in Figure 1, includes three unfilled arrows moving in a counter-cyclical direction between the work, life and personal dimensions, which is representative of the undefined enrichment factors influencing the spheres interdependently. The outcomes of this research can be used as a basis to inspire further research into the three potential categories for WLE that have emerged from this study such as; Acceptance, Social Gratification and an Allegiance to Work. The use of these three categories to complete the conceptual framework is notable of a strong development in the WLE academic discussion, but there is still significant progress to be made in order to close the gap between this literature, and the literature surrounding WLC and WLB.

## **6.3 Limitations of the Research**

As with any research project, this study presents several limitations. Firstly, the sample population recruited from Organisation X consisted of five participants. This has implications for the generalisability of the findings to the wider organisation and the context as a whole. The focussed demographic of the purposively selected sample population also compromises the validity of the research outcomes; although this was executed in an effort to inform the under-represented demographic in the literature, it does cause the outcomes of the research to be limited in terms of generalisability for the entire WLB issue. Thirdly, as one of the key emergent findings from the interviews was the existence of distinctions between employees, it would be beneficial to have interviewed a selection of participants from within the notable core group, and from outside the group in order to gather a range of perspectives on their WLB experiences.

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