

## **THE IMPACT OF WORK STRESS TOWARDS WORK LIFE BALANCE IN MALAYSIA**

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## Abstract

*Work stress has become a common problem that is faced by employees in many organizations regardless of any industry that they involve today. Work-life balance and stress go hand in hand. What seems to matter in this regard is the importance workers place on balance in their lives and the effectiveness of workplace policies and practices in supporting them to achieve this goal. This paper focuses on the work life of both employers and employees' and also suggests how work life-balance has to be achieved. The employer needs to frame policies that would minimize the work load of employee without affecting the productivity of the organisation, for achieving successful work-life balance. 80 questionnaires were distributed randomly. Based on the following study, workload is significant at  $p < 0.01$  (0.000) and has a positive correlation with work life balance at 0.402. Besides that, role conflict is also significant at  $p < 0.01$  (0.002) and has a positive correlation with work life balance at 0.348. In addition, interpersonal relationship is significant at  $p < 0.01$  (0.000) and has a positive correlation with work life balance at 0.387.*

*Keywords: Workload, Role Conflict, Interpersonal Relationship and Work Life Balance*

## INTRODUCTION

Work life balance is now a heavily researched area of interest. Work life balance has always been a concern of those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life (Guest (2002)). Broers (2005) stated that balancing a successful career with personal or family life can be challenging and impact on a person's satisfaction in their work and personal life's roles. According to Dundas (2008), he argues that work life balance is about effectively managing and juggling act between paid work and all other activities that are important to people such as family, community activities, voluntary work, personal development and leisure and recreation. According to Myers (2010), a recent Gallup poll found that Millennials desire work life balance play with work. Giving generation Y flexibility within their schedule would allow them to pursue the activities they enjoy outside the workplace while maintaining the high level of productivity. Generation Y presents a challenge to managers who must train and motivate them in order to ensure their strength becomes a benefit to the company. According to Sayers (2007), work life balance will contribute to achieving professional satisfaction and personal freedom for the employees.

Research has shown that there is a significant cost to organizations and individuals when stress is not addressed. According to Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswell (2002), stress has been found to have negative implications for individuals in 3 multiple areas which impact organizational success including absenteeism, employee attitudes, commitment to the

organization, retention rates, and performance. In addition, Cox (2004) stated that, organizations are recognizing the importance of gaining a greater understanding of the etiology and implications of stress, as well as working with professionals in the development of strategies to mitigate the negative impact of stress in individuals and the company. Similarly, Hayes and Weathington (2007) indicate that stress in the workplace has negative impacts on job satisfaction, work performance, and absenteeism resulting from decline in individual health. Research on work life balance has presented important insight into the problems of combining family responsibilities with paid work in relation to policy relevant agendas. Work life balance scales are problematic for many scholars and researchers because they conceptualize the work component more specifically than the life component. However, this conceptualization neglects different dimensions to work life balance common to specific subgroups and renders the measurement rather intangible Pichler (2008). This makes it difficult to conclude on the effects of other than work-related aspects on work life balance, which are arguably also important aspect of work life balance. As stated by Pichler (2008), work life balance scales hardly correlated with relevant external criteria such as subjective wellbeing.

According to Crompton (2006) some of the reason for increasing the interests of work life balance are caused by the increasing of female employment, de-industrialization and high unemployment among men. Work life balance is generally related to flexibility, working time, family, social security, demographic changes, leisure time and many more. Research that examines demographic trends such as age, migration is emphasizing a structural component of work-life balance whereas approaches referring to personal circumstances, family arrangements are focus on the individual. According to Hanes (2002), stress is a condition of physical or mental strain or physical/emotional wear and tear that can be the result of a real or perceived threat. While an over-stressed condition can have negative impact on people, some stress will result in higher performance if the stress is handled effectively. Based on the study being done by Doble, N. and Supriya, M.V (2011), stress refers to a condition of perceived tension between demands and resources during student life. When they come into work environment, they will face more stress as they cannot meet the demands from the organization.

In addition, according to Aldwin (2007), stress refers to the “quality of experience, produced through a person-environment transaction, which through either over arousal or under arousal, results in psychological or physiological distress” (p. 24). While the word distress seems to describe only something negative. Besides that, it suggested that stress can be both positive (eustress) and negative (distress) force in our lives. The stressors that contribute employee faced with stress are workload, role conflict and interpersonal relationship. When the

employee are facing with stress, they would like to reduce it by propose to the organization to establish work life balance so that they can balance or divide their time between work and family. Moreover, based on findings from Fuenzalida (2007), previous research examining the effects of workload variability has revealed significant effects on psychological symptoms (frustration, depression, hostility) and performance across a range of samples and situation. In the previous research from Erkutlu and Chafra (2006) claimed that, for workload, if the employee has high personal control over work, the arousal will likely be released in the normal execution of the job. On the other hand, if the arousal is accompanied by a perception of low personal control over work thus, leads to negative psychological and physical consequences.

Role conflict may leads to the stress and emerges negative impact such as discomfort with their job. It is supported by Safaria et al. (2011) said job stress that come from role conflict will raises negative outcome such as decreasing the productivity of employees and organization, problem in absenteeism and if it is continually occurred in their work, they might have intention to leave from the organization and turnover will occur. In my opinion, interpersonal relationship at work constitutes day to day interaction between co-workers, managers and employees. These relations are natural part of the work environment and usually give pleasant to the employees as they can communicate with each other when they facing problem. But unfortunately, this relation also may become a source of tension and frustration to the employees when they have different opinion in how to manage the job that has given to them. Besides that, Interpersonal relationships at workplace can be defined as interaction between one or more person in the workplace. Relationship among the employees and between superior is important in order to encourage and sustain the harmonious environment in the workplace.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Work life balance has important consequences for employee attitudes towards their organizations as well as the lives of employees Scholarios (2004). According to Guest (2002), believes that it is possible to investigate the trend of work-life balance and its development which influence the well being and job outcomes of employees at work. The issues relating to maintaining and obtaining work-life balance have receive substantial attention over recent years Deery (2008). Nevertheless, we need to understand the definition underlying work-life balance concepts. Deery (2008) defines the concept of work-life balance is a complex task as it can be viewed from the meaning of “work”, “life” and “balance”. Dundas (2008) he argues that work life balance is about effectively managing and juggling act between paid work and all others activities that are important to people such as family, community activities, voluntary work, personal development and leisure and recreation. According to Greenhaus (2003), he defines

work-life balance as the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role. Thus, employees who experience high work-life balance are those who exhibit similar investment of time and commitment to work and non-work domains. Virick (2007).

Work stress is become common issue that always happen in every organizations. The employee cannot be run without facing work stress in their work. According to Wickramasinghe (2012), job stress is generally identified as an adverse reaction people have to excess pressure or demands placed on them at work. Refer to Larson (2004), job stressors may refer to any characteristic of the workplace that poses a threat to the individual. For stress to exist, the demand from the environment (the job) versus the capability of the individual (the employee) will typically be considerably out of balance Larson (2004). In addition, work stress happen because of many factors that influence employee to facing stress on their work. One of the most factors that influence work stress is work demand and time. If they have many works to do and the due date is around of the corner, so it will make employees feel stress to settle down all work and to ensure that they will submit their tasks on time. According to Brun (2006), the scale forms part of the Sources of Work Stress Inventory De Bruin & Taylor (2006), which also includes scales of different sources of work stress, namely role ambiguity, poor working relationships, inadequate tools and equipment, job insecurity, limited career advancement prospects, difficulty in balancing work and home demands, lack of autonomy, and excessive workload.

Moreover, workload is one of the factors that influence work stress among employee. According to Shah et al. (2011), workload refers to the intensity of job assignments. It is a source of mental stress for employees. He added that, in the real life each employee seems to be exposing the workload problem. Hence, workload and stress issues are rising day by day, which require thorough studies to resolve the issue. According to Elloy and Smith (2003), work overload occurs where multiple demands exceed resources, and may be other qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative overload refers to a situation where a task is too difficult to complete, while quantitative overload is experienced when there are too many tasks that need to be done. In a big organization, their employees always receive a lot of job to do within a short period of time. Because of that, the employee will feel stress regarding to settle down all their work and submit on time to their employer. Sometimes, the employee are workload because of they like to delayed their work until due date. In fact, at the end they will face stress to settle it. Other than that, employee wish to have less work with them while managers try to take optimal production from existing workers by overloading those Shah et al. (2011).

Furthermore, in some cases, deadlines and work overload combined to make work more stressful. One respondent described the situation, “job stress occurs when we are faced with a lot of tasks. They set us a very tight deadline and we can’t cope with it. While we are still working on existing jobs, we need to complete the other jobs”. Another respondent expressed feelings about his job, “sometimes, they gave us a very important job, but we need to fulfill it in a short period of time” Awang et al. (2010). The second factor that contributes to the work stress is role conflict that faced by the employees. According to Department of Justice and Attorney-General (2012), conflict in roles in the organizations can be factor of the work stress. It is also supported by Miteva et. al (2005) said that one of the major factor that contributes to the work stress is organization factors which is poorly defines task, authoritarian decisions, responsibility transfer, conflicts and loss of work.

According to Nicklaus (2007), role conflict is defined as an incongruence of role expectation which activities and behaviour that should be carried by the employees according to the job description and how other people believe the employees should act in their roles. There are four types of role conflict which are person role conflict, inter sender conflict, inter role conflict and intra sender conflict. First type of role conflict which is person role conflict occurs when role expectation of others is incongruent with the personal orientations of the employees. In other words, the differences between the individual of employee’s view and how others employees perceive his or her roles. For example like, the employee expects different things from her employer. These happen when, the employer reject and expect that his employee make it a new one different form the past but the employee expects that the proposal must change a little bit.

Second type is inter sender conflict in which occurred when received expectations from two different people that are incompatible. It is supported by Kamel (2011), this conflict occurs within the single role such as, the employees receives conflict with the messages or instruction from two or more instructor about how to perform the role. For example like, the employees received instruction from the manager and also middle manager in preparing proposal paper for training program but both instructors (manager and middle manager) give different instructions on how to prepare it. Next type of role conflict is inter role conflict that occurs when the employees need to carry out many roles at one times that are incongruent and incompatible. For example, the trainer puts a lot of time in doing the administrative work such as booking class, prepare the form of the trainees and so on and he need be prepared also his talk and lecture before attend the class. However, he also needs to do a task that not in job description such as prepared certificates for their trainees.

Lastly is, intra sender conflict in which, occurs when resources and capabilities conflict with the roles. For example, in order to provide a better training, trainer are expected that the coordinator have already print out all notes that trainer needed for training program, the class already booking and the coordinator have provide the facilities, however, other stuffs that trainer request in the training program is not enough provided and it may occur when there has a technical problems in terms of projectors and size of classroom. These role conflicts will make the employees feel unable to meet the role expectation that state in the job description and it leads to the negative effect which is work stress. It is supported by Kamel (2011), said that the perceived role conflict such as the perception of inadequately resources, conflicting request or different working styles that involve in their work can create strain. Interpersonal relationship at workplace is also important to the employees because it will build a good relationship among the employees and the consequences of this matter will give a better feeling to the employees and they will be more comfortable in carrying their role and responsibilities in workplace. The relationship in the workplace can affect to the employees emotions.

According to Khodarahimi et al. (2012), relationship considered as a form of getting the benefits and value in any situations. It may occur at multiple levels in which, they are built and can break in many situation but they might give many impact on human behaviors. Interpersonal relationship can be build when there have support from colleagues and supervisors in doing their work and also in their personal life. According to the Ornelas and Kleiner (2003), work stress can be occurring when the employees feel lack of support from the colleagues and supervisors. So, it will slowly give an impact to the employee's emotions and it is one of the factors that contribute to the work stress. It is supported by Johnson et al. (2005) said that one of the major sources that contributes to the work stress is relationships at work, including poor relationships with boss or colleagues, an extreme component of which is workplace bullying.

Work stress will occur in anytime but when the employees have a good relationship and also get support from their colleagues and their superiors, the stress level of employees can be control. It is supported by Chen et al. (2009) said that "with regards to the treatment of supervisor support in the previous research several past researcher have shown the effectiveness of supervisor support in buffering the adverse impact of job stress". It is also supported by Khodarahimi et al. (2012), good relationships are essential for physical health that can buffer the stress. So, the negative impact of stress can be delay or can also be reduces because of the supportive from their people around them. It is also supported by Awang et.al (2010) that received one of the responses from their respondent in which he believed that talking to managers is important and he said, "If stress is because of the workload, the better way to answer it is to discuss it with your superior".

## METHODOLOGY

For study, purpose a cross sectional descriptive research design is used. The sample design that will be used is convenience sampling. According to Sekaran (2009), convenience sampling refers to the collection of information from members of the population who are conveniently available to provide it. This is because the members of the population are conveniently available to provide the information. This will help to gain the information more quickly, convenient and less expensive. According to Sekaran (2009), sample is defined as a subset of population. The sample size of this study is 80 employees according to Sekaran (2009) and it was the numbers of respondents. The employees that participated were both executive and non-executive staff, from all different departments, and have been working at the company for a varied period of time. The questionnaires were distributed to the employees in person and also through email to get their feedback accordingly. Once completed, the respondents will give back the questionnaires to the researcher for data evaluation and analysis.

The questionnaire is adopted from the previous study made by previous researcher and the researcher has done some modification to the questionnaire that suitable with the population. The questions are structured by using Likert Scale for the dependent and independent variables sections and Category Scale for personal detail section. Basically this questionnaire has divided into 5 sections. Each section contain 5 to 10 question. Section A is about dependent variable which is work life balance while sections B until D are questions that related to the independent variables which are workload, role conflict and interpersonal relationship. Last section is section E is related to respondent detail. As stated above, five Likert Scale was use for the section A until section D. It is used to represent the most suitable answer to respondent. The descriptions for five Likert Scale have two types which are, 1-Strongly Agree, 2-Agree, 3-Neither Agree or Disagree, 4-Disagree and 5-Strongly Disagree. Table 1 shows the description of questionnaires.

Table 1 Description of questionnaires

Sections	Items
Section A : Demographic Profile	This section consists of demographic factors that employees have such as age, length of service, position, income, marital status and academic qualification.
Section B : Work life Balance	Consists of 11 items to measure work life balance: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I expect to have a similar balance of work life and social life as my parents.</li> <li>2. When planning for my future, I am going to work in the field or fields that I am pursuing.</li> <li>3. Time off is more important to me than overtime.</li> <li>4. I highly value a position that offers flexible hours.</li> </ol>



5. I am intrinsically motivated by work regardless of pay and time off/vacation.
6. The number of weeks of vacation time impacts my decision to accept a job offer.
7. I would enjoy working a compressed work week (for example working 10 hours per day and having 3 days off).
8. I would rather overtime than have time off.
9. I would accept a promotion with higher pay even if it means working longer hours.
10. I would enjoy working from home.
11. I feel like I am generally able to balance life and work commitments.

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Section C : Consists of 9 items to measure the workload:

Workload

1. I feel that there are too many deadlines in my work that are difficult to meet.
2. I work more than 8 hours a day.
3. I work for long hours even on holidays.
4. I have to work very fast.
5. My daily activities affected because of workload (i.e, exercise, eating time and sleeping time).
6. I like to wake up at night because of problem at work.
7. I have no energy left at the end of the working day.
8. I have unrealistic time pressure.
9. I am so busy and find it difficult to concentrate on the job in front of me.

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Section D : Consists of 9 items to measure the role conflict:

Role Conflict

1. I receive incompatible request from two or more people.
2. I do things that are likely to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.
3. I am having uncertainties on what is expected from my work.
4. I am having task that have no relation to the job function.
5. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.
6. I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.
7. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.
8. I always feel unable to influence my immediate supervisor's decision and action that affect me.
9. I always feel that I have to do things on the job that are against my better judgement.

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Section E : Consists of 9 items to measure the importance of training & development:

Interpersonal  
Relationship  
at Work

1. I have good relationship with my colleagues.
  2. I am given supportive feedback on the work I do.
  3. I get help and support from my colleagues.
  4. I enjoy working with my colleagues.
  5. My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems.
  6. My line manager encourages me at work.
  7. I always feel that I will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands for colleagues.
  8. Recently I have found it more difficult to control my emotions.
  9. I am often feeling that I may not be liked and accepted by people at work.
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## ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The data are analyzed by using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) computer programmed version 20. The data analysis and interpretation is arranged according to each variable.

### Reliability Test

Reliability of a measure is an indication of the steadiness and consistency which the instrument measures the theory and helps to measure the goodness of the data (Sekaran, 2003). According to (Miller, 2009), he stated that, by conducting reliability test on the questionnaire, it can be measure whether the questionnaire is perfectly reliable or not valid to be used in the study. The value of Cronbach's Alpha shows the internal consistency that is, how closely related a set of items is as a group. According to (Brown, 2002) it can range from 0.00 to 1.00 with all values between 0.00 and 1.00 also being possible. However, (Sekaran, 2003) found the range value in order to measure the Cronbach's Alpha. Table 2 range value of Cronbach's Alpha shows the possible range value to measure the value of Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics for Variables

Variables	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Relationship
Work Life Balance	9	0.600	Acceptable
Workload	9	0.886	Good
Role Conflict	9	0.778	Moderate
Interpersonal Relationship	9	0.747	Moderate

Table 2 shows the reliability coefficient for all variables tested in this study. N of items is representing the number of items asked to the respondents. By referring to the table above, the reliability of the dependent variables which is work life balance is acceptable due to Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.600 with 9 number of items is reliable to ask the respondents. Next the reliability test for the Independent Variables I, is workload which the Cronbach Alpha is 0.886. It shows that the reliability was good with 9 numbers of items reliable to ask the respondents. For Independent Variables II, role conflict has produce results of 0.778 which is moderate with 9 numbers of items to ask. Lastly, the Independent Variables III, interpersonal relationship has produce results of 0.747 which the reliability was moderate with 9 numbers of items ask to the respondents.

## Descriptive Analysis

Fah and Hoon (2009) defined mean as the average value of a data set. It produces a mathematical number that reflect the average and may be used to report central tendencies.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation for Variables

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Work life balance	80	2.73	4.45	3.7307	.29730
Workload	80	2.00	4.67	3.5472	.50803
Role Conflict	80	2.33	4.33	3.3847	.36056
Interpersonal Relationship	80	3.33	4.67	3.9278	.32555

Table 3 illustrates the mean and standard deviation for dependent and independent variables. The mean score for the dependent variable which is work life balance is 3.7307 with standard deviation of 0.30. Among the independent variables, the highest mean is interpersonal relationship which is 3.9278 on a five-point scale with the standard deviation of 0.330 while the lowest mean is role conflict which is 3.3847.

The result shows that mean interpersonal relationship has very significant relationship towards work life balance as compared to the other independent variables. The employees are perceived on interpersonal relationship than workload as when the interpersonal relationship is weak among employees, it will create imbalance life for the employees in the workplace environment.

## Correlations Analysis

Correlation is a statistical technique that can show whether there is a significant relationship and how strong the variables are related. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient showed the relationship between one (1) dependent variable (DV) and the three (3) independent variables (IV). The correlation coefficient indicates how strength the relationship between DV and IV. When the p-value is less than 0.05, there is significant relationship. The scale model is used to describe the relationship as follows:

Table 4 Pearson's Correlation

		Mean work life balance	Mean workload	Mean role conflict	Mean ir
Mean work life balance	Pearson Correlation	1	.402**	.348**	.387**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.002	.000
	N	80	80	80	80
Mean workload	Pearson Correlation	.402**	1	.689**	.263*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.019
	N	80	80	80	80
Mean role conflict	Pearson Correlation	.348**	.689**	1	.202
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000		.072
	N	80	80	80	80
Mean ir	Pearson Correlation	.387**	.263*	.202	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.019	.072	
	N	80	80	80	80

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

From the table 4 Pearson's correlations, the strength of relationship of this research is from moderate to weak but in terms of significant, all the independent variables relationship is significant to dependent variables. It shows the correlation between workload, role conflict and interpersonal relationship with the work life balance. Based on the table above, workload are significant at  $p < 0.01$  (0.000) and have positive correlation with work life balance at 0.402. Besides that, role conflict also significant at  $p < 0.01$  (0.002) and have positive correlation with work life balance at 0.348. In addition, interpersonal relationship is significant at  $p < 0.01$  (0.000) and has positive correlation with work life balance at 0.387.

## CONCLUSION

The result of this research had led the researcher to answer three (3) research objectives that the researcher intended to achieve. It is because the three hypotheses are accepted and null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected. Pearson's Correlation analysis was used to identify the significant relationship between workload, role conflict and interpersonal relationship with work life balance. While for regression analysis was used to examine amongst these factors, which one is the most influential factor. The third research objectives will be clarified in the next chapter which is recommendations. Based on the regression results, it indicates that this research only covered 25.5% factors that affect work life balance, while the remaining 74.5% suggest to be conducting in the future research. Due to insufficient result, it is essential to expand into future research by taking into consideration others organizational factor that will affect work life balance. From the information gathered through this research, the company could try to enhance its strength to the

fullest and improve the weaknesses. There are several strategies that can be implemented by the company with an aim to improve the management current practices, so that it would increase the work life balance.

Clear communication is one of the important ways to reduce stress. According to Hart (2011), employees and employers should be feeling comfortable with conversations about positive and negative situations. Comfortable communication can reduce the workplace problem that automatically can influence them facing stress problem. When there has no clear communication among employees, the goals of their performance cannot be reached. It can make a problem for employee because of they cannot understand of what employer wants and the employer also become stress because of the expectation of the employee work are not match with their expectation.

A good career can be a good start for any employees. No employees want to jump from one company to another without any developments in their career. Hence, the company is recommended to manage its employees' career in order for them to excel in the future. One of the ways is by creating an employee segmentation process that will help to guide the career advancements of employees. Through this career development, the employees can create their work life balance as they can plan their work and have a balance life compared to the previous job that they perform. With today's diverse labour force, one size does not fit all employees. The company must cooperate with employees to help them acquire the skills to move forward in their career with the help by their managers.

A career plan allows the company to motivate and better understand the aspirations of their employees. In order to create work life balance and reduce stress that might faced by the employees, the employees need to know their job description as job description will be the determinants of what are the jobs that they need to perform. If the employer have give job that are not related to the employees responsibilities, the employees have right to ignore the direction from the employer by explaining politely to them that the job is not included in the job description. With this clear job description, will make the employees less stressful in the workplace so that they can balance their work and life activities.

Other than that, person based skill is one of the method to reduce stress as the company need to hire employees based on the skills that they have. The skills must be aligned with the position that has vacancy in the company so that, the employer will not select the wrong person to fill up the vacancy. If this happen, then the employees might faced with challenges as they does not have any skills to perform the job. For example, for the job vacancy of engineer, the employer need to find candidate that have an engineering skill and they cannot simply give the position to the candidate that have in other business or accountancy skills. It is because

they do not have any basic skill on engineering and it will create stress toward them as they need to perform the jobs that are not related with their skills.

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