

# Work Life Balance in the Lens of Filipino Workers: A Generational Perspective

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**Abstract:** *This exploratory research focuses on the perception of Filipino workers regarding work life balance. Work - life balance is a global phenomenon yet it is still new to many Filipino workers especially those who are working outside the metro. Filipinos are known to be hard workers, persistent, intelligent and loyal. Customarily, they work hard to provide a decent life for their families unmindful of their physical and mental health. Data collected from an in - depth interview to fifteen participants was analyzed using the thematic analysis (TA). It was found that boomers and millennial workers view work life balance similarly while members of generation X differ. For the Xers WLB is not simply appropriating equal time in doing each life roles but putting things in order according to what the situation calls, which is opposite to that of the Boomers and Millennial. It was concluded that their perceptions are antecedent of how they view and define a balanced life, and how they are achieving life satisfaction while doing their multiple roles. A definite and effective work - life balance policy and appropriate local material to analyze WLB were recommended.*

**Keywords:** work - life balance, cohorts, thematic analysis, exploratory research

## 1. Introduction

Adult life is usually evolving into two important aspects – work and family [1]. This is very true especially in the Philippines where the culture of *knit/close family ties* is still heavily observed. This culture is also the main reason for most Filipinos being hard workers and having a workaholic attitude. Customary Filipinos always look for decent opportunities to earn and provide a decent life not only for themselves but especially for their families [2].

Filipino workers are highly responsive, empowered with technology, optimistic, and accustomed to long working hours even if it means sacrificing their personal and family time. Most Filipinos have a neutral English accent that they are competent in Business English, hence are globally and highly competitive [3]. Having these work attitudes, many Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) are investing in the country especially with its strong workforce. Many MNEs introduced and offered work life balance (WLB) not only to attract and keep the best workers but they also believed in creating a work environment that promotes work - life balance that could save them money and keep their workers safer and more efficient [4].

Work - life balance is a factor that may affect important workplace issues such as employee turnover, stress, organizational commitment, absenteeism, job satisfaction and productivity [5]. Work - life balance is an important aspect of a healthy work environment and maintaining it in the workplace can reduce stress and prevent burnout among employees.

Unfortunately the concept of work life balance remains new to most Filipino workers since the government does not have a strong drive to design and implements a WLB policy.

In the private sector, there were only a few multinational enterprises (MNEs) in the country which included WLB in their organizational policy. This is in contrast with a recent observation [6] that the Philippines is regarded as the most successful in implementing work - life balance policies among Asian Nations.

These were the very reasons for the researchers to embark in this study because of the work attitude of Filipinos and their lives that seemingly imbalance.

Technically, WLB refers to proper management of demands associated with job roles, and non - work roles such as family, personal interest, growth, and others that offer happiness and fulfillment to people. It involves various connections between the working - life dimensions of the individual and the personal life of a person. Knowing the work attitude and work habits of Filipinos it would be most important that they understand the benefit of having balance between the two domains. Truly work is the root of a meaningful life [4] because it is a necessity for human survival and it gives the individual the opportunity to gain independence; however its intense demands can also create exhaustion, fatigue, and lack of sleep, which leads to physical, emotional and mental stress.

The work family border theory clearly sees that work and family are two major domains that constitute a person's life [7]. Individuals are managing their work and family domains by setting borders that separates the two. The work and family domains are separate but are also interconnected [8]. Individuals are constantly crossing the domains daily and often multiple times during the day, which shapes and influences the other domain [7]. The role theory on the other hand explained that workers have a unique set of work roles with unique rights and responsibilities. Employees have multiple roles both within and outside the organization that

they simultaneously occupy. For instance, a female teacher who is married, would have the roles of teacher, subordinate, and spouse and there are expectations for each role that they assume. In this instance, role conflict is likely to exist. According to role conflict theory, behaviors expected of an individual are inconsistent with his other role, and when this happens he will experience stress, become dissatisfied, and perform less effectively.

Many researches have established the importance of WLB however, there is little attention devoted to the study of relationship between work and non - work life domains and how it changes across the lifespan [9]. In addition, researchers argued that contextual influences such as national culture and stage of life have an effect on how individuals view the issues of work and life hence is a worthy research avenue [9] [10]. It is for these reasons that the researchers became interested in exploring the perceptions of Filipino workers according to their age or the generation they belong to on work - life balance.

Today, dominant generations in most companies are the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 - 1964) Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), Generation X or Gen X (born in the years 1965 - 1979, Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) and the Millennial (1980 - 2000) or Generation Y (Yost, 2008) [11]. For most companies, managing a diverse generation of workers is challenging because each cohort has its own distinct characteristics, values and attitudes towards work [12]. Because of the generation gaps and differences among their workers, many organizational leaders believe that there is a need to redefine work life balance. Past empirical studies of the work - life interface with a life stage approach have demonstrated that life stages are linked to different levels of work - to - life and life - to - work conflict and enrichment [13].

The diverse skills and ideas of each cohort contribute greatly to the success of an organization. But this diversity can also be a concern because various generations will fail to understand the beliefs and styles of each other and may result in conflicts among them. Work - life balance for each cohort is definitely not the same. Employers must take into account the particular work - life balance needs of each generation.

The Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1960) are often idealistic, competitive, and results - driven, [14]. They work to stand out and plan to stay for the long term. Boomers routinely sacrifice family and their well - being for their employers.

Generation X (born between 1961 and 1980) workers see work - life balance as extremely important. Most Xers do their best to spend more time with their families, even when their jobs will not allow them to, so they usually stress over guilt and are constantly running against the clock. For Millennial (born in the years of 1981 to 2000) it is not a big deal to achieve a work - life balance because they believe that work should be seen as part of life.

Work life balance is a global phenomenon but still new to some Filipino workers especially those who are working

outside cities or commercial districts. The practice of work - life balance could be the answer to the pressing problems of many workers brought by role conflicts that eventually leads to burnout, stress and to many other mental - health problems and issues and psychological well - being.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This research was conducted to explore the perception of Filipino workers about work life balance (WLB). Specifically this study sought to (a) understand the participants' concept of balance; (b) analyze their concept of work and (c) discover their perceptual differences about the concept of WLB according to their age group.

## 3. Methods

This exploratory study was conducted to deeply understand the concept of work - life balance in the Filipino perspective. The paper does not intend to give solutions to any specific problem but to provide awareness about the unexplored phenomenon. Fifteen participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Specifically, five participants for each generation (Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials) were selected with the following requirements: (1) a Filipino worker who are (2) currently employed in any human services jobs for at least 1 year, and (3) belonged to one of the three generations,

The objectives of the study were explained to the participants as well as the possible risk and the benefits they can gain in participating.

The study commenced after the acceptance and signing of informed consent.

**Table 1:** The profile of the participants

	Age	Civil Status	Work
<b>Millennials</b>			
Marven	37	Single	Collection Officer (BPO)
Twinkle	27	Single	Junior Data Scientist
Justine Mae	21	Single	Pharmacist
Previously	26	Married	Police Officer
Dan	27	Single	Legal Consultant
<b>Generation X</b>			
Glicery	48	Married	Kindle Teacher
Aaron	45	Separated	Film/Media Director
Erlay	47	Married	Field Supervisor
Jonas	47	Married	Bank Officer
Bing	47	Married	Civil Engineer
<b>Baby Boomers</b>			
Nel	60	Widower	Engineering Professor
Arby	59	Married	Registrar
Mimi	60	Married	Nurse Educator/Professor
Johnny	61	Married	VP-PMIS Professor
William	61	Married	Exec. Dir. Professor

The different levels of employment status from high ranking officials to junior officer level and work sectors were represented among participants and pseudonyms were used as names.

**Research Instrument**

To systematically and comprehensively gain the data needed for the study, a self - structured interview protocol was prepared. The interview guide was prepared to ensure that the same basic questions have been asked to each participant. It was composed of ten questions and prompts were added to each question.

**Procedure**

A semi - structured in - depth interview was conducted to get the informants to talk in their own terms. The questions were not asked in any given order, rather they are asked in a way that develops a smooth conversation.

All interviews were audio taped (upon permission of the participants) and were transcribed and coded for analysis. All data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA). Themes and sub - themes were identified using the steps of Vaismoradi [15]. To establish the credibility and reliability of the data, triangulation steps such as memoing and focus group discussion (FGD) were undertaken.

**4. Results and Discussion**

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the participants' narratives.

**A. Concept of Balance.** The concept of balance itself is problematic to work - life balance researchers [16]. Initially, researchers understood balance as signifying low levels of conflict between work and non - work. In the current study, there were different views from the three groups though there were some who shared the same view.

The Boomers and Millennial are two extreme groups of workers that are usually being stereotyped as workers who always had clashes at work because of their age gap. In this study, it was revealed that the two groups have common ideas and perceptions on work and work related things, one of which is their idea about balance.

**Theme 1. Allocating equal time to work and non - work roles.** For these two groups of workers, the concept of balance is literally what the term connotes.

*It's a matter of time. You have to allocate your time for your work and you have to allocate your time for the non - work. .*  
- William, 61

**Theme 2. Balance is unique to every individual.** For most of the members of Gen X, everything is dynamic, especially life in general. That your priorities may change and your time may be spent according to what would best suit your priorities and current situation. For them, balance is handling your time efficiently. The concept of balance with regards to work - life for Xers is not only the physical time you appropriate to all aspects of life but rather the essence of your time and the reason why you are doing things, as one of them said:

*For me it's not always 50 - 50. Balance for me could be 70 - 30, right? You're working hard for your family. So even if it reaches 80, still you're doing it for your family. The 20 that we are saying is the time with them physically, right? -*  
Aaron, 45

**B. The Concept of Work.** People thrive in an environment where their work has clear meaning and purpose. For most of us, work helps to fulfill

**Theme 1. Bread and Butter.** Most of the Generation X and Baby Boomers perform their job based on what work expects and demands from them despite small dissatisfactions and discomforts because they perceive work as their "bread and butter".

*. "It is our source to feed our family...I just take medicine when I don't feel good, I should not stop. "* -Erly, 47

**Theme 2. Challenging and Dynamic.** Theme 2. Challenging and Dynamic. Most of the Millennials work hard to prove that despite their young age they are capable of earning respect and recognition in the organization. They preferred work that is challenging and dynamic. Work that is challenging and dynamic makes the individual perceive themselves as being capable and feel fulfilled. As explained by William James, feeling good about ourselves and how well we actually do are inextricably linked; we can feel better about ourselves by succeeding in the world but also by varying the levels of our hopes and expectations. Preserving one's integrity is a means of attending to yourself, thus, achieving balance against the pressure of work. As quoted from one of the participants [17].

*"I tried to work in a job that has a high salary but it is very easy and I find it not challenging so I resigned after three months. . "* - Twinkle, 27

**C. Perception on Work - Life Balance**

Collectively, for the three cohorts WLB is important because life would be less stressful and you can have time for yourself and love ones. Workers who are stress - free can be more efficient and productive. Work life balance affects many aspects of life but the most impacted aspect is health – both physical and mental health. They also perceived several factors affect the achievement of work - life balance such as civil status, nature of work, salary and benefits and work demands. They also admitted that currently they do not have a good work - life balance.

**Theme 1. Time Balance for work and non - work roles.** For the Millennial and Boomers, they perceived work life balance as equally dividing the individual's time to their work life and personal life as they say:

*"My concept of work - life balance is that all angles of your life needs to be balanced. "*  
- Johnny, 61

*"...work from 8 - 5 then personal life after 5. I often tell my office mates that my salary is good until 5. No OT. "* - Dan, 27

**Theme 2. Work - Life Balance is dynamic.** On the other hand, members of Generation X viewed work life balance pragmatically. For them work life balance is not simply appropriating equal time in doing each life role but putting things in order according to what the situation calls.

*"For me when you say balance, everything revolves around it, your family, your work and yourself. But sometimes, there are those that suffer, that you deal more*

with one over the rest. ....what happens is, you give more time and attention to those that need it greatly. ”

- Glicery, 49

The relationship between work and non - work aspects of life is more dynamic, emotional [18]; and the autonomy, control and identity are important in performing an individual's way across borders and into different role identities. It was presumed that work - life balance could also be a result of individual autonomy over the roles most salient to the individual [19].

**Theme 3. Work - Life Balance is Not Easy.** Millennials and Gen Xers perceived that achieving a balance between work and non - work life is not easy. Bekker et al. (2010) explained that an individual tends to feel guilty, and to be loyal towards a certain domain of life [20]. Often, individuals tend to have work - life balance issues because of lack of sensitivity towards the other domains of their life. Their desire for “being there” for family members and their being unable to manage another situation influence their problems in balancing their roles.

“I feel that it is not that easy to balance everything. You will be at home after work. At home you will have a different role, you are not a pharmacist but you will be a daughter, an older sister. Your day is divided (into different roles) so it becomes tiring. ”

– Justine Mae, 21

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Work is undeniably very important and a priority for most Filipinos. Many of the participants however are open to the concept of having a balanced life especially those younger workers but for the other participants they view work life balance as very idealistic and contradicts with the reality of their situation.

Younger workers (Millennials) prefer to put a distinct line between work and non - work to be able to enjoy life outside the office. For them, work - life conflict, mental health problems such as stress, burnouts, and mood disorders can be reduced if work - life boundaries are properly managed. While Generation X workers who viewed work - life balance pragmatically are less ideal and look at it based on their actual situations. For them, work - life balance has a deeper meaning and does not connote physical time (temporal border) devoted to a particular role but the meaning and the reason (psychological border) why you devote time to a particular role. For the majority of the Xers, balance is not always allocating a 50 - 50 division of time to life roles but what fits to one's actual need as it arises. Xers believed that a balanced life is putting things in order to avoid conflicts between their multiple life roles. Work - life balance is not merely giving weights to a particular domain but putting it together to become whole. In contrast, the Boomers tend to be very devoted to the task and responsibilities assigned to them and put greater attention to the demands of their work. The majority of the Boomer participants devote more time in accomplishing their work roles rather than their non - work roles. Although Baby Boomers are putting greater weights on their work domains

still it is a fact that they too are crossing personal or family domains every day.

For the three cohorts, many personal and work - related factors that contribute to stress and other mental health problems can lead to an imbalance in work and personal life; these factors are significant in achieving work life balance. It can be said that their perceptions on work - life balance are antecedent of how they define a balanced life, and how they are achieving life satisfaction while doing their multiple roles.

It is high time that both private organizations and public offices in the Philippines come up with comprehensive work - life balance policies to preserve the physical and mental health of Filipino workers. It is recommended that the needs of the workers will be considered in designing the policy. Appropriate material to analyze or measure the work - life balance is also needed to effectively design a work - life balance policy.

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