Keeping it up to the level -
How professionals deal with work and life demands

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Abstract

Work-Life-Balance, a matter of growing significance within modern business management that has been argued to be more important than ever, is a complex matter to manage for both managers and employees. Previous research in this field calls for more attention to the process of how the idea of Work-Life-Balance is understood in practice within an organizational context and which factors might influence the individual's understanding of the idea of Work-Life-Balance. In order to respond to this call, this article is based on a case study at Solver AG, a German consultancy company. This study mitigates the shortcomings by elaborating how the process of translating the idea of Work-Life-Balance within an organization is taking place and thus depicts what different meanings and consequences this process entails. Moreover, the study brings to light several discrepancies between intentions and reality leading to paradoxes and also emphasizes the ambiguity surrounding this field. The results indicate that more attention needs to be paid to the diversity of meaning and interests that evolves owing to changes in work and non-work environment. Furthermore, a significant impact of the organizational context on the topic of Work-Life-Balance could be identified, urging a finer understanding of the individual's context when it comes to the idea of Work-Life-Balance.

Introduction

"Work gives you meaning and purpose and life is empty without it"

(Stephen Hawking, 2010)

For most of us, the concept of work is a central part of our lives. It does not only provide us with the resources we need for living, it also shapes our identity and creates meaning for our lives (Winkelman, 2013). In relation to the aspect of work, the idea of Work-Life-Balance (further referred to as WLB) is of significant interest. Over the years, many researchers have aimed to provide a general definition of this idea. One definition states that Work-Life-Balance is "an individual's ability to meet both their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities" (Parkes & Langford, 2008, p.267). Another definition provided by Greenblatt (2002) argues that WLB is defined by *"the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and nonwork demands"* (p.179). However, Czarniawska & Jörges (1996) claim that one cannot generalize the meaning of an idea since individuals are always creating their own, distinct images of it. Consequently, the existing definitions of the idea of WLB represent only static constructs of ideas (Czarniawska & Jörges, 1996). Furthermore, keeping in mind that the term WLB consists of three words that are all "exposed to the subjectivity of its meaning" (Guest, 2002, p.261), one should not be too surprised by this inference. As a result, the idea of WLB is nothing which can be measured or defined easily due to its subjective characteristic (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001). In general, it describes how individuals understand the relation between work demands and their (private) life. Moreover, it concerns how individuals engage in finding and maintaining their balance between these two aspects (Hoffmann & Cowan, 2008). As a consequence, the best way to understand the concept of WLB is by acknowledging that the balance, imagining a continuum between work and life, is positioned for any individual on a different point (cf. Greenhaus et al., 2003). The word "balance" refers to the idealistic idea that the described relation should be equal in its nature (Greenhaus et al., 2003). However, in practice the definition of "balance" is highly problematic and the measurement of it is a complicated task in itself (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Given the previous insights, the purpose of this article is to further investigate the concept of WLB, especially within an organizational context.

Although the idea of WLB has been a subject of research since the 1980s, one could observe that only within recent years has the idea of WLB become more and more a public matter, concerning everyone within society regardless their age, job or social status (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Hoffmann & Cowan, 2008; Sturges & Guest, 2004). One reason for this trend is that private life blurs more and more with work life (Vielmetter & Sell, 2014; Hardill et al., 1997). This trend is reinforced by the increasing amount of pressure within the work environment due to technological progress, globalization or the rising pace of change (Greenblatt, 2002). Another reason refers to the fact that employees in today's world have more freedom to make choices based on values and not based purely on economically driven reasoning. It is not just about having a job anymore, but more and more about how work mirrors personal values and how this job is integrated in your private life (Vielmetter & Sell, 2014). This shift of value preferences is also covered by Guest (2002) who states that an unlimited sense of commitment towards a company is not the norm anymore among employees. In summary, the increasing pressure of work and the change of personal values, creates rising

conflicts between work and life. For instance, in reference to the study by Perlow & Porter (2009), the amount of working hours increased significantly through the digitalization of work. Hence, less time can be spent with family and friends which certainly increases the likelihood of conflict situations. As a result of those increasing conflicts, the idea of WLB has become a more widely discussed topic within society and also sensitizing individuals to this issue (Guest, 2002).

Looking from a business perspective at the idea of WLB, one has to consider an organization's task to recognize and incorporate social trends, such as the increasing importance of the idea of WLB within society, in order to cope with the fast changing and ambiguous environment (Reeves & Deimler, 2011). Furthermore, on grounds of the constant pressure on organizations to sophisticate their mechanisms and alter their efforts to become more employee attractive, they are urged to have a finer grasp on how employees move between their various roles and modes in life (Ashforth et al., 2000; Hall & Richter, 1989). Consequently, considering the increasing importance of the idea of WLB in society, companies gave the idea of WLB more space in managerial discussion which can be related to at least two reasons. On the one hand, it seems that WLB is positively connected to an employee's well-being which might trigger positive benefits for the organization (Shanafelt, et al., 2012). On the other hand, considering that more and more companies adapt the idea of WLB to their work approaches, others have to align to keep pace with competitors as well as being able to attract and maintain talented people at their company (Todd & Binns, 2013). Furthermore, offering a proper WLB approach may serve as a source of competitive advantage in environments in which financial aspects such as salary, are not primary employee attraction factors (cf. Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000).

In relation to the idea of WLB, one main argument for organizations to incorporate WLB practices is that WLB is linked to organizational performance. WLB practices are defined as programs or measures which aim to facilitate the most often very challenging act of balancing work and life demands (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Practices, such as offering flexible working modes such as telework or the possibility to take a leave of absence, sabbatical or parental leave, are common within organizations. However, reviewing the literature in regard to the aforementioned argument, one can find only inconsistent proof on the relation of WLB practices and organizational performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). White et al. (2003) go even further within their study and state that WLB is negatively linked to high performance practices within organizations. Concluding, one can argue from an organizational performance standpoint that previous studies cannot prove quantitatively that employees who perceive to have an appropriate WLB are more beneficial for organizations than the ones who do not perceive such a balance. However, from an individual standpoint, having a balanced work-life relationship is certainly beneficial since it increases personal health and reduces stress (Greenhaus et al., 2002; Shanafelt et al., 2012).

Looking further at this issue, Beauregard & Henry (2009) point out that a considerable difference in the existence of WLB practices and the use of them exists. Employees are generally very reluctant in using such offerings, since they associate it as a sign of weakness and thus individuals fear that they will sacrifice their personal career by using WLB practices (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). The study of Judiesch and Lyness (1999) supports this fear by demonstrating that individuals who took some time off, no matter the reason, received fewer

promotions and raises in salary than their colleagues. The use of WLB practices is further exacerbated by organizations itself which tend to leave the responsibility of taking such offerings to the discretion of the employee (Hoffmann & Cowan, 2008; Brannen, 2005). However, Sturges & Guest (2004) argue that organizational support is crucial for encouraging employees to make use of WLB practices, especially since employees normally fear to avail oneself of those offerings (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

Through examining the existence of WLB practices in organizations, it seems that the practices are not solely for the sake of the employee (Kossek et al., 2010). Hoffmann and Cowan (2008) state that the practices allow the organization to control even more aspects of the employee's life. Consequently, by offering practices which should balance the employee's work and life, organizations are actually able to create a greater imbalance in their own favour. This argument can be illustrated by looking at the aspect of telework within organizations. The idea of telework encompasses the use of technology such as a company laptop, in order to be able to work from any site possible. On the one hand, some researchers argue that such use of technology enables employees to have a balanced work-life relationship by providing more freedom regarding where and when to work (Guest, 2002). On the other hand, this practice blurs the boundaries between private and work life, hereby heightening the potential of work-life conflicts (Hill et al., 1998). Often conflicts arise through moods, stress and thoughts which are generated in one area and often influence or spill over into the other (Ashforth et al., 2000). Since work and life domains are more and more connected, confusion can emerge about which role and behaviour to enact at a given time, impeding an individual's full immersion into one role (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

The previous sections demonstrated that various aspects can be connected to the idea of WLB within an organizational environment such as employee's satisfaction, health but also organizational performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Shanafelt et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the sections also bring to light the ambiguity surrounding this concept, making it more worthwhile for researchers to indulge in it. Therefore, the aim of this article is to further look at how the idea of WLB is picked up by organizations, hereby gathering valuable insights for researchers as well as managers. As pointed out, employees hold a central position within the organization, as they have to understand the idea of WLB as well as manage it while simultaneously being expected to perform. Certainly, this constitutes a difficult endeavour. Following this insight, the focus of this research paper concerns especially the question how employees are understanding the idea of WLB within an organizational context. Hereby, two aspects of the idea of WLB need to be considered. On the one hand, it is about how individuals understand the idea surrounding WLB, meaning how they themselves define WLB while on the other hand, it emphasises how individuals manage their work and life in order to achieve and maintain their idea of WLB.

Having reviewed the existing literature on WLB, one can recognize many studies about work-life conflicts (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001; Shanafelt et al, 2012) WLB practices (Beauregard & Henry, 2009) and studies on the effects of having a balanced work-life relationship (Greenhaus et al., 2002; Bloom et al., 2009). However, a significant research gap can be identified by looking at how employees within organizations understand the idea of WLB. In principle, employees are exposed to the idea of WLB, though everyone has their own

individual way of understanding it. Considering how employees are exposed in different ways to different contextual factors, the following article intends to investigate how employees perceive the idea of WLB while being influenced by a definite organizational context. Thereby, we want to emphasize the influence of a specific context on the employee's understanding of the idea of WLB. Applying the theories of translation and boundary work on the investigated phenomenon will allow us as researchers to investigate the topic further and it will add another relevant perspective to the existing field of studies. Furthermore, many definitions on how a well-balanced work-life relationship should look like exist but less research addresses how the idea is actually understood in practice within a specific setting. However, we believe that one can shed some light on this process by looking at which factors might influence the individual's understanding and the respective management of the idea of WLB. This will be done by conducting a case study as methodological approach, hereby analysing and emphasizing the importance of contextual factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that our article is highly relevant and valuable for this field of studies, especially regarding the idea of WLB within an organizational context.

Valuable insights might be gained which can be used to understand the idea of WLB within the contemporary work environment. Furthermore, it is interesting to look at what implications emerge when having a distinct perception and strong agenda towards the domains of work or life. This becomes particularly interesting when a contrast between perceived idea and reality emerges. The article aims to investigate those blind spots, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the idea of WLB.

Based on the reasoning, the purpose of this study is defined within the following research question:

How is the idea of Work-Life-Balance translated and managed within an organizational context?

The following will firstly provide a theoretical framework of relevant concepts in order to provide a specific perspective, facilitating the process of understanding the studied topic. Secondly, the methodology part entails a description of the study approach and comprises the gathering and analysis of the field material. Afterwards the practical findings will be presented, laying the ground for the discussion which analyses the findings in relation to the used theoretical concepts. Lastly, practical implications and a conclusion will be drawn and suggestions for further studies will be presented.

Theoretical framework: boundary work & translation theory

The individual's process of understanding the idea of WLB certainly involves ambiguity and uncertainty which is triggered through externalities but also personal traits (Guest, 2002). On these grounds, it is essential to apply fitting theoretical concepts that guide and ease the analysing process. Therefore, the following will provide a comprehensive overview of the two concepts which are used within this article.

Firstly, one will apply the theory of boundary work. According to this theory, boundaries (i.e. physical, temporal and behavioural) serve to structure and demarcate the various roles an individual maintains in different domains (Ashforth et al., 2000). Since the

term Work-Life-Balance is emphasizing the interplay of two domains, work and non-work, it is necessary to indulge into how these two domains interact with each other. Thereby, Guest (2002) urges to look at boundary work since it displays how much control one has in managing a balance between these two domains. Especially the management of the balance between these domains lies at the heart of our research, justifying the theory choice. Secondly, the idea of translation theory serves as a theoretical lens on the investigated phenomenon. In relation to the idea of WLB, the core principle of translation theory is that individuals translate the idea of WLB into their specific context and hereby create their own understanding of the idea (cf. Latour, 1984). Consequently, the theory was chosen due to the fact that it acknowledges the subjectivity and the changing meaning of the idea surrounding WLB. Moreover, this theory is particularly useful since it points towards and emphasizes how the idea of WLB is influenced and shaped by various factors while being exposed to an organizational context. Hereby, boundary work will serve as the linkage between the influencing factors and the translated idea of WLB. By examining how the influencing factors of the translation process alter the management of work and life domains, researchers and readers will be enabled to understand the translated idea of WLB as such. Consequently, boundary theory serves as mechanism to understand the translation process of the idea of WLB.

Reviewing the existing literature, one can state that boundary theory deals with how humans construct and maintain boundaries to structure their environment and to deal with its complexity (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005). In other words, people constantly strive to structure their lives in order to cope with complex circumstances and challenges. Through this they are creating different social domains, such as 'work' and 'home' and for each domain certain roles such as the 'parent role' which one enacts, are defined. In order to determine and give meaning to the domains, boundaries are set and respective roles are determined to facilitate cognitive processes and thus disburden humans in living their lives (Kreiner et al., 2009). Primarily, these roles are defined in relation to their interface with the environment (role boundary) and their nature of content (role identity). Concerning the aspect of role boundary, its characteristic is determined by the underlying attributes in the areas of role flexibility and permeability. Role flexibility relates to when and where the role can be enacted, meaning how dependent it is on time and space. Boundary permeability refers to the extent to which one can physically be engaged in one role but can be engaged behaviourally or mentally in another role (Ashforth et al., 2000). Nippert-Eng (1996) further points out that the relationship between roles shall be depicted as a continuum, ranging from high integration to high segmentation. Thereby, high role integration can be defined as not distinguishing between what belongs to one role or another, implying that only a few or no boundaries at all exist which would separate one role from another. On the other hand, high role segmentation exists when domains and the respective roles are entirely separated in spatial and temporal dimensions and there is only one purpose at a time (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Although those cases signify only the extreme ends of the role continuum, one can use them to make sense of how individuals relate to their roles in life (Brannen, 2005).

Next to the interface with the environment, boundary theory further distinguishes roles by their nature of content. One's role identity is principally shaped by three primary influencing factors in the individual's process of positioning oneself within the addressed continuum. Firstly, the aspect of role identification relates to the idea that individuals are more prone to

live out and express roles which are intrinsically as well as extrinsically rewarding (cf. Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Such roles are more likely to be enacted by the individuals and in case of conflict situations, they are more prone to choose the role to which they can identify more (Ashforth et al., 2000). Secondly, the notion of situational strength is a decisive criterion since role boundaries are embedded in local and social contexts which are meaningful and abundant in history and culture (cf. Morgan, 2006). For instance, a situation, characterized by a high degree of situational strength, appears when everyone has the same understanding of which behaviour is appropriate and when everyone acts upon it. Lastly, the culture in which the individual is embedded sways the nature of role boundaries and the respective transition process. Furthermore, it influences work behaviour and role dynamics since culture constructs expectations and therefore shapes the behaviour of an individual (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000). In conclusion, the presented characteristics represent certain inner and outer criteria, building the fundament for every individual's situation and thus accounts for the richness, diversity and finally justifies the subjectivity of comprehension. In relation to the theory of boundary work, the term transition is another central concept. Transitions are boundary crossing activities where an individual enters another role by surmounting role and/or domain boundaries (Clark, 2000). These transitions occur daily, for instance when individuals are leaving work in order to go home to their family. Depending on the nature of role boundaries, this transition process can be achieved with little or lots of effort (Ashforth et al., 2000).

As briefly elaborated in the beginning of this section, translation theory serves as the second applied theoretical concept of this research. Latour (1984) introduces this concept within his article by claiming that one should abandon the thought that society is something stable that can be clearly defined and is simultaneously staying the same while being exposed to time and space. Rather he urges to look at society from what he calls a translation process perspective, which states that society is constituted by the actions of many actors who constantly translate the aspect to their own context. Consequently, society is the result of society members' actions and therefore undergoes a constant flux while traveling through time and space. Through applying this perspective on the notion of an idea, such as the idea of WLB, one can conclude that an idea cannot be clearly defined. Only in practice, by looking at how the idea is translated into the actor's context, can one attempt to understand what the idea means within this specific context. One prominent model within the field of translation theory originates from Michel Callon (1984). He states that the idea of translation should be perceived as a never-ending process, depicting how something comes into being. Callon (1984) makes use of this theory to study the aspect of power by looking at how power is constituted and created within a certain context. In his work, he developed essential premises, such as the notion of generalized symmetry. This concept refers to the actors who are involved within the translation process and claims that all actors should be perceived in the same manner. In general, an actor can be human or non-human (e.g. technology) and everyone has its own interests which influence the translation process (Callon, 1984; Murdoch, 1997). In relation to the concept of generalized symmetry, Sismondo (2010) states that "non human actors can appear to act in exactly the same way as do humans- they can have interests, they can enrol others" (p.73). Consequently, one should not assume beforehand that human or non-human actors differ from one another (Law, 1992). Linking back to the idea of WLB, translation theory can be used to look at how ideas are spread within society. Czarniawska & Jörges (1996) claim

that ideas are changing while being exposed to time and space, since the idea gets re-embedded into another context. Therefore, it is important to note that the process of translation combines aspects of transportation as well as transformation (Czarniawska, 2012). In other words, while an idea travels through time and space, one has to consider that the idea itself changes as well. Doorewaard & van Bijesterveld (2001) confirm with their study this argument. By looking at how a management fashion within the area of IT management enters an organizational discourse, the authors depicted an "ongoing process of meaning transformation [...] in which all actors discuss, interpret, modify and alter the core ideas of the new management fashion" (Doorewaard & van Bijesterveld, 2001, p.60). Furthermore, one has to acknowledge that the travelling idea also changes the actors who translate the idea into their specific context (Czarniawska & Jörges, 1996).

In order to study how ideas enter organizations, Czarniawska & Jörges (1996) created a four moments of translation model. The first moment, called "Disembedding", refers to the idea being detached from its institutionalized context (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2013). Since an idea is not able to travel by itself, the idea needs to be materialized within an object or prototype ("Packaging"). For example, according to Czarniawska & Jörges (1996), an idea can travel through space in case it is materialized within a human's mind since the body itself is able to travel. Other ways to travel are by being materialized in a written text or by being visualized within pictures (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2013). The third moment ("Reembedding") refers to the actors' action of translating the idea to their specific context, for instance a specific organization (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2013). It is important to keep in mind that the translation of an idea into a new context is never a smooth and predictable process (Latour, 2008). This process often creates paradoxes and is accompanied by constant negotiations of different actor's interests. These negotiations occur due to the fact that actors want to convince others of their interests. Therefore, one can claim that a lot of effort is involved in the translation process and uncertainty and ambiguity is permanently encompassing the process (Callon, 1984). The last step "institutionalization" concerns how the translated version of the idea gets institutionalized within the organization, meaning that everyone within the organization interprets the translated idea in the same way and that generalized practices are established (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2013). In relation to the four moments of translation model, Sahlin & Wedlin's article (2008), which focuses on how ideas become adopted by organizations, highlights the dynamic nature of circulating ideas. As well as the authors Czarniawska (2012), Latour (1984) or Doorewaard & van Bijesterveld (2001), they infer that ideas do not travel in a vacuum through time and space. Ideas are always exposed to contextual factors such as other ideas, interests or traditions. Consequently, the authors urge to give translation theory more space in the discussion about the travel of ideas since it acknowledges the complexity of the travel process as well as pointing towards the question of how and why an idea is translated into a specific context (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008).

In total, based on the presented main ideas of translation theory and linking the following insights to the idea of WLB, an adequate way to understand the meaning of WLB is to look at how the idea is translated by actors into their specific context. Furthermore, applying a translation theory approach points towards influencing factors which are involved in the translation process, thereby enriching the discussion of how the idea of WLB is translated and

understood. Owing to that, the usage of translation theory in combination with boundary theory as a perspective on our case is reasonable and highly relevant.

Methodology

In the following, a short description of the chosen case will be presented as it was determined that for the purpose of this research a case study approach would be most appropriate. Afterwards, the study design, the data collection approach and the process of how the respective data will be analysed are elaborated in more detail.

Case Description

Our case study concerns an organization within the consulting industry. Over the years, the consulting industry has become an increasingly popular career choice for graduates (Wylie, 2016). Their project-oriented working structure promises many unique and challenging experiences and is seen by many as the starting point for a successful career. However, concerning labour conditions, the consulting industry is subject to controversial discussions. Tight deadlines and strict budgets are common in the industry, leading to understaffed project teams and long working hours (Muhr et al., 2012). According to Muhr et al. (2012), there are no limits to how much a consultant can work and working overtime is rather an obligation than an option. Furthermore, the consulting industry is characterized by a high-performance culture in which employees tend to sacrifice everything for the firm, such as time with family and friends (Muhr et al., 2012). Due to that, an employee fluctuation rate of 15-20% per year is not unusual (Batchelor, 2011). Considering WLB, the consulting industry makes a suitable case due to its characteristically demanding and challenging labour conditions which in turn create a highly contested and ambiguous field.

Our case study was conducted within a subsidiary of a worldwide operating consultancy firm, hereby referred to as "Solver AG". The subsidiary is located in Germany and has more than 300 consultants employed. The company offers several services such as management, business and risk consulting. Their area of expertise covers numerous branches, from automotive over finance up to IT consulting. To date, the firm has implemented Work-Life-Balance approaches – explicitly named as such – and is broadcasting them widely on their internet platform. Amongst others, their offering comprises year-round flex days, home and offsite working, sabbaticals and other job sharing opportunities. As briefly mentioned, managing Work-Life-Balance in the consulting industry can be a tenuous endeavour due to the conjunction of finite resources and high performance requirements. Additionally, consulting companies promote to their employees and the public their great approach towards Work-Life-Balance (cf. BCG, 2017). However, we noticed an a priori discrepancy between stories from individuals within the organization and the organizations' publicized self-images revealing an interesting ambiguity.

Therefore, the consulting business can be regarded as an extreme case of WLB management, reasoning the industry choice of the following case study. By investigating an extreme case in regard to the management of WLB, we claim that additionally insights can be gained. These insights might add another perspective to the existing field of studies, hence reasoning the choice of our case. The decision to limit our study to a single investigated case

was chosen intentionally in order to achieve a deep understanding of a specific case and its contextual environment. According to Ashforth et al. (2000) this is certainly beneficial since specific factors such as the organizational culture could possibly have an impact on WLB perceptions.

Study design

The main argument for conducting a case study is that it is a suitable method for exploratory purposes (Dul & Hak, 2008). Since a research gap can be identified, concerning the research purposes of our article, we claim that the case study is an appropriate method in order to explore the topic further. However, despite the presented perspective on this methodology, Dul & Hak (2008) state that case studies are also suitable for theory testing and not only limited to exploratory purposes. For instance, Flyvbjerg (2006) emphasizes the value of "the force of example" (p.228), thereby shifting the focus of research towards a more practical, context related approach. Considering that the study seeks to understand how consultants understand and manage the idea of WLB, this research focus is certainly beneficial as the idea of WLB points to a high subjectivity of meaning, indicating that contextual factors are important to the studied phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Consequently, the use of a case study approach allows us to immerse ourselves in the consultants' organizational context, hereby enabling us to better understand how consultants construct their idea of WLB (Flyvbjerg, 2006). One limitation of the chosen methodology is that it cannot be used to generalize insights. Nonetheless, we follow Flyvbjerg's (2006) argumentation that also non-generalized knowledge can contribute to scientific development, thus rationalizing and justifying our form of study.

Data collection

Since our study aims to examine the translation process of a socially constructed phenomenon, a qualitative research method was selected with the objective to enhance the researchers' comprehension of the described phenomenon (Silverman, 2013). Taking into account that contextual factors are crucial for how consultants understand and manage their idea of WLB, it is considered essential to place the investigated idea into a context to improve the basis for our analysis (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Furthermore, a qualitative method is better for establishing trust between the involved actors which is essential for our case study, since the studied topic is quite personal and sensitive (Myers & Newman, 2007).

Primary data was gathered through interviews, carried out in a semi-structured format, enabling us to maintain an open and flexible atmosphere, hereby fostering interviewees to share stories with greater freedom (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, all interviewees were anonymised and the interview data was not shared with anyone else but the researchers. Furthermore, following Silverman's (2013) advice in terms of the ethical dimension of this study, all interviewees could withdraw their consensus of using the interview data at any time. In order to remain even-handed and to obtain information from the object of investigation holistically, interviews were conducted with managers and their subordinates, 'regular' consultants. Obtaining insights from both perspectives is key in order to get a finer grasp and a better picture about what is happening inside the investigated organization. Moreover, collecting data from different hierarchical levels gives the researchers a better notion how the studied phenomenon was interpreted from individual viewpoints (Silverman, 2013).

In the forefront of the interviews, a guideline based on subjects and questions was developed and used as an initial framework for the interviews with managers and other employees (Ritchie et al., 2014). Apart from an introductory part, main themes of the interview were working routines, interaction, communication, leisure time, and WLB balance offerings. We partially tailored a few themes to the interview groups to improve relevance and fit. In order to follow a semi-structured interview approach, initial questions were asked for each category and further relevant questions evolved during the course of the interview.

Interviews were taken either in a face-to-face conversation or via virtual communication. Although virtual communication has the setback of a higher difficulty to establish trust among interviewer and interviewee (Czarniawska, 2014), the approach was selectively chosen on grounds of spatial constraints. In principle, to overcome this hurdle and to avoid information asymmetry, we aimed to precisely point out purpose and interest of our research study prior to the actual interview. In regard to the interviewee selection process, we started to contact a few persons with different backgrounds, responsibilities and different hierarchical levels. These interviewees not only gave us information but also helped progress our search, often through recommendations for further interview partners. This snowballing method was useful, since it enhanced the relevance and fit of our interview partners (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). During the course of the interview, the interviewers focused on listening and understanding the interviewee's statement. The interviews were recorded with the consensus of the interviewees and transcribed verbatim, thus allowing the researchers to return to the original wording and easing the process of data analysis. It is additionally important to acknowledge that the interviews were conducted and transcribed in German. On the one hand, this enabled the interviewees to talk in their mother tongue, thereby avoiding problems with expressing their thoughts in a foreign language, while on the other hand, this fact complicated the task of analysing the collected data, since the data had to be translated into English (van Nes et al., 2010). The interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes enabling to probe thoroughly the experiences and notions of the interviewees. In total, we conducted 16 interviews, of which six were conducted with managers and 10 with consultants. In the following, it will be referred to the interviewees as C 1-10 (Consultant) and M 1-6 (Manager). Conducting more than 16 interviews was not deemed to be necessary since the interviewees started to be repetitive in their answers. The time frame of data collection lasted eight weeks. Altogether 18 hours of field material was collected, exclusively data stemming from observations made during the interview and visits at the company's office. The decision to be engaged in observations was made, since observations are a useful supplementary method which enables researchers to enhance their understanding of the interviewees' context (Silverman, 2013). Furthermore, while being at the company's office, one could observe how the organizational members work which is a central part of our study. Considering the ethical dimension of this study, the researchers informed the employees that observations were taken and asked for permission in order to avoid any ethical conflict situation (cf. Ritchie et al., 2014).

Secondary data was primarily obtained from the organization's website and research journals, such as Harvard Business Review, Human Resources Management Review or the Journal of Vocational Behaviour. Data was gathered by using a systematic search approach on the journal's websites with a focus on relevance and recentness. Furthermore, we were provided with additional internal documents about the studied topic by the interviewees. The

purpose of collecting secondary data was mainly to identify what empirical evidence had so far been brought forward and how those insights relate to the purpose and the results of our study (Silverman, 2013).

Data analysis

In order to make sense of the acquired data, a grounded theory approach was used. The aim of the grounded theory approach is to construct a theory based on the collected data and not using it for theory testing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For our case, this method is especially useful, since it takes into account the complexity of the studied organizational context. By analysing the data according to the principles of the grounded theory, one aims to identify more abstract concepts which can later be clustered and analysed by the theory at hand (Martin & Turner, 1986). In other words, a grounded theory approach allows researchers to categorize data from different sources. The categories might reveal patterns across the selected data which are helpful in understanding the investigated phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This process of narrowing down one's focus towards certain patterns, according to Czarniawska (2014), is especially useful in a case study approach, since it enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon without ignoring the contextual environment in which the case takes place (cf. Martin & Turner, 1986). Thus, in relation to our case, all data from interviews, observations and secondary data was categorized by using the concept card approach, recommended by Martin & Turner (1986). Those concept cards were further analysed and two main categories emerged in the process. The main categories are the following: "Organizational Context" and "People". Concerning the analysis of the data, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher holds "a monopoly of interpretation" (Kvale, 2006, p. 485). Since we alone interpreted the data of this article, the data analysis was in a way biased. Although one cannot avoid this issue, it is important to be aware of it; however, the issue is lessened due to the fact that the data was analysed by two different researchers.

Limitations

For a researcher, it is crucial to know what one will study, nonetheless it might be even more important to know what is not in the scope of this study and which limitations exist (Silverman, 2013). First, one limitation exists in temporal and spatial constraints. As our case study was conducted in one distinct setting, the insights of the consulting industry are not easily transferable to other contexts, e.g. to countries outside of Western Europe or to other organization that have varying cultural values and business models. Second, the fact that we did not interview individuals who belong to the private life of the consultant such as spouses and life partners, depicts a limitation since those individuals might add another perspective to the observed translation process. Third, we aware that our case study only provides a certain picture at a certain point of time. A longitudinal study approach with several interviews at distinct point of times might reveal new insights, especially in terms of how the idea of WLB might change over time. However, time and capacity constraints did not allow to pursue this study approach. Fourth, it is clearly not the focus of the study to engage in issues that have also been discussed in recent times, such as pursuing the link between performance and productivity in relation to merely working hours or workload.

Findings

In order to visualize the decisive aspects of the translation process, we depicted our findings in a model, that is based on the two categories that emerged when applying a grounded theory approach on our data. The emerged overarching elements are "Organizational Context" and "People". Each category is composed by several elements that arose through the grounded theory approach and which are classified as pivotal in allowing the researchers to achieve a greater understanding of how the idea of WLB is translated within the context of a consulting organization.
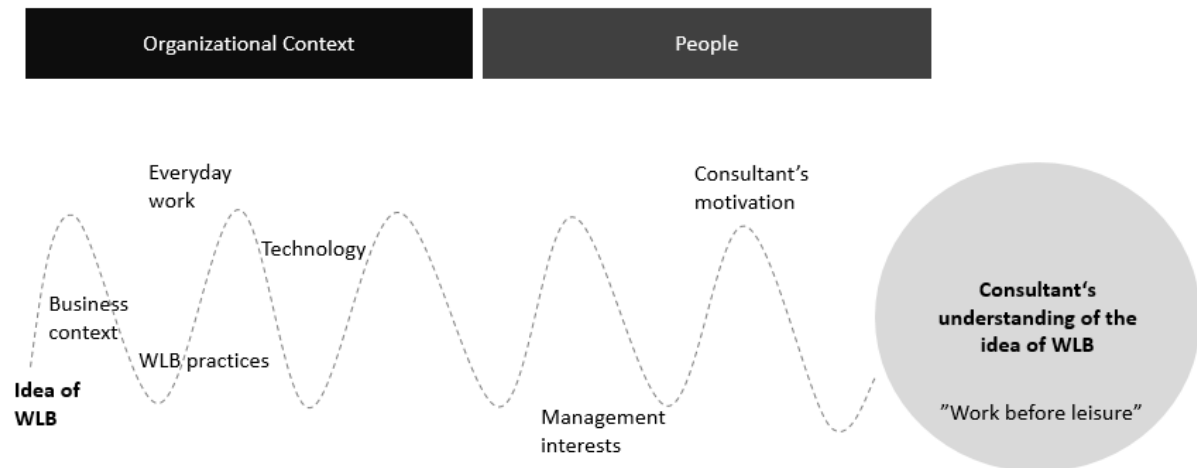

Figure 1: illustration of the translation process

The category of organizational context depicts factors which are more generic and applicable to all consultants within the organization. The "People" category presents more individual aspects which might vary across the organization. These categories will be presented step by step and thus lead the translation process.

Subsequently to each aspect of a category, we will give a short analysis in order to look from an analytical level at the findings in regard to the translation process of the idea of WLB. Thereby, several paradoxes and negotiations of interests are presented which are typical for the nature of a translation process.

In relation to the depicted model, one has to emphasize that translation is a never-ending process, meaning that the above displayed categories are fluent in their nature and do not have a fixed position within the translation process (cf. Callon, 1984).

Organizational context

In the following, the organizational context of Solver AG in which the idea of WLB is translated is presented. This category is constituted of four sub categories: Business context, Everyday work, WLB Practices and Technology.

Business Context

The success of consultancy firms is, independent of their size, fundamentally based on their business model which bundles several success factors, such as human resources, knowledge, reputation, customer orientation and the efficient management of key resources. All operations

have the creation of customer value at its heart by offering complex solutions to client's problems.

It is our business model that is fundamentally based on reliability, rapid delivery of high quality results under immense time pressure. In a nutshell, we are called when it's about to pull the chestnuts out of the fire (C 7)

The defining criteria for the work groups within the organization are every customer's problem. In order to solve certain issues, Solver AG is forming an adroit team that is able to handle customer's problems within the agreed conditions. Since the team is collaborating within an agreed timeframe and is dissolved thereafter, their business model is fundamentally creating a project oriented structure.

What is offered is not a ready-made service or product. No, these are tailor made solutions according to prevailing needs and demands of every individual client (M 3)

As stated, the business model molds itself towards the client's demands. In order to grasp the customer's notion and the value constellation of the business, consultants need to operate closely with the customer, requiring them to be physically present at the customer's location on an ongoing basis. This implicates the necessity of being flexible and agile in order to cope with changes and the client's demands. Finally, the variety of interests and issues creates heterogeneous projects since each customer's organization is a unique entity with own structures, environment and problems. In relation to the described business model, Solver AG's structure is shaped by a very flexible and agile architecture as well. Other than a few central departments such as HR and IT, the organization is structured around partner groups. Partners own the company and each has a special field of expertise such as IT or financial consulting. Each partner is responsible for acquiring client projects, maintaining client relationships and generating a certain amount of revenue per year. In order to do so, partners set up their own team of consultants and managers who work on the projects. Consequently, the partner group is the most important element within this decentralized, organizational structure and each partner group can differ greatly from one another.

My partner group is great, we have a lot of fun together. But I also heard of another group where the partner is very reserved and well that influences their group. So, who your partner is definitely matters! (C 3)

In principle, the work form that emerges from the aforementioned business model and Solver AG's structure is group work in form of projects. In general, project timelines differ, depending on the severity of the customer's problem and their preferences. Project durations can vary from short (up to 8 weeks), middle (3-8 months) or long (9-24 months) and according to the demands and needed resources, the amount of staff on the project will vary as well. Consequently, depending on the project type, the needed requirements for consultants also vary. Owing to characteristics of the project, especially to the structure and length, workload varies within a project.

The last project was tough. I often worked till late at night. But my new project is more relaxed and normally I can leave around 7pm (C 6)

Furthermore, it is insightful to hear the perception of a more senior employee about project work.

The thing is that the next project is often as stressful as the previous one (M 1)

In total, the statements clearly show how differently individuals are perceiving their workload and that even one's own perception can rapidly change depending on the project, workload and leader of the project.

Analysis of 'Business Context'

As the findings revealed, revenues are made through services for clients, thus the client's interest lies at heart of every undertaking. From a WLB perspective, this insight leads to a conflict of interests since the business model clearly prioritizes the client's interests before the interests of their own employees.

Owing to the characteristics of the business model, projects are the common form of work. As shown, projects entail some sort of natural short-termism since clear project deadlines and tight timelines are defined. In relation to the idea of WLB, thus another clash of interests can be observed, since the idea of WLB is naturally long-term oriented, whereas the nature of project work leads to short-term orientation. Solver AG's structure clearly emphasizes decentralization, empowers partners and managers. Hence, the partners' agenda such as their values and vision, highly influences working style and climate as they decide how to implement organizational regulations in their teams. Relating to that argument, the decentralized structure aggravates the task to implement general WLB practices and makes it even harder to monitor their practical implementation. Furthermore, the typical project structure as working mode also entails implications for understanding and managing the idea of WLB. From a professional perspective, the current project determines what and when you do things owing to its tasks and deadlines which can be beneficial for an employee. However, from a personal perspective, the heterogeneous characteristic of projects prohibits to establish routines and little long-term planning is possible owing to the unpredictability of the project's course. In fact, these features appear paradoxically. The project structure makes the work life more stressful and prohibits to establish routines. On the other hand, this structure allows employees to better cope with the challenges of the industry and lessens the pitfalls of working as a consultant due to rationalization that a project has an end, therefore justifying the sacrifice of spare time and the suppression of a need for proper WLB.

Everyday work

In the following, an average working week of a consultant at Solver AG is briefly described. Hereby, the focus lies on the most common working mode for consultants which is to work on projects. The "average" working week was described by one interviewee as the "5-4-3 week". A "5-4-3 week" refers to five days of working, four days at the client site and three nights staying at a hotel since the client is often not located within the city the consultant is based in. The findings show that the consultant usually travels to the client on Monday morning (~ 6am) and travels back home on Thursday evening (~ 6pm). Fridays are therefore entirely different in comparison to the rest of the week. The norm is that consultants are back at the city they are

based in, working from Solver AG's offices. Furthermore, Fridays are defined by a quite relaxed working atmosphere.

We can wear what we want on Fridays and normally we go home around 6pm which is quite early (C 9)

Considering the characteristics of a "normal" work week, the findings show that the working location for consultants varies permanently. In principle, one can differentiate between three main working locations: Client side, Solver AG's own office buildings and Home Office. In general, consultants are very independent in choosing their working location. However, the vast majority of statements tended to go into the same direction as the subsequent quote.

I actually prefer going to the office. Some of the main reasons why I am working for this employer are the colleagues and the interaction in the office (C 10)

From an organization's perspective, the main rule for the working location choice is that it has to be compatible with project demands, entailing the need for high agility and flexibility. In parallel, the choice of working location relies heavily on personal preferences and on ad-hoc enquiries which is exemplified by the following statement:

My actual plan was to work from home. But I got a call from my manager the day before and he requested that I should come to Frankfurt to help him with an internal matter. So, I booked a train and I stayed the rest of the week in Frankfurt (C 1)

Nevertheless, one aspect is very important to the working mode. All interviewees stated that at the end of the day it is a choice to work at Solver AG and despite all negative aspects, for them the positive ones prevail.

Nobody forces you to work here, I mean, I chose to work here and overall I like it. Otherwise I wouldn't stay here (M 4)

Analysis of 'Everyday Work'
In regard to the working location, one can identify a field of conflict in which the idea of WLB is exposed to different interests. In general, consultants have the freedom to pick the working location by themselves, giving them a greater autonomy and independency. However, keeping in mind that project interests always come first, one can observe that the decision where to work from is always made short notice. As a result, consultants are quite restricted in their options to manage their WLB. The option to work from home reveals another interesting paradox. In theory, home office is often cited as one major approach of WLB. Nevertheless, within Solver AG it is considered as the least desired option. According to the consultants' notion, they feel isolated at home and miss the collegial spirit of the organization that is often crucial for handling stressful situations. Additionally, one has to acknowledge that having the choice to work from home also entails within this organizational context that you have to work from home, thereby blurring the boundaries between work and life. For some consultants, this blurring of boundaries might hamper the attempts to manage their idea of WLB.

WLB Practices
As part of the organizational context, it is essential to look at the existence of WLB practices within Solver AG. Moreover, those practices depict the physical manifestation of the idea of

WLB within Solver AG. Within the studied organization, one can clearly state that WLB practices exist. For instance, the option to work from home is often used by consultants and allows them to independently determine their working hours.

What I think is really cool is that we have this annual working time account that allows us to manage our working hours over a longer period flexibly (C 7)

In practice, this approach often appears to be useful in combination with Home Office.

I recently did Home Office on a Friday so I could shut down my computer quite early in order to make it to a sport event which was two hours away (C 9)

Furthermore, it is possible to work for a couple years abroad or to take a sabbatical in order to pursue other interests. A sabbatical contains the option to take a longer time off from work in order to pursue other interests in life. In fact, some employees gave the notion that a sabbatical is a must-have for them and that they could not imagine working for an employer not offering this. The findings further show that colleagues are supportive and encouraging in the event of someone's decision to do a sabbatical.

No, there is normally no envy among colleagues. I mean it is not like those people do nothing for half a year. Often, they are travelling or pursue other interesting projects (C 5)

An interesting feature of all these practices is that even though they appear frequently within the organization, they are not managed and steered centrally, but foremost left at the discretion of the partner groups or the branch offices.

We do not have a company-wide policy for these things, it's just that these activities are all managed by the individual partner and thus extremely depend on this very person (M 2)

In general, the findings revealed that one has to differentiate between WLB practices which create more flexibility regarding the work aspect and WLB practices which allow the employees to get some time off from work in order to focus on other parts of their life. One can observe that a lot of support exists for the first kind of practices. For instance, as long as the project allows it, everyone is free in choosing when and from where to work. WLB practices, such as offering the option to work from home, are used. Especially in case of emergencies such as having to look after the children, the option to work from home is utilized. On the other hand, the second kind of WLB practices are openly promoted within and outside the company. However, in practice another picture appears. Despite the manifold of offerings, interviewees only gave vague answers to the question if they used them.

Yes, I know somebody who took a sabbatical. In fact, many were actually very curious and started asking after her return 'how was it', 'what did you do' [...]. So, I think I saw overall positive reactions. [...] No, I wouldn't do it. But of course, it is an option (C 2)

The main reason for such a reaction is presented by another interviewee who states:

I mean I have only been working here for two years so I have not yet really considered it. Besides, at the end of the day your partner wants to make money with you. So of course, it is not beneficial for your career if you are doing a sabbatical (C 6)

Analysis of 'WLB Practices'

In principle, many practices in relation to the idea of WLB exist. When it comes to the actual use of WLB practices a noteworthy paradox occurs. Juniors often tend to believe that they are not yet in a position to take advantage of WLB practices. Therefore, it seems that WLB practices become more relevant the longer someone works within the organization. However, due to a high rate of fluctuation, many consultants are no longer with the company after a couple of years indicating that the usage of such WLB practices is quite low. The project structure within the company aggravates the usage of WLB practices even more. One can only use such offerings in case the project allows it. However, due to tight project schedules and the fast-moving nature of consultancy work, one can barely make use of such offerings during a project. Furthermore, owing to the fact that WLB practices are not generalized, the focus on the partner group is amplified. Consequently, depending on the attitude of the partner towards WLB practices, one can observe that consultants make use of WLB practices in varying ways. In case a partner does not value the use of WLB practices, consultants become hesitant to use them in order to hinder jeopardizing their career advancement.

Technology

The next main aspect refers to the influence of technology on the studied idea of WLB within Solver AG. Throughout the course of the interviews, technology could be identified as an important actor, taking part during work and off-work times. Every consultant possesses a company smartphone and laptop which are central to their job. Possessing these devices enables the consultant to work from anywhere.

Our premise is, we can work from anywhere as long as we have a steady Wi-Fi connection in place, but this very thing is also expected from us (M 5)

The findings demonstrate that especially interviewees with families appreciate this premise as it allows them to work from home while looking after their children. Furthermore, consultants are allowed to use those devices in private which, for instance, makes a private smartphone redundant.

In principle, my smartphone is my best friend. I am waking up and going to bed with it. The first three things I am doing in the morning is checking WhatsApp, checking my private emails and checking my work emails (C 1)

However, the findings demonstrate that not all consultants are willing to use this offer since some perceive some negative consequences which is shown by the following statement:

In the beginning, I had only my work phone, but it got insane with work emails. Therefore, I decided to have a private smartphone as well, so I can turn off the other one after work (C 8)

An organizational wide rule regarding this matter is not implemented. In general, the findings demonstrate that one can decide freely where and when to use the company technology. One should also emphasize that superiors do not demand of consultants to work in their private time even though it would be technically possible.

My manager told me that I do not have to answer his emails on weekends. But ya, often it is urgent so I answer him anyway (C 10)

In summary, the findings reveal that technology is a central part of the consultant's life and it is indispensable for the job as consultant. Our findings reveal that the technology aspect evoked two distinct reactions. Some employees try to clearly separate work technology from private technology and thus are better capable of maintaining the separation on weekends. Others are acknowledging the fact and try to use the benefits while trying to minimize the pitfalls.

Analysis of 'Technology'

On basis of the presented information, it can be claimed that technology serves as a connecting piece allowing work aspects to blur gradually with private life and vice versa. This insight has implications for the consultant's management of the idea of WLB. Since the smartphone and the work laptop allow the employee to work from anywhere with a steady Wi-Fi connection, it results in becoming a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it gives room for more flexibility. Individuals can enjoy the freedom to decide upon when and where to work which, according to our findings, makes it particularly interesting when having a family. On the other hand, the premise exists that consultants can work from anywhere at any time. Consequently, being at home does not imply that you cannot work. Colleagues are aware of that fact and they do not hesitate to contact consultants, even though they are at home.

Considering that a smartphone can also be used for private purposes leads to another paradox. In reference to the offered WLB practices, the smartphone should facilitate working plus simplifying life by making a second private smartphone redundant. However, the private use of the smartphone implies that the employees are carrying it constantly with them, thus extending their reach of availability to the maximum possible. Therefore, checking and reading emails becomes a common habit, even on weekends or while being on vacation. This habit subsequently alters the consultant's understanding of the idea of WLB by acknowledging that work is a constant part of your private life as well. A paradox is discernible in relation to working on weekends. In the first place, managers do not want to make their employees work on weekends; however, as managers often send out emails during the weekend they make their employees aware of possible new tasks. Hence, the managers create subliminally pressure and unintentionally create work on weekends which makes it harder to maintain a balanced work-life relationship. Furthermore, the fact that managers tend to work during unusual hours, such as on the weekend, reveals their understanding of the idea of WLB. The manager's understanding of the idea certainly affects the consultant, by causing subconscious pressure to assimilate oneself in order to meet the manager's expectations although the managers themselves do not demand it.

People

The second category 'People' concerns the role of humans and their interests within the translation process. The presented groups of people have different interests which influence the consultant's understanding in terms of the idea of WLB. Due to this reason, a closer look at the people's interests is useful and highly relevant.

Management interests

Looking at the general structure within a partner group, one can differentiate between consultants and managers. Consultants are primarily working on projects and are located on

the lower hierarchy levels. Managers on the other hand are positioned between the consultants and the partner of their group. The findings point out that managers are responsible for steering projects as well as serving as mentors for consultants within their team. A mentor serves as the main contact person for career questions and looks after the personal well-being of the consultant. Generally, our findings show that project leaders are not necessarily the mentors of the consultants who are working within their team. This is important to acknowledge, since the interests of a project leader and a mentor might differ in regard to the role of the consultant within the project. For example, the project leader's main interest is, according to our findings, to satisfy the client's expectations and to generate revenue for their partner. Those interests derive mainly from the partner whose interests are explained in the following quote by a manager:

The client is willing to pay for our performance and in the end of the day, the partner has to make money and that is priority number one. Therefore, employees need to accept that other interests are secondary (M 1)

In order to understand that way of thinking, our findings point towards the role of the client within this construct. The client usually pays a great amount of money for the service of Solver AG which puts a lot of pressure on the partners and their managers, since the client is expecting great results. Relating to the above-mentioned findings, the management has its priorities straight. For them, the client comes first and thus the project shall be the clear centre of focus for all consultants involved whereas other interests need to step back. As stated, the managers' responsibility of realizing the project and thereby making money is putting them under severe pressure to succeed. Therefore, project leaders are constantly exposed to the challenge of aligning the demands and interests of their teams with the client's expectations. Certainly, it often ends with the same outcome:

Well, the client demands it, so we have to deliver under any circumstances (M 4)

Since the project comes first, the manager is not concerned with how tasks get done as long as they get done. The gathered interviews also showed that this circumstance also has beneficial implications for the employees since they are able to work quite autonomous on the assigned tasks.

I could not work within an environment where somebody is constantly telling me what to do (C 3)

Furthermore, the decision where to work, in case the projects allows it, is not even questioned nor does it have to be agreed upon a priori. Therefore, one can easily take advantage of working from home if it is necessary. The weekend represents one clear frontier for the reachability of the employee. The managers get proactive by pointing out that working on the weekend is not a must nor that one has to check emails. However, as already stated, the data revealed that often the managers themselves work on the weekend and send out emails.

Analysis of 'Management interests'
The presented findings clearly illustrate how different interests influence the consultant's understanding and management of the idea of WLB. The management's interest display the

focus on satisfying the client by ensuring that all project objectives are met. Management expects the same focus from the consultants, thereby urging to prioritize work over other life demands. As briefly mentioned, one further important issue concerning the manager-employee relationship is that managers do not always have disciplinary responsibility for the team members within their project. They are responsible for issues in regard to their role as project members, thus short-termism occurs, but they are not responsible for their personal development and wellbeing as such. Therefore, they are often not interested in how team members feel about their WLB since they are only together in a team for a short time. As a result, having limited support from the management clearly hampers the consultants in managing their idea of WLB. It is the task of the employee's mentor to look at how the employee copes with the various aspects of work. This can prove to be hard as they are not always working together nor interacting on a daily basis with one another. In conclusion, Solver AG's organizational structure together with the management interests creates conflicting situations. The leader who has the personal and career development of the employees in mind, is foremost not their direct supervisor in projects and thus a certain distance is created. The project leader who is in close contact with the consultant has first and foremost the project's interest in mind and thus values proximal goals.

Consultant's motivation

Another interesting topic to touch upon are the reasons why individuals choose Solver AG as their employer and what their basic motivation is. Furthermore, one will examine how the consultant's motivation aligns with the interests of the related actors in the consultant's environment outside this organization. Within this section, these actors are consolidated to one major influencing factor and it is shown how they have an impact on the consultant's understanding of the idea surrounding WLB.

Throughout the course of the interviews, similar patterns related to the inspiring working environment could be identified.

I truly love my colleagues which is a great plus. Moreover, we have a great atmosphere in the office (M 5)

This statement depicts an extract of manifold statements which point in the same direction. It seems that within Solver AG, the people are professional, live in a productive environment and strive to maintain this atmosphere.

I really appreciate the spirit we are having in our organization, our mindset - that is basically why it does not bother me sitting on a project until very late (M 2)

Next to elements of collegiality and professionalism, work (task wise) stands out. Many statements state that consultants value the delegated responsibilities along with a great amount of freedom. Moreover, the variety of tasks driven by the previously mentioned heterogeneity of clients and their interest is clearly mentioned as being positively influencing the consultant's attitude and motivation towards work. Finally, picking up the aforementioned aspect of productivity, many argued that the work itself is a criterion for having chosen this employer and being motivated to perform.

Many newcomers are surprised about the pace of work. I believe that this is exactly the thing - to see what is possible. Once you reach the moment where you get convinced, then your intrinsic motivation kicks in. That's when you see the shining in the eyes of the people (M 6)

The feeling of achievement is obviously a way of satisfaction and a driver for achieving more. In line with their ambition for professional development, many envision a consultancy job as a way to develop and realize professional goals. However, the interviewees also revealed that these perceptions alter with changes in their personal life environment. For instance, the findings demonstrate that the perception changes in relation to the relationship status.

Now, that I am single, I do not have a problem with travelling a lot. I rather think it's cool. Well, once I was in a relationship, I did not enjoy it so much (C 2)

Another issue, which was repeatedly notified is that having a family has a critical impact. This can be emphasized by the following statement:

My principal once told me, that he has a family. His daughter once told him 'Daddy is also living in an office'. These are things that you are really missing (C 5)

Our findings show that many consultants are leaving Solver AG after major changes occurred in their life.

I am becoming a father and I want to have the time to raise my child. Therefore, I will start a new job in a couple of months (M 4)

Finally, the data reveals that a lot is done by the consultants to avoid such personal conflicts from happening. For example, consultants often align their private life with the work environment which is illustrated in the following quote.

My girlfriend is a consultant as well. So, no, it is no problem for her that I am not here during the week (C 3)

Also, friends play next to family or life partner, an important role. Many statements within the findings were overlapping in respect to meeting friends during the week which indeed demonstrates a major challenge. The following neatly describes what consequences emerged:

For me, it became now relatively easy. I have been here for two years and my circle of friends basically consists 100% of my work colleagues. That has the advantage that my friends are stuck in the same situation and kind of think in the same way. Therefore, others show sympathy when some appointments fall out. On the other hand, it makes it even more difficult to schedule something because both sides cannot state with accuracy if they can make it. Consequently, most of the leisure activities stay within the weekend and I only make few plans for the week. Certainly, I need to acknowledge that I am falling behind in keeping up contact with old friends outside of work (C 2)

Analysis of 'Consultant's motivation'

Several insights can be gained by looking at the presented findings. One can clearly state that the homogeneity of interests and personal types transforms the understanding of the idea of WLB. Another interesting insight is revealed by the fact that aspects, such as adhering to the organizational culture, creating and maintaining a sense of belonging, seem to be essential for

the consultant's satisfaction. Furthermore, considering that actors within the life environment make sense of the idea of WLB in a different way than the consultant entails a great potential for conflicts. Therefore, an understanding environment, that might even have homogeneous work interests, is certainly beneficial. Furthermore, one can conclude that the life environment influences how a consultant understands the idea of WLB and changes within the life environment such as divorce or birth of a child, immediately alter the perception of this idea. In case of such external shocks, interests outside of the work domain become suddenly more present and relevant, thus the feeling of belonging diminishes. Consequently, work itself becomes less interesting and going the extra mile for career purposes appears less desirable. Hence, the entire system becomes disturbed and dissatisfaction can kick in. If this momentary imbalance cannot be equilibrated in the short term, individuals might leave the company.

The Consultant's view on their work: 'Work before leisure'
Looking at the aforementioned aspects within the consultants' lives, one can identify a certain pattern which is best described under the category 'work before leisure'. This section presents how the idea of WLB impacts the consultants' mindsets and their actions.

Work demands a huge amount of flexibility which consequently leads to the fact that leisure time is always structured in a flexible way around work.

You cannot plan a week ahead, maybe two-three days but not more (C 8)

Individuals over time accepted the above-mentioned statement which leads to the phenomenon that everyone trims back their expectations concerning WLB.

In the first place, you prioritize work and then there is not much space for disappointments. Since you are going into the new week with the expectation to have no free time, you are really happy if finally something works out (C 10)

Our findings show that as long as a few important needs are satisfied such as getting enough sleep, one is generally satisfied. Although the employees are in a way aware of their sacrifice, they are still pursuing this behaviour as it is a sort of self-protection mechanism.

I do not really expect to be able to do much during the week. It works for me because then I am not really disappointed if something does not work out (C 7)

Another interesting aspect is that the interviewed consultants have a different attitude towards the definition of work. For instance, one consultant stated:

From time to time I check my work emails at night as well as on the weekend. But I do not think that it is work, it is just a normal habit (C 4)

Furthermore, the consultants emphasized that leisure time, especially during the week, does not necessary mean that one can relax. Most often work aspects are still present in their mind, often leading to do some work in their leisure time in order to better cope with it. The following quote summarizes the previous mentioned aspects quite well:

You try to accept how things are to be better off. Nevertheless, I guess things here are how they are. Once you signed your working contract, you are standing down from some part of your self-determination (C 6)

Occasionally the downsides of working in this industry become evident. For instance, some consultants stated that they cancelled planned events, such as going to a concert, since they had to work extra time on a project. Another interesting statement which became surfaced repeatedly were the diverging perceptions of young and more senior employees. The following statement depicts one of the most drastic opinions, gathered in the findings.

Absolutely, I remember the time being a newcomer. I was very ambitious and tried to exceed expectations. But times change, you know. I did this job for six years now and to be honest, I am done with it. At the moment, I am looking for a new job opportunity (M 2)

Analysis of 'Work before Leisure'

It can be claimed that the reduction of expectation serves as a self-protection mechanism and in cases of conflicts, work always trumps non-work. Consequently, one can claim that the organization's interest managed to prevail over the employee's interests. As a result, the whole setting 'work comes first' becomes manifest in the employee's mind. Thereby, differentiation needs to be established between junior and senior employees. At early stages of their career, employees accept and even pursue that way of working. In some way, they are eager to adapt to the prevailing habits and culture, thus they are willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of being integrated and legitimized. However, looking at the more senior employees, the tone and the excitement when speaking about their work starts to shift. Moreover, it is easy to see that the motivation and interests of the two groups differ drastically, especially in comparison to the more senior employees who have already more experience within the industry. Owing to their maturity, many of them start to alter their perspective, reflect about happenings and thus often amend their attitude towards the idea and management of WLB.

Discussion

The findings displayed several influencing factors which will be linked in the following to the fundamental question of boundary work, comprising how individuals are structuring their roles in life and how they are managing the boundaries between them (Nippert-Eng, 1996). By looking at how the consultant's role boundaries are constituted, we will be able to understand how and especially why the idea of WLB is understood in the form it is. In other words, by looking at the theory of boundary work, one will be able to understand how the distinct factors of the translation process, as set out within the findings, are altering the consultant's mindset and thus can illuminate why consultants attain their idea of WLB. After discussing the insights about boundary work, the link to translation theory will be drawn and elaborated upon.

As presented within the theoretical framework, boundary work claims that two distinct approaches on how to manage role boundaries exist, namely segmentation and integration (Ashforth et al., 2000). With respect to Work-Life-Balance and the challenge to satisfy demands from both domains (work and life domain), both approaches have means to realize this. WLB following segmentation as a boundary approach can be realized through clearly keeping up the boundaries, thereby being mentally, behaviourally and physically engaged in

only one domain (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Thereby, individuals are able to satisfy their work demand while being at work and satisfying the demands from their life environment while not being within the work domain. WLB, following integration as a boundary approach, is clearly focusing on dropping boundaries, thus individuals do not differentiate in time and space which role to enact at a certain time (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005). This entails that individuals can engage continually in satisfying both demands, hereby maintaining their perceived balance of work and life demands. In a nutshell, both ways point out a path on how to manage one's idea of WLB.

Integration of role boundaries

In relation to the findings of our case study, it becomes evident that consultants are enacting an extreme form of the integrative approach (cf. Nippert-Eng, 1996). In fact, our case study provides evidence that within the investigated organization, consultants are impelled to pursue the integrative approach. This claim can be justified by looking at the themes within our findings that emerged through our interviews.

Initially, it can be notified that many factors allow the consultant to decide freely on how to approach the whole idea of WLB. In theory, both ways, role segmentation and role integration are feasible. The combination of technology, the existence of WLB practices and the nature of the consultant's everyday work allow the consultant to follow one of the two approaches. For instance, the employee has the free choice to pick the working location, enabled by having the necessary technology such as smartphone and laptop, available. The existence of WLB practices such as the possibility to work from home, further increases the consultants' autonomy towards the management of their WLB. Therefore, the consultants can choose in theory to either follow the segmented or the integrated approach.

However, in practice more factors, such as the management's interest, come into play. As the findings illustrated, management desires a highly committed and hard-working employee who makes use of all abilities to satisfy client demands. In order to do so, the employee needs to work where and when it is demanded, hereby implying a smooth and easy process of transitioning between various domains and roles in life (Clark, 2000). Moreover, within the organizational culture, the notion is anchored that everyone can work from everywhere but also has to work from everywhere. Hence, working while being situated outside the work domain is expected, contracting the general idea of the role segmentation approach (cf. Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Moreover, the organizational structure clearly highlights the importance of the partner. Owing to their powerful standing, their agenda is driving the consultant's behaviour. As shown, the partner values the realisation of project objectives and customer centricity, urging to show flexibility and agility. Together, they indicate to follow a role integration approach to satisfy this demand. A further aspect related to partners is their perception towards the value creation of WLB practices. The findings indicate that WLB practices which encourage the segmentation of work and life domains are often neither desired, nor supported by the partner. Therefore, consultants developed the perception that following WLB practices that trigger role segmentation poorly entail benefits as they contradict with the partner's vision.

An additional influencing factor is the project structure which naturally creates short-termism, thus indicating constant changes of demands within the work domain. Due to this

changing environment, routines and clear boundaries between work and life cannot be established or maintained, suggesting that the role segmentation approach is hardly possible to be successfully pursued over time.

Another aspect refers to the role of technology within the organizational context. The fact that work-technology can be used for private purposes as well, leads to the dispersion of boundaries between work and life domains. For many consultants work aspects become a constant element of their life domain, aggravating the task to disconnect oneself from the demands and expectations of the work domain. The implications are so far-reaching that the work domain "invades" times and days which were normally solely reserved for satisfying demands of the life domain. For instance, consultants tend to check their emails on weekends and even while on vacation or sick leave. Consequently, one can state that technology facilitates the consultants' transition process between their various roles and domains in life which clearly favours an integrative approach (Clark, 2000).

Summarizing the aforementioned aspects, it is obvious that the approach of role segmentation is neither desired by management, nor feasible to be pursued in a successful manner. Our analysis of the findings display that this notion is internalized within and reinforced by the organizational culture of Solver AG. Combining this insight with the fact that adhering to the organizational culture is meaningful for all consultants, it is necessary for consultants to pursue role integration.

This insight can be related to Ashforth et al.'s (2000) notion of role identification. As many individuals' profile is being a consultant, they adapt to the behaviours and enact the mindset of the unrelentingly hard working and committed consultant that is desired by management and also reinforced by organizational practices. This aspect of role identification is further enforced by the widespread homogeneity of interest among the consultants which implies a high degree of situational strength (Ashforth et al., 2000). Moreover, as pointed out, many consultants showed intentions to adjust to common practices within the organization, thus underlining Solver AG's pervasive and relevant organizational culture.

Boundary permeability & role flexibility

In order to add another perspective to support the presented claim, one can further look at the aspects of boundary permeability and role flexibility which facilitate to understand the consultant's approach towards the management of the idea of WLB (cf. Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2005).

The notion of role flexibility relates to the enactment of one's role such as your work-role, specifically to the question of how dependent a role is to the aspects of time and space (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Based on our findings, one can state that the consultant's role boundaries are hardly defined and the enforcement of boundaries in practice is often not possible, triggered by technology and management interests. Especially the aspect of technology disconnects role boundaries from spatial or temporal constraints. Consequently, the degree of role flexibility is in principle unlimited. The only "place" where role boundaries are still relevant are in the consultant's mind. In other words, the only way to limit the degree of role flexibility is by defining strict boundaries of work in one's mind and by enforcing those boundaries in practice. However, one can observe that many consultants, especially in the beginning of their career,

are struggling with this task, since the organizational environment is working towards an integrative role approach embracing role flexibility.

In relation to boundary permeability one can claim that consultants are often engaged within their work role while being physically located in another domain. As shown, aspects such as working from home, when being sick or working on weekends enforce boundary permeability by using the life domain for work purposes. The findings also displayed that consultants are quite free in being engaged in private matters while being physically located within the work-role, thus emphasizing the two-sided permeability. A complementary aspect which increases the degree of boundary permeability is the fact that many consultants structure their private life around work by having mostly friends from work or by having a relationship with someone from work.

Summarizing this section, one can clearly observe that the consultant's work role is shaped by a high degree of role flexibility and boundary permeability, exacerbating the task to pursue a segmented role approach (cf. Ashforth et al., 2000).

Role integration and its consequences
In the following the insights of the previous sections will be linked back to the management of WLB. The presented insights indicate that the only option to manage the idea of WLB within Solver AG is through being a role integrator. The presented premise is having consequences for all consultants in the organization.

This can be illustrated by looking at newcomers entering the organization. Two approaches to deal with the demand of being a role integrator exist. In principle, option one in order to successfully manage the idea of WLB, consists in adjusting to the idea of high role integration from a cognitive and behavioural perspective. Practically speaking, consultants engage in adjusting their life environment to create homogeneous interests. For instance, based on our case, new employees start to align their circle of friends with work colleagues thus diminishing conflicts of interests. Through this, acceptance and sympathy for one's own relation to work and life is clearly altered. Furthermore, embracing the business model with the entailed work requirements can clearly ease to develop dedication and indulgence for work. As a consequence, this entails that the work domain tends to become predominant within the relationship between work and life.

In contrast to this is option two, which consists in not adjusting to the high integrative approach. In case, consultants attempt to follow a segmented approach, one will face a life of continuous struggles, since keeping up the segmented approach involves high efforts and costs in their situation. Pursuing the segmentation in a successful manner entails working against prevailing cultural values. Moreover, satisfying management which is valuing commitment and flexibility becomes a difficult task. Dissatisfaction will arise and consequently frustration evolves. Most likely, individuals will decide to leave the organization at some point. Consequently, this illustration emphasizes the fact that the segmentation approach is not an option within the frame of the consulting company Solver AG.

This premise can also be related to more senior employees at Solver AG. The findings indicate that over time, people try to focus on having more time for life domain purposes, often triggered by life-changing happenings, such as the birth of a baby. However, our case

demonstrates that following an integrative approach while aiming to have more time for private matters, leads often to failure and to the decision to leave Solver AG.

Summarizing this paragraph, being a role integrator entails the possibility to manage the idea of WLB and to attain a balanced work-life relationship. Ultimately, it is an individual's choice to determine which relative level of dedication to the work and the life domain can still be considered as balanced. As our findings provided evidence, individuals' perceptions are varying, thus underlining the subjectivity of the whole topic. In the beginning of one's career, work interests are prevailing, such as starting a successful professional career and other interests are suppressed or adjusted to match work demands. With more seniority and the addressed occurrence of life-changing events the mindset towards a balanced level is altered, thus underlining the on-goingness of the process of WLB management.

The process of Work-Life-Balance
The following chapter will link back to the general aspects of translation theory and to what insights can be drawn from the consultants' process of translating the idea of WLB into their individual context. Our findings and the discussion demonstrated that the perception and the management of the idea of WLB is a constantly ongoing process of translating the idea into one's own context and making sense of it (cf. Callon, 1984). As demonstrated, even after many years consultants are still engaging in this process as they find themselves in constant negotiations and continuous reflection of how to understand and manage their idea of WLB.

Owing to continuous change of contextual factors such as life environment, work requirements or organizational culture, the translation is never terminated but constantly present. Furthermore, the findings clearly display the involvement of non-human and human actors such as the management team or actors within the consultant's life environment which all have different interests in mind, hereby influencing the consultant's process of understanding the idea of WLB (cf. Murdoch, 1997). Those distinct interests are creating conflicts and a situation of constant negotiations comprises the topic of WLB. Foremost technology, as non-human actor, occupies a paradoxical role by often mediating but also provoking and evoking conflicts of interests in terms of the management of WLB. Consequently, one can only support Law's (1992) notion that all actors, regardless their human or non-human nature, have interests which create an environment of constant negotiations. Owing to different understandings and different interests, there is clearly no universal description, neither for the process of translating the idea of WLB, nor for the definition of WLB, nor for the management of it. The translation is clearly depending on subjective perspectives and on human and non-human actors with their respective interests. Additionally, contextual factors such as the organizational set-up, vary within and from organization to organization. Contextual changes thus alter the understanding of the translated idea of WLB as well as the translator itself (cf. Czarniawska & Jörges, 1996). Therefore, the mentioned factors clearly do not allow to normalize in any way how the translation process is happening.

Conclusion and implications

By following a translation theory approach, we were able to reveal the complexity and ambiguity of the idea of WLB. Therefore, in relation to our research question, we state that the idea of WLB is exposed to constant transformation and change within the specific organizational context. Consequently, no comprehensive description of how the idea of WLB is translated and managed within the consultant's organizational context exists. Rather, one should acknowledge and embrace the fact that every individual possesses their own unique version of the idea. Moreover, our case revealed that the management of role boundaries significantly influences how the idea of WLB is perceived and managed.

This paper contributes to the literature on WLB management in several aspects. Although it has been extensively discussed how WLB can be defined and what consequences it entails, little attention has yet been paid to depict how the translation of the idea of WLB actually unfolds in practice. We have clearly depicted how consultants understand and manage WLB in practice, together with decision making influencers. Our study thus responds to the call for more empirical evidence on how WLB is understood in practice. Moreover, we demonstrated the problems and challenges involved in dealing with WLB management from the employee perspective.

Looking at how our research aligns with the existing relevant academic literature, we discuss and reflect upon the validity of three major claims that were brought up by scholars. Firstly, several researchers, such as Tausig and Fenwick (2001) or Guest (2002), highlighted the subjective character of the concept of WLB. In fact, our study results are in line with this claim. Owing to the variety of perceptions and contexts disclosed in our study, we revealed the subjectivity of the consultant's understanding of the idea of WLB. However, factors, such as the organizational context, clearly limit individuals in managing their WLB, in our case study expressed through the imposed form of role boundary integration. We urge future researchers to further investigate which factors constrain individuals in managing their WLB and how this affects their understanding, as we believe that more valuable insights can be extracted and revealed. Secondly, amongst others, Beauregard & Henry (2009) and Judiesch & Lyness (1999) claimed that a wide gap exists between WLB practices and the use of them owing to the association with signs of weakness, fear and negative career perspectives. Indeed, our study partially confirms this. We also identified the existence of this gap and we agree that it is partially caused by fear and negative perspective. However, also the level of seniority accounted for not making use of many practices since many organizational members only had short history with the company. Furthermore, the consultants' restriction towards the management of role boundaries additionally augments the identified gap. Hereby, we urge researchers to further investigate this issue, since our study indicates that more aspects cause this gap between the offer and the practical usage of WLB practices. Thirdly, Hill et al. (1998) and Hoffman & Cowan (2008) stated that the offered WLB practices blur even more the boundaries between work and life thus allowing the work domain to influence more aspects of the employee's life. As a matter of fact, we also found some evidence for this claim in our study. Especially triggered by the use of technology, in line with organizational culture and offered WLB practices, we notified that work-related aspects are more and more present within

the consultant's life domain. An interesting aspect requiring further investigation is whether organizations are aware of this effect and evoke it on purpose.

As pointed out, our findings confirm to a great extent many of the claims from previous research. However, it is not only our intention to simply provide evidence to confirm certain claims, we want to go further and give some practical suggestions based on our gained insights. Moreover, since we investigated the phenomenon of WLB from a processual perspective, we believe that some helpful learnings can be extracted.

Due to the fact that the perception and management of WLB is highly subjective and alters over time, organizations need to continually reinforce efforts and consistently question and reflect on their practices and offerings. Therefore, organizations should acknowledge that dealing with the issue of WLB is clearly not a onetime investment or undertaking. In relation to this point, organizations should consider focusing on managing WLB related topics in a central manner, providing the same rules and guidelines for everyone within the organization, thereby easing the process of practically implementing all WLB practices in the same manner, regardless of the superior's preferences or opinion. Furthermore, organizations need to embrace the diversity in meaning and sense-making of the employees. As demonstrated, role boundaries, primarily the cognitive mindset, are an influencing factor and can hamper or facilitate WLB translation. Therefore, it might be wise for organizations to already engage in the hiring process in determining an employee's mindset and thus draw conclusions also regarding to the compatibility with the prevailing organizational values.

In conclusion, one can argue that the idea of WLB has made its way into organizations and their employees' mind. Within the organization, the idea is constantly exposed to other conceptions, values and practices, leading to various understandings of the idea of WLB. Organizations and researchers alike should embrace this ambiguity and richness of meaning and act upon this premise.

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