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Work-life Conflicts in the AEC Industry
- A Comparative Analysis

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A B S T R A C T

The Architectural, Engineering and Construction (AEC) industry has a culture of long working hours that sometimes extend to weekends. As a result, construction employees find it challenging to achieve a balance between their work and personal lives. It is believed that there is rarely a clear separation between employees' work and personal life in the AEC industry. This paper suggests that in order to attract and retain a talented workforce, AEC organizations have to cater for the diverse needs of employees with regard to work-life balance. This paper presents the results of a survey of both professional and managerial employees' perspective on work-life conflict issues in private and public AEC organizations. Perspectives were found to differ, although not significantly, by employees' experience, leadership experience, age and gender. Furthermore, most survey respondents noted that their employers did not have a policy or program in place supporting work-life balance initiatives. Finally, although the AEC industry is making strides to improve work-life balance, the effort is lagging behind other industry sectors in providing policies and programs to promote work-life balance through flexible work hours and various other means.

Keywords: AEC industry, work-life balance, work-family conflict

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining a proper work-life balance is essential in ensuring employee effectiveness in any industry, more so in Architectural, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industry for the reasons discussed in the ensuing paragraphs. When such a balance is achieved, job performance consequently increases along with job satisfaction and occupational health of individuals (Raiden and Cavern, 2011). On the contrary, negative effects such as burnout, stress, and concentration lapses may often be witnessed amongst employees that fail to strike the appropriate balance. The results of these negative effects, according to Lingard et al. (2010), may manifest themselves as reduced productivity, absenteeism, health issues and substance abuse, eventually leading to higher turnover rates amongst personnel.

Research Problem

According to Lingard et al. (2008), the challenge of maintaining a balance between work and life in construction has been identified as one of the most important management issues of the 21st century. In one of the recent studies,

32% of employees reported work-family balance as their leading job concern (Dixon and Bruening, 2006). A reliable measure of work-life balance is work-family conflict. Consequently, it is significant to study work-family conflict (WFC) when assessing work-life balance because commonly if there is a lack of balance between work and life, there will be a high level of work-family conflict. The nature of the AEC industry characterized by non-traditional work hours and often-extensive travel presents an ideal environment where work-family conflict thrives. Projects in the AEC industry tend to be awarded on a short notice and in a competitive environment. This requires that project teams have to be mobilized rapidly with an appropriate blend of skills and abilities to meet the project demands quickly. Therefore, companies involved need to respond to sudden changes in workload, as there can be no guarantee of how much work will be undertaken at any particular time (Dainty and Loosemore, 2012). This intense mobilization and uncertainty of mobilization period and having to balance staff and workload can produce stress and burden on not only line employees but also their management teams. With the varying degree of responsibility at different managerial levels, operational at the bottom to the strategic at the top, it is presumed that work-family conflict correspondingly increases with the increase in responsibility.

Challenges and New Directions

Working in the AEC industry often demands significant amounts of effort to achieve project objectives (Lingard et al., 2007). This represents one of the most prominent challenges in preventing workers from achieving a work-life balance. Personnel, especially those working in a project-based context, might be subjected to long and quite often irregular working hours to meet the tight deadlines that characterize the industry. Consequently, people working in this industry are faced with the challenge of establishing an effective balance between their work and external lives since they spend a lot of time and effort fulfilling the obligations of their projects. This in turn directly correlates to the time and effort that is left available for the family.

Furthermore, the construction industry is characterized by considerable amounts of physical exertion, which results in both physical and mental exhaustion (MacKenzie, 2008). In such regard, personnel working in the industry are often tired at the end of their working day/shift. Much of their remaining time is consequently spent resting in preparation for their next shift. The problem is exacerbated by the long shifts that exceed regular working hours such that little time is left for rest and recreational activities while a project is being executed. Workers therefore lack the opportunities that is available in most of the other industries to spend time with their families and pursue other interests in their lives. The harsh economic environment that the industry operates in, not to mention the existential threats to many companies due to frequent economic downturns, compounds this problem. As such, construction companies are often forced to optimize their staffing levels such that fewer workers are required to carry out vast responsibilities; a factor which often wears out employees since they spend a lot of energy performing these duties (Lingard et al, 2007).

Another related challenge to the attainment of this balance is in the dispersed or remote locations of projects whereby workers often have to travel and spend time away from activities and persons of their interest (Raiden and

Cavern, 2011). Their ability to spend quality time with their family and loved ones in such activities is challenged by their location such that their focus is solely captured by their occupational responsibilities. Workers consequently are unable to achieve an effective work-life balance, hindering their own well-being and their ability to perform effectively for their employers.

In drawing up solutions to this problem, the recognition of the similarities between life and work should be recognized (Healey, 2008). This is in addition to the companies acknowledging the need for "new" psychological contracts, specific policies and programs to deal with the same. Some of the considerations include, companies should set work time limits to allow workers to get personal time whereas workers should look for specific jobs that they enjoy and appeal to them to ensure a positive work-life balance (Batt and Valcour, 2003).

Significance of Study

Work-life conflicts create job stress for the individuals. Thus, work-life conflict could directly or indirectly incur economic cost both for the individuals and the organizations. According to an American Psychological Association report, seventy-four percent (74%) of employees reported that work is a significant source of stress and one in five has missed work because of stress (APA, 2008). In 2001, the median number of days away from work as a result of anxiety, stress, and related disorders was 25 which was substantially greater than the median of 6 or all nonfatal injury and illness cases in the U.S. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). Job stress is estimated to cost U.S. industry more than $300 billion a year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, and medical, legal and insurance costs (Rosch, 2001). Besides, a later research done by Stewart et al. in 2003 estimated that productivity losses due to personal or family health problems cost U.S. employers $225.8 billion a year. Apparently, work-life conflicts have been causing issues both for industrial participants and their organizations. Thus, it is well worth research from both academic as well as industry's perspectives.

This study is based off of a few prior thoroughly discussed work-life conflicts and work-family conflicts researches. The study is significant in seeking and identifying industrial practice to resolve work life conflicts. It is useful to examine the actual condition of work and life of people of different age groups, gender, experience level, management experience, etc. The research with its limited scope revealed the level of impact of work life conflicts. Furthermore, the responses to open-ended questions from the survey participants regarding the resolution of work life conflicts provided insights and possible future research directions.

Literature Review

A few prior research studies in the context of Australian construction industry in the area of work life conflicts have been conducted. Lingard et al. (2007) investigated the impact of reducing the length of the working week but increasing the length of the working day in a case study, which found that the alternative work schedules could ease the construction employees' work-life conflicts. Similarly, Lingard et al. (2012) investigated the work–life balance in a dynamic project-based industry. Fluctuating experiences of work life conflicts were captured using a weekly

work–life record. Strong relationships between work hours and work–life conflicts over time were found. In yet another study, Lingard et al. (2015) compared the quality of work-life experiences of workers in construction firms of differing sizes, explored the work conditions, and circumstances that impact upon the work-life experiences of workers in small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Australian construction industry. The survey results indicated that those respondents who reported working for a construction firm with between 16 and 99 employees reported significantly higher work-life interference than workers in organizations employing 15 or less or more than 100 workers.

Yip and Rowlinson (2009) investigated and compared the experience of job burnout among 249 construction engineers working within consulting and contracting organizations in Hong Kong. The sample in this study scored highest in burnout among nine other occupations in national samples, with engineers working within contracting organizations reporting higher levels of burnout than their fellow engineers working within consulting organizations. In a similar study by Francis et al. (2013), a comparison of the experiences of employees working in construction for a public-sector organization and a private sector company was undertaken which showed that private sector employees reported higher levels of work interference with family and/or personal life than public sector employees. A more recent study conducted by Turner and Mariani (2016) explored the work-family conflicts of projects managers working in the construction industry to find out how they managed their work-family interface. The researchers found that practitioner's role in the project had an impact on one's work-life interference, to be more specific the working hours, accountability, and the stress arising from accountability associated with the role all plays important part when striking the work-life balance. Participants from that research identified four key strategies used to manage their work-family interface: managing work-based stress, having a supportive partner, prioritizing non-work time for family, and trading off activities.

In order for an AEC organization to achieve occupational health and organizational effectiveness, work-life balance should be given top priority. This has emerged as one of the most important issues in management today. Through work-life balance, there is an increase in job performance and job satisfaction and as a consequence, the occupational health and safety of employees is greatly improved. Failure to achieve work-life balance can result in stress, burnout and concentration lapses in employees.

Several construction companies have taken up the issue of work-life balance seriously and have been compelled to take action. Dainty and Loosemore (2012) agree on the fact that when the workforce is affected, it translates to output and definitely the company stands to lose. In drawing up solutions to this problem, the recognition of the similarities between life and work should be recognized (Healey, 2008). This is in addition to the companies acknowledging the need for "new" psychological contracts, specific policies and programs to deal with the same. Some of the considerations include, companies should set work time limits to allow workers get more personal time. Batt and Valcour (2003) advise workers to look for specific jobs that they enjoy and appeal to them to ensure a positive work-life balance.

The company or employers should organize and manage time well for all employees to have their personal time

free from day to day work responsibilities. The family should be recognized and ample time should be dedicated to employees to spend time with their families. The employers should provide leave and other forms of vacations to free up the workers from exhaustion and pressures (Walker, 2011). A cordial relationship should be established between the workers and the employer. According to Aziz and Hafez (2013), a company should always evaluate, balance and improve the work time according to specific situations of the demands of different jobs. Efficiency should be instilled through workers performing the duties within the allotted time of work (Dhar, 2008). The employers who do not have families should take it upon themselves to understand workers who have families and family responsibilities.

Work-Family Conflict

In order to get a better understanding of the term "work-life balance" it may be helpful to look closely at what it entails. Work-life balance is the umbrella under which work-family conflict (WFC) falls. It is assumed if an individual has work-life balance, there will be no work-family conflict. Terms used to describe an unbalanced work-life relationship are work-life conflict and work-life collision (Allan et al., 2007).

Work-family conflict is defined as "a type of interrole conflict wherein at least some work and family responsibilities are not compatible and have resultant effects on each domain" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). When talking about work-family conflict the impact of work on family and vice-versa should be considered. Researchers distinguish between two directions of WFC: work interfering with family (WIF) life and family interfering with work (FIW) life (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005). It is assumed that if there is an imbalance between these two domains conflict will exist. Much of the literature regarding work and life is based in a conflict perspective (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggested that WFC can take three forms as follows: (i) time-based conflict, which occurs when time spent on activities in one role prohibits the fulfillment of responsibilities in another role; (ii) behavior-based conflict, which occurs when behavior in one role cannot be adjusted to be compatible with behavior patterns in another role; and (iii) Strain-based conflict, which occurs when pressures from one role interfere with fulfilling the requirements of another role. This research study found the work family conflict dimensions put forth by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) to be appropriate to be used in devising the instrument to measure work-life balance. The next section discusses how these concepts were used to formulate the objectives of the study.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

With the overview of the problem defined, the purpose of this study is to supplement the existing literature on work-life balance by analyzing work impacting family (WIF) and family impacting work (FIW) of people employed in AEC related jobs and outline some of the ways by which a balance between work and life could be achieved.

The objectives of the study are:

• To assess the work-family conflict levels of employees in the AEC industry.

• To determine if there are significant differences between male vs. female; experienced vs. inexperienced, private vs. public employees in terms of work-family conflict.

• To enlist some solutions as suggested by the respondents to strike a positive balance between work and family life.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedures

An online survey was the data collection method utilized for this paper with invitations distributed through e-mail, Facebook, and Linked-in. In total, 146 invitations were sent out covering participants both from the public and private sector in the AEC industry. Out of these, 72 individuals completed the survey (4 participants provided partially completed responses and therefore were not considered in the analysis). The response rate is 49.31% with an approximately equal distribution from public and private sector. The responses were from companies based in North Carolina.

Instruments

Every participant was asked to complete a total of 20 questions in the survey, the content of which was divided into three major parts:

i) The survey included questions related to the professional and managerial experience in terms of years worked, type of industry, gender and age. The aim of these questions was to get an understanding of the makeup of the employees participating in the survey and how these variables ultimately affected the work-life balance.

ii) The main component of the survey consisted of questions on how work impacted employees' personal and family life and vice-versa.

iii) The last part of the survey asked the participants regarding their opinion on how a positive work-life balance was maintained. This part also consisted of a question regarding the presence of a policy or program, if any, in their organization aimed at promoting work-life balance.

The major portion of this survey was focused on analyzing the level of work family conflict (WFC). In order to analyze the work-family conflict, some sort of theoretical measurement instrument was required. For this purpose, it was decided to use a scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000). This scale comprised of six subscales. Each direction of WFC (i.e., work impacting family, and family impacting work) is nested within three dimensions of conflict (i.e., time-based, behavior-based, and strain-based.) However, for this study behavior-based dimension was excluded primarily due to the complexity of assessing the relationship of behavior on the work life conflict.

Behavior-based conflict may occur when people are expected to exhibit behavior styles (such as impersonality, logic, power, authority) that are perhaps incompatible with behaviors desired by their family members (Burke and Bradshaw, 1981). Therefore, only four subscales, namely time related WIF, time related FIW, strain related WIF and strain related FIW are considered for this measurement as shown in Table I. A five-point Likert scale ranging from one (never) to five (always) was used to rate how often the participants experienced these work family conflict circumstances in their occupations.

TABLE I. QUESTIONS MEASURING THE LEVEL OF WFC IN FOUR VARIABLES

WFC Variable	Survey Question: In a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always) rate the following:
Time related WIF	On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away from my personal interest. My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with family/friends. The amount of time my job takes up make it difficult to fulfil family. Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities.
Time related FIW	My personal demands are so great that they take away from my work. My personal life takes up time that I would like to spend at work.
Strain related WIF	After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do.
Strain related FIW	I am often too tired to work because of the things I have to do at home. Family related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties.

Other qualitative assessment type questions comprising the survey were about the employee's perception on what they believed was the key to maintaining a positive work-life balance and what kind of policies/programs, if any, their organization had in place to promote this.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographics and Employment Information

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze specific demographic variables of the participants, and are depicted in Table II. The overall sample consisted of 72 participants. Of those, 82% were male, and the rest (18%) were female.

TABLE II DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE PERSONAL BACKGROUND VARIABLES (N=72)

Background Variable	Category	N	(%)
Gender	M	59	81.9
	F	13	18.1
Age (Mean, SD)	18-25	0	0.0
	26-35	19	26.4
	36-50	30	41.7
	51-64	22	30.6
	65+	1	1.4

TABLE II DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE PERSONAL BACKGROUND VARIABLES (N=72) (CONTINUED)

Background Variable	Category	N	(%)
Industry	Public	36	50
	Private	36	50
Management Experience	0-3	14	19.4
	4-6	12	16.7
	7-10	12	16.7
	11-20	12	25.0
	20+	18	19.4
	N/A	14	2.8
Industry Experience	0-3	4	5.6
	4-6	7	9.7
	7-10	10	13.9
	11-20	25	34.7

The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 36-50 years. The participants were equally divided between public and private employers. Over 70% of the respondents had an experience of more than ten years working in the AEC industry. About 45% of the respondents had more than 10 years of managerial experience of some form.

Work-Family Conflict Scores

Table III shows the mean WFC scores for each of the four types of WFC variables, a scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996) and adopted for the present study compared with scores from previous research that

TABLE III. Comparison of WFC Scores with Other Previous Studies (Adapted from Lingard et al., 2010)

Study	Industry/ Sample	Category	Mean Time related WIF	Mean Time related FIW	Mean Strain related WIF	Mean Strain related FIW
Present Study	AEC Employees in NC	Male	3.20	2.30	3.17	2.09
		Female	3.28	1.82	3.25	1.06
Lingard et al. (2010)	Construction Workers in Australia	Salaried	3.16	2.18	3.21	2.07
		Waged	3.64	2.34	3.35	2.34
Carlson et al. (2000)	MBA graduates, US	Male	2.91	1.77	2.45	1.71
		Female	2.82	2.01	2.81	1.93
Bruck et al. (2002)	Hospital Workers in USA		2.70	2.27	3.04	2.09
Carlson et al. (2003)	MBA Graduates, US		3.02	1.99	2.81	1.82
Madsen (2006)	Multiple for Profit Organizations	Teleworkers	2.21		2.01	
		Non-teleworkers	2.25		2.42	
van Daalen et al.(2006)	Various industries in the Netherlands		2.42	1.89	2.24	1.68

Note: The measurement scale ranged from 1 (no impact) to 5 (maximum impact).

measured WFC variables using the same scale. Notable observations from this research compared to previous research is that AEC professionals reported higher levels in every dimension of WFC (time related work impacting family and vice-versa and strain-related work affecting family and vice-versa). Mean levels of time and strain related WIF and FIW of this study were comparable to that of the study conducted by Lingard et al. (2010) which was for construction workers in Australia. With this general observation, the present study further explored the mean score of the WFC variables across different categories of AEC professionals, such as gender, age, experience and employer type, which is discussed next.

Mean WFC Scores

A popular nonparametric test to compare outcomes between two independent groups is the Mann Whitney U test. Similarly, Kruskal Wallis test is used to compare outcomes among more than two independent groups. These two tests were used to find out whether demographic factors had any influence on work-family conflict. The four demographic factors that have been considered are gender, age, employer type, and years of managerial experience. Figure I shows respondents' average levels for four variables of WFC compared by respondents' gender.
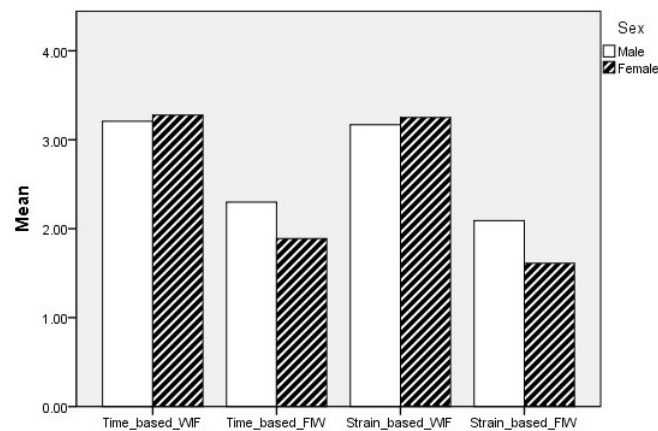

FIGURE I. MEAN LEVEL OF WFC BY GENDER

Male respondents reported lower level of time related WIF (3.20) than female (3.28) although both groups acknowledged more than average level (3.0) of conflict in their work-family. When tested for statistical significance using Mann Whitney U test, the p-value is found to be 0.42 and therefore the result is not significant at $p < 0.05$. Similarly, male respondents reported lower level (3.17) of strain-based WIF than female (3.25). Again the difference was found to be statistically insignificant (p-value=0.85).

On the other hand, female respondents reported lower level of both time based FIW (1.82) compared to male counterparts (2.30) and strain-based FIW (1.56) compared to that of male counterparts (2.09). When tested for statistical significance, it was found that time related FIW was not significantly different between the two groups (p=0.07) whereas the strain related FIW was statistically significantly different (p=0.01) at significance level of

p<0.05. It can be inferred that female professionals reported significantly less impact of family life on their work than their male counterpart.
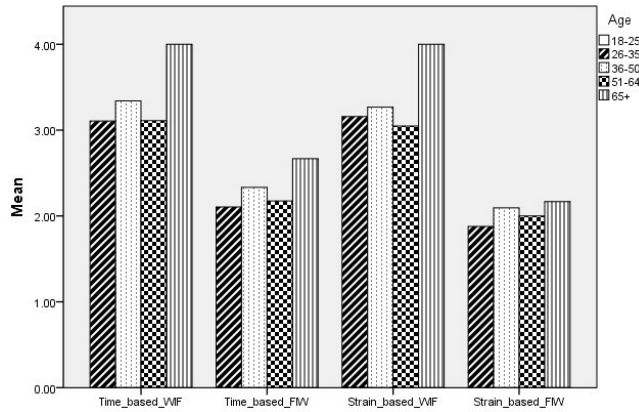

FIGURE II. MEAN LEVEL OF WFC BY AGE GROUP

Figure II shows respondents' average levels of four variables of WFC compared by respondents' age.

The responses were analysed to explore the difference among the age groups in terms of the four dimensions of WFC. Kruskal Wallis test was performed to evaluate the differences of opinion between different age groups. Time-based WIF proved that the difference between the group was statistically insignificant (p-value=0.37, p<0.05). Similarly, significance level of strain based WIF (p=0.68), time-based FIW (p=0.49) and strain based FIW (p=0.54) all indicate that there is no significant difference between the various age groups in terms of WFC variables measured.

Figure III shows respondents' average levels of four dimensions of WFC by type of employer.
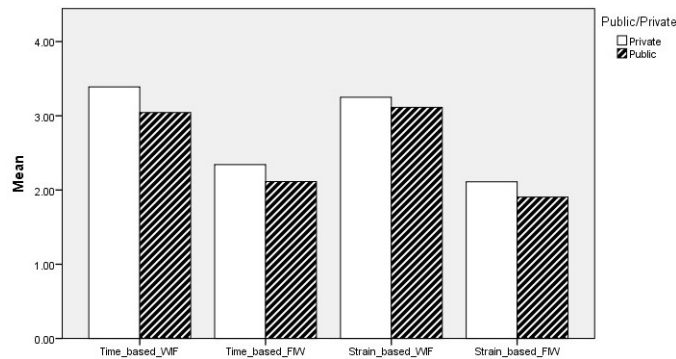

FIGURE III. MEAN LEVEL OF WFC BY EMPLOYER TYPE

Comparing private employer versus public, it can be seen from Figure 3 that in all dimensions of WFC, public employees reported less conflicts compared to their counterparts from private companies. Exploring further to investigate if the difference was significant using Mann Whitney U test, only time based WIF was found to be

significant between public and private employees (p-value=0.03, p<0.05). None of the other WFC dimensions considered (time-based and strain based conflicts) were statistically significant between these two groups of employers at the significance level of p<0.05.

Figure IV shows respondents' average levels of four dimensions of WFC by the number of years served in managerial position.
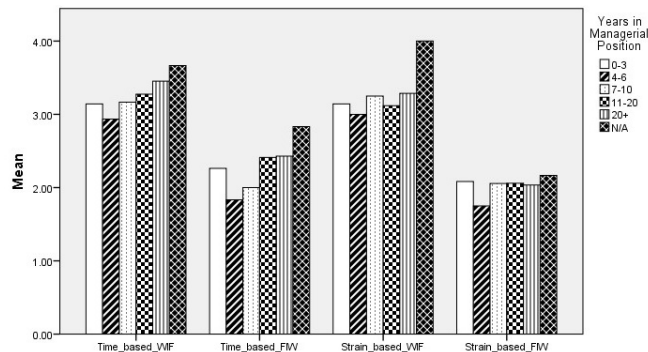

FIGURE IV. MEAN LEVEL OF WFC DIMENSIONS BY YEARS IN MANAGERIAL POSITION

One can see a general pattern in Figure IV that except for the employees with the least managerial experience (0-3 years), people with more years of managerial experience reported higher levels of WFC in all the four measured variables. It is worth noting that employees who had no managerial experience reported the highest level of WFC in all the measured variables.

Upon further exploring this generally observed phenomenon using Kruskal Wallis test to determine if the difference between the groups in the WFC dimensions were statistically significant, it was discovered that all WFC dimensions were not significantly different at p<0.05.

In the last part of the questionnaire survey, questions regarding the perception of the employees regarding the forty-hour workweek were included. Additionally, the last question of the survey also had an-open ended question that asked for employee's feedback on how to strike a positive work-family life balance. Of the completed surveys, 38 out of 72 respondents (52.3%) stated that a 40-hour workweek was not enough to do work-related activities. Those that felt a 40-hour work was not enough to do work related activities were those who had served in leadership/management positions for the last 11 to 20 years. About 51.4% believed that salaried employees that did not work more than 40 hours per week were negatively perceived. Those who affirmed this view were mainly professionals with less than 10 years in leadership/managerial position.

In a response to a question that asked the AEC professionals if their employers had a policy or program in place promoting work-life balance, 74% of the respondents said they did not have any such policies while 26% said they had either flexible work schedule practices or policies in effect in their workplace. There is a considerable evidence to suggest that work-life balance initiatives may be a more effective means of enhancing employees' morale and fostering a sense of loyalty to the company than providing traditional rewards such as an increased remuneration

(Dainty and Loosemore, 2012). One of the more popular choices identified for work-life balance was a provision of flexible work schedule. Adjustments can be made, for example, by coming into work an hour early and leaving an hour early or vice-versa, i.e., coming in late and leaving late. Other ways include compensation time for salaried employees that may have to stay late for meetings and other official activities. Other flexible arrangements include time for educational leave and trainings. There are many ways for companies to assist their employees with family responsibilities including childcare, elderly care, flexible work practices, permanent part-time work, and parental leave which help the employees maintain a healthy family life when needed.

The survey also asked open-ended questions to participants on what they believed was the answer to striking a work-life balance. For most respondents, striking a work-life balance resided on an individual and recognition of the differences and similarities in work and life. Some of the notable responses are organized in the theme outlined in Table IV.

TABLE IV. MAJOR THEMES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE BASED ON RESPONSES

Theme	Response
Efficiency	Working within allotted work time; self-determination; getting it right the first time and not having to redo tasks; organization and time management.
Priority	Leaving work at office, spending time with family; establishing priorities and schedule; distinguishing work and life and separating the two; making time for exercise; setting limits on work time.
Flexible Schedules	Promoting work from home; flexible schedules.
Vacation	Taking vacation and sick leaves; taking breaks at work.
Communication	Communicating with family and employer; recognition by employers, especially those that have relatively heavier family responsibilities.

Limitations of Research

The questionnaire survey was sent though author's and his acquaintance's network. At the time, the survey questionnaire was sent to North Carolina based architectures, engineering, construction and public authority professionals. The survey with such geographic boundary limits the research representation of the entire AEC industry in the U.S.

CONCLUSION

Although concrete conclusions could not be obtained regarding the difference between employees in terms of age, experience, gender and the employer type, male employees reported slightly higher level of work-family conflicts arising out of time and strain when compared to female employees. This means that male employees were unable to balance the time and stress at work, which would ultimately influence their family life. As generally perceived, public employees had lesser work family conflict than their counterparts from private employers. This could be attributed to more intense workloads and higher working pressures for private sector employees, while a

regular work schedule, typically 40-hours, helps to maintain a better work-life balance in the public sector. As for the age group, the oldest group of employees, i.e., 65 plus years of age experienced the highest level of WFC.

A broader review of literature regarding gender differences of work-life conflicts among working professionals in other non-AEC industries was carried out. In relation to gender differences at workplace, women were found more likely to report that they have too little time to handle life duties, whereas men perceived that they spend too much time at work. Overall, work-life conflicts were found to be slightly higher in women (Kotowska et al., 2010). Both genders have experienced work-family conflicts and its negative relationships with job-life satisfactions. Additionally, the relationship was reported to be stronger for women (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). In another Swedish sample, Canivet and researchers revealed that work-family conflicts had a strong relationship with exhaustion. Such conflict was more prevalent in men, while on the other hand had a stronger association in women. Interestingly enough, in this research women respondents reported significantly less impact of family life on their work than their male counterparts. To be considered as an equal, women competing for similar positions within the industry are likely to work more than the prescribed hours and deflect any interference of their duties to home and family.

Based on the result, female employees reported significantly less impact of family life on their work than their male counterparts. This came as a surprise to the authors because it is generally perceived that female employees have a greater family responsibility and that could possibly have an interference in their work. With more women entering the workforce in general, males are now becoming more cognizant of the balance that has to be achieved and contribute more in the family matters. Dainty et al. note "employees with family responsibilities must not be regarded as being low in commitment to their job. The industry must also appreciate that employees have a life outside work. There needs to be recognition of the needs of employees with family responsibilities and a genuine attempt to accommodate these needs" (Dainty and Loosemore, 2012).

The findings from this research indicate that there are differences among AEC employees in terms of work life conflict but the differences are statistically inconclusive. Comparative statistics presented in this study (Table III) shows that AEC employees had the highest level of work-family conflict among a small pool employee from different industry investigated by other researchers. With more and more young people, joining the industry a more appropriate measure to assess the work-life balance for this group would be to also investigate work-extracurricular conflict. Future research in this area to assess the work life balance of unmarried employees is recommended by assessing the conflict between work and extracurricular activities that would include spiritual, hobbies, exercise/health, school and social activities.

All AEC owners and managers need to be open minded to adopt any solutions for a work-life balance. As revealed in this paper "employee flexibility" seems to be the most popular tool to achieve work-life balance particularly through flexible schedules. Employee's perception of their work-life balance is unique to that employee, therefore communication between managers and employees is important in establishing that employee's unique flexibility plan. Strategic human resource management will be critical if positive strides are to be made within the AEC industry, particularly construction.

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