

WORK-LIFE BALANCE – EMPLOYEES' EXPECTATIONS AND EMPLOYERS' ACTIONS. DIFFERENT WORLDS OR HARMONIOUS COOPERATION?

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to identify the primary expectations of employees with respect to Work–Life Balance (WLB) and to compare these findings with the provisions offered by employers in this domain.

Design/methodology/approach: A review of selected scholarly research was conducted. Scientific databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, were examined using relevant keywords. Additional input data were derived from commercial reports, both domestic and international. Based on the collected material, an evaluation was performed, leading to final conclusions regarding the current state of equilibrium between professional and personal life in business practice.

Findings: On the basis of a critical analysis of selected sources, the principal employee expectations related to Work–Life Balance were identified. The tools and the extent of their application in WLB initiatives were described. By integrating both perspectives, the extent to which employers' actions address the explicitly defined needs of employees was assessed.

Research limitations/implications: The primary limitations of the conducted review include the subjectivity of assessments provided by both employees and employers, discrepancies in the definition of Work–Life Balance, the limited number of longitudinal studies employing a consistent methodology, and differences between the Polish and foreign labor markets.

Implications: The article highlights a critical social issue—namely, the pursuit of balance between professional and personal life. In recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a marked increase in employees' desire to safeguard their mental and physical well-being. This study may serve as a practical resource for entrepreneurs intending to implement or revise WLB policies within their organizations.

Originality/value: The conclusions drawn from the analysis of selected studies reveal discrepancies between employee expectations and the tools utilized by employers. By integrating the perspectives of both employees and employers, this research addresses an existing gap by pinpointing divergences in the perception of WLB between these two groups. Employers recognize the numerous benefits of WLB, a substantial proportion of surveyed companies fail to implement adequate measures to improve employee well-being.

Keywords: labor market, human resources, work organization.

Category of the paper: Literature-based conceptual review.

1. Introduction

Everything strives for balance. This phrase often inspires reflection and analysis of the environment in which we live. Numerous phenomena observable in everyday life gravitate toward such a state. This tendency is evident in the natural sciences (e.g., the second law of thermodynamics, galactic motion, chemical processes), in the biological sciences (e.g., the functioning of biocenoses, organismal homeostasis), and in the economic sciences, as reflected in the approaches of F. Quesnay, A. Smith, D. Ricardo, J.B. Say, among others (Romanow, 1990). Organizations and their employees likewise strive toward equilibrium. The equilibrium of an enterprise may be understood as a state in which the economic entity achieves the maximum level of its objective function within a given time horizon and under specific external conditions (Meredyk, 2003). In the context of human resources (HR), this concept is frequently associated with the balance between private and professional life, referred to as Work–Life Balance (WLB).

A comprehensive analysis of scholarly sources on the subject was conducted. The number of articles published on the topic was determined, their specific thematic scope was examined, and keywords were analyzed using, among others, the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Numerous Polish and international publications were reviewed, and commercial reports were also used as supplementary input data. Based on the gathered information, a research gap was identified. It should be noted that, while studies exist that address Work–Life Balance from the perspective of either employees or employers, there is a lack of publications integrating both perspectives, particularly in the post–COVID-19 context. The question of whether supervisors genuinely seek to ensure the psychophysical well-being of their subordinates through the appropriate design of WLB policies appears to remain unanswered.

The aim of this article is to juxtapose employee expectations with employer actions in the field of Work–Life Balance. The practical character of this study is of particular significance in the current environment, in which many companies are seeking competitive advantage in order to attract and retain talented employees.

2. Definitions and theoretical framework of Work-Life Balance

Work-Life Balance topics seem to have recently become one of the most interesting political and social topics. This can be seen, among other things, from an analysis of data obtained from Google Trends.



Figure 1. Number of searches for the phrase "work-life balance" in 2015-2025 worldwide.

Source: Google Trends, <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2015-03-15%202025-03-15&q=work-life%20balance&hl=pl>, 15.03.2025.

The analyzed period covers March 2015 to March 2025. The figures represent the relative level of interest in searches with respect to the highest point on the chart. A value of 100 denotes the peak popularity of the term. Until August 2021, the presented results resemble a sinusoidal wave, although the deviations are not substantial. In August and December 2021, a marked increase in searches for WLB was observed, signaling the onset of an upward trend. Comparing August 2021 with March 2025, the increase exceeds threefold. Potential contributing factors include, among others, the period associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing generational turnover in the labor market, and the rise in societal awareness. It is therefore pertinent to address the question of how Work–Life Balance is defined, based on a review of the relevant literature.

Conflict between private life and work responsibilities was first defined by R.L. Kahn in 1964 as a contradiction in the demands of work and family that occur (Tomaszuk, Olszewski, 2023). J.H. Greenhaus and N.J. Beutell, among others, also contributed greatly to the development of the subject (Greenhaus, Beutell, 1985). The idea of Work-Life Balance was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Great Britain, and was later developed mainly in the United States (Gajdzik, 2018). Programs aimed at increasing the balance of employees' different roles were initially implemented by large companies, which found it easier to provide a diverse benefits proposition (Glass, Fujimoto, 1995). The start of the search for WLB solutions was prompted by the desire to increase motivation in employees to perform work tasks. An additional reason was the growing work overload (Tomaszuk, Olszewski, 2023). In addition, it was a time of social change. There was a crisis of the patriarchal model of the family cell and there was an increasing departure from the accepted pattern, where the man was the sole breadwinner. The professional activation of women was observed on a large scale, which forced employers to be more flexible (Sadowska-Snarska, 2013).

There is no single, universal definition of work-life balance in the sources analyzed. Various studies, while showing points of commonality, present the issue with an emphasis on other components. New technological opportunities and social transformations are accelerating the evolution of meaning.

Table 1.
Overview of selected definitions of the Work-Life Balance

Author	Definition
Marks, MacDermid (1996)	"Work-Life Balance is a combination of two roles - a professional role and a personal role. The two roles should not meet at the same time in one place, so it is important to "share" to be as effective as possible in each role".
Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, Walters (2002)	"The relationship between the times and institutional and cultural spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is primarily generated and distributed by labor markets".
Borkowska (2004)	"The ability to combine work with other dimensions of human life, such as home, family, social activities and personal interests. Such a balance occurs when work does not hijack private life, and, conversely, when non-work life does not happen at its expense".
Lewis, Gambles (2007)	"WLB understood as combining work and personal life, it is important to complement each other's roles and reduce competing priorities".
Parkes, Langford (2008)	"A person's ability to fulfill his work and family obligations, as well as other non-work commitments and tasks".
Gashi et al. (2022)	"the ability of employees to effectively manage the boundaries between work and non-work areas".

Source: Own elaboration based on (Marks, MacDermid, 1996; Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, Walters, 2002; Borkowska, 2004; Lewis, Gambles, 2007; Parkes, Langford, 2008; Gashi et al., 2022).

Within the issue of Work-Life Balance, there are diverse related terms, such as conscious control of the roles performed in life (Lee, Zvonkovic, Crawford, 2013), life satisfaction (Ferguson, Carlson, Zivnuska, Whitten, 2012), enjoyment of the combination of work responsibilities and private time (Kalliath, Kalliath, 2013), reflection on one's own experiences (Nieżurawska, Dziadkiewicz, Kowalewska, 2017). Selected sources also introduce related terms such as **Work-Life Integrity** - the integrity of the family and work spheres, **Work-Life Quality** - an emphasis on taking care of the overall quality of life, **Work-Life Rhythm** - the perspective of rhythmicity, the repetition of certain activities at similar intervals, **Work-Life Blending** - the permanent connection and intermingling of work and personal life (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2018), **Workation** - combining work with going on vacation (PARP, 2024), or **Work-Life Fit** - a way of organizing work understood by flexible alignment of professional and private areas, the main focus is on the needs of the employee and his efficiency (Talentplace, 2022).

Based on the above definitions, it can be seen that the understanding of Work-Life Balance is multidimensional. However, despite the variety of meanings Work-Life Balance has its recurring points on the basis of which many definitions are based. This includes the issue of an individual's performance of various roles between which he or she should smoothly transition. Here it is necessary to mention the work of B. Ashforth, G. Kreiner, or M. Fugate (Ashforth, Kreiner, Fugate, 2000). The literature distinguishes between transitions between occupational and non-occupational roles on a micro level, such as driving from work to home. These are frequent migrations between roles, based on repetitive behavior. Changes on the macro scale are less frequent, but more noticeable to the employee, affecting a significant part of his life. Examples include changing jobs, growing a family, or retiring (Gądecki, Jewdokimow, Żadkowska, 2017). The notion of conflict is also frequently mentioned in

research. It can be understood as a situation in which there are conflicting demands at work and at home, which can result in disproportionate commitment to particular roles (Lipińska-Grobelny, 2014). Conflict is described through the lens of three perspectives:

- Time dimension - conflict understood as time pressure caused by physical or mental commitment to one role at the expense of another.
- The tension dimension - the cost of performing one role negatively affects effective performance in the other role through, most often, emotional effects such as stress, nervousness.
- Role-related behavior dimension - inconsistency in behavioral styles in assumed roles.

In addition, the concept of boundary¹ between roles appears in studies. Four types of boundaries are often noted in the literature: physical, temporal, emotional and cognitive (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Currently, many researchers emphasize that increasingly the boundary between work and personal life is blurring, especially among white-collar workers (Wróbel, 2014). Definitions also indicate the relationship between the roles performed. It is worth mentioning here the concept of **work/family enrichment** by Greenhaus and Powell, which presents an approach of mutual role enrichment. This is a state in which experiences gained in one role positively affect the quality of life in the other role (Greenhaus, Powell, 2006).

It can be said that the perception of work-life balance is something fluid and depends on many variables. Definitions are built based on recurring characteristics, but also have many meaningful distinctions. Work-Life Balance seems difficult to achieve in various situations. Many people have several roles at the same time, which require different skills from the individual, varied patterns of behavior, and daily challenges are subject to time and environmental pressures. This begs the question, are we satisfied with our balance between work and non-work space? What expectations do we have of it? With what tools do we want to take care of our psycho-physical well-being?

3. Work-Life Balance - current status and expectations of employees

An OECD report published in 2022 shows Poles as one of the busiest nations in the European Union. On a weekly basis, we work an average of as much as 40.4 hours. Only Greeks work more, fulfilling their professional obligations in an average of 41 hours/week. The average for EU countries is 37.5 hours/week (OECD, 2022). Compared to the statistical citizen of the Community, we work about 3 hours longer on a weekly basis (144 hours on an annual basis) and as much as 8 hours longer on a weekly basis (384 hours on an annual basis) than the shortest working residents of the Netherlands. It should be emphasized that the differences indicated in

¹ For more on the use of the concept of boundary in management, see (Jendza, Wróbel, 2019).

the survey may have their origins in different legal regulations, customs in individual labor markets and may be due to the number of part-time workers, but the difference is still significant (Polish Economic Institute, 2022). The situation in Poland can be further assessed on the basis of reports from the Statistics Poland. For this purpose, two studies from 2010 and 2021 were analyzed (Statistics Poland, 2010, 2021). Based on them, it can be noted that working time in our country has decreased by an average of 0.5 hours per week in the 11 years between the studies. In 2020, 8% of those surveyed worked more than 49 hours a week. Interestingly, there was a decrease of as much as 5% compared to 2010. Despite the indicated changes in hourly workload, we still work intensively, and the time we have available outside of work is on average 61% of the day, or 14.7 hours (OECD, 2022). According to the study, Europeans allocate an average of 7.1 hours to sleep (Global Sleep Health Study, 2023). Statistically, there is an average of 7.5 hours left for a range of household responsibilities, social relationships, developing one's professional competencies, and yet there must be time in this for entertainment, relaxation, pursuing hobbies, taking care of one's physical condition.

The OECD has presented data on employee satisfaction with Work-Life Balance. The survey used the WLB index, which is based on two indicators - the average number of hours per day devoted to leisure and personal care including time spent eating and sleeping, and the percentage of employees working an average of fifty hours or more on a weekly basis. In the ranking, Poland was ranked 3rd from the bottom among European Union countries and 25th among the 41 countries analyzed, with a score of 6.5 on a 10-point scale, where 1 is the worst rating and 10 is the best (OECD, 2022).

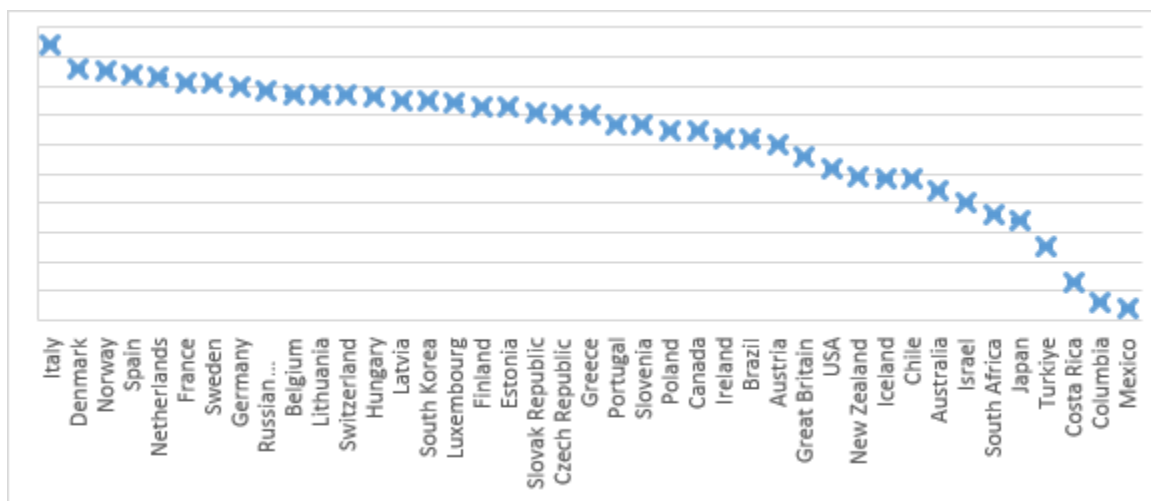


Figure 2. Work-Life Balance Index in selected countries in 2022 (the higher the score, the higher the level of satisfaction with WLB).

Source: OECD, <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/>, 16.03.2025.

A survey conducted in Poland in 2024 by the ClickMeeting platform indicates that only 28% of people surveyed feel they have achieved Work-Life Balance in their lives (ClickMeeting, 2024). A slightly better result (45% of respondents) is presented by two more surveys conducted in 2018 and 2023 (Hays Poland, 2018; SD Worx, 2023). In contrast,

according to a report commissioned by the Novotel brand, only 20% of respondents are satisfied with the current WLB (Novotel, 2022). It is worth noting that none of the above publications showed a score higher than 50%. According to Novotel, 52% of respondents estimate that their personal lives are subordinated to their professional duties, with 46% keeping in touch with the company in their free time, 34% working after hours, 55% working while sick, and 43% working while on vacation. Such activity does not show a smooth transition between roles. A report by Gumtree.co.uk shows that 78% of working people have noticed a blurring of the line between private and professional life (Gumtree, 2018). It is worth asking to what extent is WLB relevant to employees? This will certainly depend on individual factors such as age, family situation, health situation, financial situation, number of roles performed, and hierarchy of values. However, regardless of the above, many studies show that WLB is high on society's expectations. According to the Workmonitor 2024 survey, for 60% of employees, personal life is more important than work life (Randstad, 2024). Work-life balance is as important as salary (93% of responses) and is the most important factor when considering a job offer (93% of responses). A majority of respondents (57% of responses) would not accept a job if it would negatively affect their work-life balance. In a report published by the same entity in 2025, it can be seen that for the first time in the history of their annual publications, Work-Life Balance has become a more important motivating factor than salary (Randstad, 2025). According to "The Employee Expectations" report, the right WLB policy is the most important factor for employees (Oyster, 2022). It should be noted that the approach to the analyzed topic may differ depending on the age of the people employed.

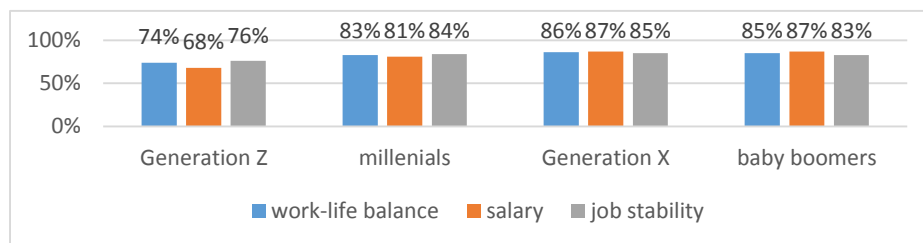


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents for whom selected Work-Life Balance factors are important, n = 27,000.

Source: Randstad Workmonitor 2025, <https://info.randstad.pl/hubfs/Randstad%20Workmonitor%202025%20-%20PL.pdf?hsLang=pl-pl,0>, 20.03.2025.

Based on an analysis of the chart, it can be seen that expectations regarding salary, job stability and Work-Life Balance may increase with age. This may be related to the fact that younger people are more focused on gaining experience, establishing themselves professionally and are able to reduce their demands to some extent. Still, WLB is crucial for the vast majority of employees regardless of age (74-86% of responses). According to a Flexjobs survey, as many as 82% of parents living with their children under 18 treat Work-Life Balance as the most important parameter when evaluating a job offer (Flexjobs, 2018). What expectations do employees report in the selected surveys? What tools would they like to use to positively influence the perception of work-life balance?

One of the key prerequisites for maintaining Work-Life Balance is the ability to perform duties in different roles. To achieve the above goal it is important, among other things, to prioritize duties and manage time properly. Based on the analysis, it can be seen that working time flexibility has become crucial for many people. The report "Active+ work in life, life at work" showed that this is important for 67% of respondents (Gumtree, 2018). The "Workmonitor 2025" survey depicts flexibility as a priority for 73% of respondents (Randstad, 2025), and the "Happiness at Work for Poles" report emphasizes that it is important for everyone, regardless of gender - 70% of men and 73% of women (Jobhouse, 2024). In the study "Current Work Model in Companies vs. Work-Life Fit", time flexibility was ranked second in terms of benefits that support childcare and help achieve individual goals (Talentplace, 2022). The same study found that moving away from standard working hours is the most important element, that companies should implement as part of the Work-Life Fit concept. According to the report, "Executives feel the strain of leading in the new normal", up to 94% of respondents expect such solutions from their employer (Future Forum, 2022).

Not only is flexibility linked to modern working time design and the search for a work-life balance, but also the idea of reducing working hours. The Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy is considering introducing statutory regulations to reduce average hours from 40 to 35 in terms of five working days. An alternative to this solution is the introduction of a four-day work week. This is a concept publicized by the current government, and was one of the fundamental slogans during the election campaign. The ministry commissioned a series of studies showing that a statutory reduction of working hours to 35 hours is more difficult to implement than a four-day work week (PIT.PL, 2024). The shorter workweek is in high demand. A survey conducted by Clickmeeting indicates that 66% of respondents support it, with 68% preferring 4 days of working 8 hours each to 5 days of 6.4 hours (Clickmeeting, 2024). The Ariadna survey panel shows similar support for the above concept at 63% (Ariadna, 2024). It should be mentioned that pilots of the four-day workweek are currently being conducted on every continent. The majority of workers surveyed expect such a working time organization to continue. As an example, a survey was conducted in Brazil, where as many as 98% wanted the four-day work week to be maintained (4 Day Week Pilot in Brazil). Many studies show a number of benefits of a shortened work week including, among others, a very strong positive effect on achieving Work-Life Balance (Balla, 2024).

Based on a review of recent studies, it is noticeable that employees also expect a flexible workplace. Increased interest in remote and hybrid work has occurred especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the withdrawal of sanitary restrictions, many people are looking for partial or complete freedom in choosing where they carry out their work commitments. According to a Future Forum (2022) report, 80% of respondents expect flexibility in this regard. According to "The Employee Expectations" report, remote/distracted work policies were ranked the 3rd most important factor when respondents were asked to provide a picture of their ideal company (Oyster, 2022). According to a survey conducted by Gumtree, 53% of employees

expect to work remotely (Gumtree, 2018). An even higher result was noted in the report "Happiness at work of Poles" - 74% indicated men and 74.6% indicated women (Jobhouse, 2024). Based on the publication "Workmonitor 2024" 43% of respondents say that the opportunity to work outside the office is non-negotiable, and 28% rated that they would not accept a job offer if it did not provide them with flexibility (Randstad, 2024). Another survey confirms that workplace flexibility is important to the majority, with 67% indicating this (Randstad, 2025). According to "WorkLifeFit", limitations in this matter are a big barrier to starting a family and performing parenting duties - 43.8% of indications (Talentplace, 2022).

According to the "Economic Activity of the Polish Population" report, economically inactive people accounted for as much as 41.4% of the total population in the 15-89 age bracket in Q3 2024 (Statistics Poland, 2024). The reasons for the inactivity of people aged 15-74 varied, but it is worth noting that studying, completing qualifications, illness, disability and family responsibilities accounted for 40.5% of all indications. Family responsibilities were an obstacle to work for 12.2% of women and 1.3% of men. Certainly, some people remain inactive of their own volition, such as for the sake of social programs such as 500+ (Myck, Trzcinski, 2019). However, it can be assumed that a large group cannot engage in full-time work, but could successfully engage in part-time employment. The expert report "Part-time work in the era of post-pandemic change in work patterns" reveals that 52.3% of economically inactive women do not work due to the realization of family-related responsibilities (Zielonka, 2023). As the only country in the European Union, Poland exceeds the 50% threshold in this area. The "Code Life Balance" report reveals that the opportunity to work part-time was one of the five key expectations of employees 34.16% of responses (justjoin.it, JLL, 2023).

Based on a review of numerous studies, the following table outlines the most important expectations of employees.

Table 2.

A list of employees' top Work-Life Balance expectations based on selected surveys

Selected expectations of employees	Proposals for solutions to a given area of expectation	Percentage of respondents for whom the area is important
Flexibility of working hours	Introduction of mobile/task/intermittent/equivalent working hours	67-94% (Gumtree, 2018, Talentplace, 2022, Future Forum, 2022, Jobhouse, 2024, Randstad, 2025)
Reducing working hours	The most sought-after form of this by employees is the introduction of a four-day work week, assuming that work would take 8 hours a day at full pay (the numbers in the next column refer to such a solution). In business practice, there are alternative models such as 4 days x 9 hours of work, 5 days x 6 hours of work, 4 days x 8 hours of 80% pay, and others.	66-98% (Ariadna, 2024, Clickmeeting, 2024, Brazil 4 Day Week Pilot, 2024)

Cont. table 2.

Flexible workspace	Introduce remote or hybrid work solutions.	53-80% (Gumtree, 2018, Future Forum, 2022, Jobhouse, 2024, Randstad, 2025)
Part-time employment	Contracts based on the Labor Code or the Civil Code, a solution that can work well for students, family caregivers, people with a disability certificate and others.	34% (JLL, 2023)
Additional benefits	A group of additional benefits such as company crèches and kindergartens, extra vacation days, vacation subsidies, extended parental leave, medical packages, gym packages, etc. These solutions are not indicated as the most sought-after, but they should be taken into account when building a WLB environment in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vacation surcharges 43%, • additional vacation days 34%, • medical care 23%, • Company nurseries and kindergartens 22% (Talentplace, 2022)

Source: Own elaboration based on Gumtree, 2018; Future Forum, 2022; Talentplace, 2022; JLL, 2023; Ariadna, 2024; Brazil 4 Day Week Pilot, 2024; Clickmeeting, 2024; Jobhouse, 2024; Randstad, 2024; Randstad, 2025.

Based on the sources analyzed, it can be seen that employees have high and very specific expectations regarding the work environment and ways through which they want to achieve Work-Life Balance. There are three main areas that reach the highest indications of respondents in each survey, i.e. flexibility of place and time of work and reduction of hourly workload. It is apparent that the vast majority of employed people would like to move away from the standard employment model. Integrating such clear expectations of employees with business practice, it is worth asking the question - to what extent are employers matching the expectations of employed people? What WLB tools do they most often offer employees?

4. Work-Life Balance in practice - the tools used and the approach of employers

Effective communication can often be fundamental to the smooth operation of an organization. Are employers talking to employees in the right way to ensure an environment conducive to WLB? An amendment to the Labor Code was recently introduced, implemented into Polish legal circulation on April 26, 2023, based on the Law of March 9, 2023. The new legislation was introduced due to the directives of the European Parliament and the EU Council - 2019/1152 of June 20, 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union and 2019/1158 of June 20, 2019 on work-life balance for parents and guardians. The main goal of the directives was to introduce solutions that can help employees maintain their WLB. The amended legislation introduced, among other things, unpaid caregiving leave, the right to leave due to force majeure for urgent family matters, and increased parental leave. Parents of children under the age of 8 can apply for flexible working hours (Work-Life Balance in Practice, 2024). The scope of the changes is much larger. However, it will be interesting to see how business owners react to this.

Based on a survey conducted by Clickmeeting, it is clear that employers' actions are not sufficient. A small proportion of respondents (21%) have been informed by their superiors about the changes in the law (Clickmeeting, 2023). The majority of respondents (69%) do not know what the new regulations are about. Some companies have introduced new types of leave due to statutory obligations (16% of indications), additional breaks (9% of indications), more flexible working hours (7% of indications). A large proportion of survey participants (42%) are not sure whether supervisors have made any changes related to the amended law, and 40% indicated that the employer has not taken any action. This is an interesting observation, as many entrepreneurs declare that Work-Life Balance is important to them, and it is often emphasized in media messages or job offers. It also seems that employers see related benefits. According to the report "Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Arrangements", as many as 80% of entrepreneurs believe that flexible work arrangements are key to hiring and retaining valuable employees (Polish Economic Institute, 2024). In the publication "Courage and Balance or Work-Life Balance in Polish", 76% of signatories indicated that by implementing WLB programs companies are much more attractive when recruiting new employees (Diversity Charter, Responsible Business Forum, 2020). Other benefits included high employee satisfaction (70% of indications) and higher work motivation (68% of indications). The same report indicates, however, that as many as 81% of the companies surveyed had not developed and implemented a WLB policy. Although some companies were implementing measures in this area (16%), only 3% had a unified document in place. Some employees said (41%) that even if the company has work-life balance measures in place, it is impossible to say what the reasons were for introducing specific mechanisms, suggesting that they were implemented without prior consultation. Most employees (69%) of employees and signatories (78%) in small companies do not know who is responsible for implementing WLB measures. This may indicate insufficient communication between employers and employees. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that employees show limited initiative to speak clearly about their needs. According to the Workmonitor 2025 survey, in Eastern Europe only 44% of respondents signal what benefits they expect, and in Southern Europe the result drops to 36% (Randstad, 2025).

Filling the research gap, it is interesting to know to what extent employers, with so little communication, are responding to the main expectations of subordinates demonstrated in the previous section of the article, and what, if anything, do they offer in addition? The vast majority of employees (93%) noted that flexibility has improved the quality of their work (ManpowerGroup, 2022), and many employers (77%) reported an increase in employee productivity. Despite this, less than half of companies (46%) offer or plan to introduce moveable working hours (Polish Economic Institute, 2024). The report, "Current Work Model at Companies and Work-Life Fit", found that employees at surveyed companies most often have fixed and recurring work hours (83% of responses). Movable working hours were indicated by 19% of people, and full freedom to decide the length of the working day was confirmed by only 5% of respondents (Talentplace, 2022). Reduced working hours can be

understood as a reduction in the hourly dimension realized for five days a week or the introduction of a four-day work week. The first option is more popular, indicated by 29% of respondents (Diversity Charter, Forum for Responsible Business, 2020) while only 2% of surveyed companies realize or plan to introduce a four-day work week (Polish Economic Institute, 2024). Workplace flexibility is also not evident. While 72% of companies noted that hybrid or remote work reduces the cost of doing business, only 36% provide employees with such options (Polish Economic Institute, 2024). The percentage of people working remotely in Poland is 13%, where the EU average is 23% (Eurostat, 2023). What, on the other hand, is the issue of part-time contracts? In Poland, the number of part-time workers is increasing, but their share of the labor market is still small. Comparing Q3 2021 with Q3 2024, the number of part-timers increased by 201,000 (indications: 980,000 and 1,181,000, respectively), (Statistics Poland, 2021, 2024). According to data from Eurostat, the share of part-time workers in Poland is only 5%, the EU average is 17% (Eurostat, 2023). On average in the EU, such a form was used in 2022. 28% of women and only 8% of men. This compares with 61% of women and 18% of men in the Netherlands, and 8% of women and 3% of men in Poland. According to the report "Economic Awareness of Young Poles", surveyed high school graduates indicated that as many as 80% of them intend to combine work with studies, while only 30% of women and 37% of men intend to take up full-time employment (BIG Infomonitor, 2024).

It is worth asking - what additional things can employers offer to improve WLB? The report "Work-Life Balance, and flexible forms of work organization" draws attention to an area, that did not appear in the responses of employees in any survey analyzed. Employers in the above publication indicated that work organization is important. In terms of it, as many as 75% of respondents answered that prioritizing work was important for WLB, 61% indicated automation of repetitive work, 57% organization of notifications, and 54% reduction of multitasking (Polish Economic Institute, 2024). In the publication "Courage and Balance or Work-Life Balance in Polish", according to the signatories surveyed, employees may additionally benefit from subsidies or reimbursement for recreational, sports or cultural cards (58%), specially arranged spaces in the office (54%), special facilities for pregnant women and parents after parental leave (54%), additional days off (30%), or opportunities to associate within internal communities e.g. LGBT, families, women et al. (28%) (Diversity Charter, Forum for Responsible Business, 2020). It should be noted that the above solutions do not address the main expectations of employees and can only be an addition to other priority solutions for achieving WLB.

Below is a table that integrates the three most important expectations of employees with the solutions offered by employers.

Table 3.*Degree of response by employers to key employee expectations that relate to Work-Life Balance*

Employee expectations	Percentage of employers who use selected solutions that fit with key employee expectations
Flexibility of working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moveable working hours 46% (Polish Economic Institute 2024), 19% (Talentplace, 2022). • Full freedom to shape working hours 5% (Talentplace, 2022).
Reducing working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of working hours 29% (Responsible Business Forum, 2020), 2.5% (Talentplace, 2022). • Four-day work week 2% (Polish Economic Institute, 2024).
Flexible workspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid work 27% (Talentplace, 2022), 36% (Polish Economic Institute, 2024). • Remote work 7% (Talentplace, 2022), 13% (Eurostat, 2023).

Source: Own elaboration based on Forum for Responsible Business, 2020; Eurostat, 2023; Talentplace, 2022; Polish Economic Institute, 2024.

Based on the above data, it can be noted that the most popular tool is mobile working time. There are alternatives that introduce partial employment flexibility, but they apply to a decided minority of employees. Full flexibility in terms of time or place of work is rare in the surveyed companies and is a marginal solution.

5. Conclusion

In this article, the primary objective was to juxtapose employee expectations with employer actions in the domain of Work-Life Balance. The conducted analyses indicate that the balance between private and professional life has ceased to be merely an ideological postulate and has evolved into one of the principal demands of the workforce. Growing expectations in this area compel many organizations to give greater consideration to employee needs, particularly in order to maintain high competitiveness, reduce staff turnover, and ensure the effectiveness of motivation systems.

It is important to note that in recent years there has been a marked increase in employee awareness regarding WLB, evidenced by a significant rise in interest in the topic and a more explicit articulation of expectations. For many individuals, empty employer declarations concerning work-life balance have lost all relevance. Employees expect concrete solutions, such as flexibility in terms of work location and hours, shorter working hours, and increased availability of part-time contracts. Frequently, they are unwilling to compromise on these high expectations and are prepared to change employers to meet them, a phenomenon particularly evident in sectors such as IT, marketing, and professional services. Notably, these expectations are highly consistent across respondents, regardless of age or gender.

Another significant finding is that, although employers recognize the considerable benefits of implementing WLB programs and frequently declare their commitment to employee well-being, their measures are often insufficient. Such initiatives tend to be fragmented, selective,

and episodic. WLB policy is frequently treated as a collection of benefits or short-term measures rather than as a comprehensive framework. Research clearly demonstrates that business practice lacks integrated strategies and fully developed WLB programs that accurately address the individual needs of employees. Moreover, there is often no clear designation of responsibility for program implementation, no well-established culture of employee well-being, and no training to enhance awareness of employment rights. Employers' general approach to WLB appears to be a core issue: fundamental aspects such as effective communication, needs assessment, and monitoring of intervention outcomes are lacking. Many employers remain at the level of declarative commitment without translating intentions into concrete actions.

To assess employers fairly, it should be acknowledged that fully meeting employee expectations is sometimes simply impossible. In certain companies, flexibility in work location or hours cannot be implemented due to structural or economic constraints or industry-specific characteristics. In addition to these limitations, the studies under analysis indicate that employers have other reasons for not directly responding to employee demands, including fear of losing operational control and difficulties in reorganizing work. Concerns about maintaining process continuity, data security, and team cohesion often lead employers to consciously avoid flexible arrangements. Part-time employment, in turn, is associated with higher administrative costs, the need to train more employees, and potential barriers to operational fluidity.

The analysis conducted has certain research limitations. A substantial challenge in WLB research is that each employee and employer may define and experience the balance between work and private life differently. Many data sources rely on respondents' subjective perceptions, which are influenced by factors such as current life situation, physical and mental condition, and workplace atmosphere. The existing literature lacks longitudinal studies that monitor selected enterprises in detail to determine the long-term effects of specific WLB measures. In many publications, the choice of research tools appears incomplete questionnaires alone do not capture the full complexity of the phenomenon. Qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and focus groups should be more widely employed. Additionally, family circumstances and the perspectives of close family members are often overlooked in WLB studies. Furthermore, it should be noted that the conclusions presented herein are based on commercial research, for which full verification of methodology and procedures is not always possible. Nevertheless, a critical analysis of these sources provides valuable insights.

Some of the studies presented in this article pertain to foreign labor markets and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Each country has unique cultural and business conditions that influence the process of adapting to employee expectations. This process may vary across nations due to social and organizational differences. National culture, organizational culture, historical events, degree of hierarchy, and characteristics of workplace relationships factors extensively discussed in the literature, including in the works of G. Hofstede are all relevant. On the Polish labor market, changes in work organization often occur with a delay compared to Western markets. The process of employer adaptation to employee expectations also varies

by sector and job characteristics, progressing differently in, for example, the IT sector compared to public institutions. While the direct transfer of foreign research findings to the Polish labor market is problematic, such findings nonetheless highlight potential directions for change.

From both a research and business practice perspective, WLB in contemporary times is not merely an appealing slogan or a social concern but, above all, a strategic element of a modern enterprise. Addressing employee needs facilitates the creation of a sustainable work environment that integrates corporate economic goals with employee well-being. There appears to be a need for a transformation of organizational culture, in which WLB constitutes a fundamental and central component of corporate policy. Many of the barriers to implementing new measures may diminish if management adopts a comprehensive, integrated approach to WLB one that combines legal, technological, social, and economic dimensions. Organizations should develop roadmaps that allow gradual alignment with employee expectations, setting precise goals, tasks, timelines, and success metrics.

The analysis presented in this article clearly indicates the necessity for further exploration of the implementation determinants of WLB. Future research should have both an applicative and an exploratory character. Achieving equilibrium between employee expectations and employer offerings requires not only appropriate tools and new procedures but, above all, a shift in attitudes towards WLB and work itself. Communication, trust, education, and a shared sense of responsibility for achieving common goals appear to be key to this transformation.

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