

All of work? All of life? Reconceptualising work-life balance for the 21st century

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Abstract

This paper argues that the study of work-life balance to date has, in the main, adopted a restricted conception of both “work” and “life”, which does not take account of recent developments in life worlds, working arrangements and employment relationships. “Life” has hitherto been viewed as largely comprising caring activities for dependent children, whereas “work” has been premised largely on a traditional model of work, characterised by full-time, permanent employment with one employer and a conventional understanding of what work involves. This means that extant research and theory only provides a partial view of the work-life needs and experiences of the workforce. In the paper, we propose extending conceptions of both work and life to incorporate different life worlds and social groups and different working arrangements and employment relationships.

KEYWORDS

qualitative research methods, thematic analysis, work-life balance

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the relationship between work and non-working time—work-life balance—has been the subject of much attention in public discourse. There has also been a longstanding academic interest in work-life balance—what it is; how to achieve it; what the consequences of a “good” or “bad” work-life balance might be; and how employers might develop policies to foster it. Although extensive in volume, we argue that the study of work-life balance has, in the main, adopted a restricted conception of what “life” entails and is based on a traditional model of work, which does not incorporate recent developments in work and employment relationships. In this paper, we build on earlier critiques of how the extant literature has understood “life” (De Janasz, Forret, Haack, & Jonsen, 2013; Eikhof, Warhurst, & Haunschild, 2007; Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, & Bell, 2011) to address what we argue are only partial

considerations of both “work” and “life.” “Life” has hitherto been largely viewed as comprising caring activities for dependent children, with the inference that attaining a work-life balance is principally a concern of working parents. Likewise, “work” has largely been premised on a traditional model characterised by full-time, permanent employment, with one employer and a conventional understanding of what work involves.

Although the needs of those with caring responsibilities and those working under traditional arrangements are undoubtedly important, we argue that changing modes of work and non-work life that have emerged in the 21st century mean that there is much that has not been examined by extant work-life scholarship. This is problematic because it restricts the value and relevance of the knowledge base in this field, by creating what Ozbilgin et al. (2011) and Moen (2015) refer to as “blind spots.” There are, therefore, limitations on how it can inform public policy and organisational policy and practice. Little is known, for example, about the work-life balance concerns of those without dependent children, who may wish to balance work with other activities that are important to them. This might include other caring activities (e.g., elder or disabled care, and caring for pets), pursuing further education, non-work-related training, hobbies, and exercise, maintaining and recovering health, or engaging in religious or community activities. Furthermore, those with dependent children may also wish to balance some of these activities with work. Equally, little is known about the work-life balance of individuals who have non-standard employment arrangements, such as those on short-term, part-time, or zero hours contracts, those with multiple jobs, and those who are self-employed, including the increasing numbers in the “gig economy” (Deloitte, 2018; McKinsey, 2016).

There are a number of important arguments in support of a more holistic and contemporary understanding of work-life balance. First, there is strong empirical evidence showing positive outcomes for individuals and for organisations from a satisfactory work-life balance (Hobson, Delunas, & Kesic, 2001; Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Lero, Richardson, & Korabik, 2008). If support for work-life balance focuses only on certain lifestyles, or certain working arrangements, it is likely that maximum benefit will not be realised by organisations or individuals. Second, to retain its practical and scholarly value, work-life research needs to be aligned with contemporary social and economic trends. Ozbilgin et al. (2011) observe “making the conceptualization of the work-life interface more akin to the nature of reality on the ground would render organizational change initiatives to improve work-life arrangements more effective” (p. 178). Third, a more holistic and contemporary understanding of work-life balance would allow for more strategic policy alignment with current trends, as well as more informed preparation for future developments. For human resource (HR) practitioners, it is therefore important to appreciate the various life forms of their workforce in order to respond to their needs better. It is also important that they appreciate the implications of different work arrangements and relationships for work-life policy development.

The paper starts with an overview of the extant work-life balance literature where we explore definitions of balance and present a brief summary of the evolution of the field. We then argue for a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes “life” in work-life balance, examining what it may involve beyond fulfilling childcare responsibilities. Next, we examine developments in working arrangements and relationships and consider how they might shape understanding of work-life balance. Finally, we propose an agenda for further research and theoretical development and consider the implications of this reconceptualisation for HR practitioners.

2 | OVERVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

2.1 | Definitions

The term “work-life balance” refers to the relationship between work and non-work aspects of individuals' lives, where achieving a satisfactory work-life balance is normally understood as restricting one side (usually work), to have more time for the other. Although the notion of work-life balance may be intuitively easy to understand, there has been some debate in the literature about the appropriate terminology to use, with some authors preferring terms such as work-life interface instead (Kelliher, 2016). There has also been debate about what constitutes “balance”

creating further confusion in the field (Voydanoff, 2005). Some scholars have understood balance as inferring an equal distribution of time, energy, and commitment to work and non-work roles (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Others have adopted what Reiter (2007) refers to as a “situationist” approach, where balance depends on the individual's circumstances. Adopting this perspective accords value to individual, subjective interpretations. Taking a subjectivist stance, Kalliath and Brough (2008) also argue for more attention to be paid to individual perceptions, where the extent to which a person has a satisfactory work-life balance will depend on how *they* perceive their situation, rather than any predetermined notion of what “balance” is. This paper adopts a broadly subjectivist stance, where priority is given to individual perceptions of the relationship between work and non-work domains. Importantly, a subjectivist stance, by necessity, also calls for a more encompassing and dynamic understanding of work and life, with a focus on understanding how individuals experience work-life balance.

2.2 | Evolution of the field

The relationship between work and life first became a focus of interest as growing numbers of women sought paid employment outside of the home, following the Second World War (Roberts, 2007). These women typically retained their role as homemaker with primary responsibility for childcare, thus creating a need to balance work with this particular responsibility (Gattrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013). From the 1970s onwards, the focus on working mothers expanded to incorporate work-life balance among dual career couples (e.g., Gilbert & Rachlin, 1987; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976), although the primary focus continued to be on women in couples negotiating work and childcare. Hochschild's book, “The Time Bind: when work becomes home and home becomes work”, published in 1997, points to a work-family crisis, with working parents struggling to balance the increasing demands of work with childcare and the stresses of home life. By the turn of the 21st century, the field had become more multidisciplinary: a “sprawling domain of study involving researchers from several disciplines and different theoretical perspectives” (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000, p. 981). More recently, there has been increasing interest in the influence of changes to how work is done and the consequences of, for example, work intensification and the heightened significance of client focus in professions such as law, education, the finance, and consulting sectors (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013; Sommerlad, 2016). Likewise, there has been growing interest in how information communication technologies blur the boundaries between work and life and negatively impact on work-life balance (Besseyre Des Horts, Dery, & MacCormick, 2012; ILO, 2017).

The extant literature has tended to fall into four main lines of enquiry. First, there is a body of research concerned with individual outcomes of employees achieving (or otherwise) a satisfactory work-life balance. This work has mainly indicated the positive effects of work-life balance on individual well-being (Lingard & Subet, 2002; Lunau, Bamba, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014; McGinnity & Russell, 2015) resulting from a “buffering effect”, which protects individuals from negative experiences in either domain and which may reduce stress caused by tension between roles.

Second, there has been considerable research examining the outcomes of employer policies designed to help employees achieve a more satisfactory work-life balance, such as providing flexible work options (Farivar & Cameron, 2015; Lero et al., 2008). Indeed, helping employees achieve a satisfactory work-life balance has been advocated as good practice by a number of policy organisations (e.g., Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, European Union, and International Labour Organisation). There is also evidence that employer concern for work-life balance can have a positive impact on motivating, recruiting, and retaining employees (Farivar & Cameron, 2015) and on employee attitudes such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Chang & Cheng, 2014; Kim, 2014; Shannafelt et al., 2012). A positive impact on performance has been explained by use of social exchange and gift exchange theories, where it is argued that employees respond to opportunities to tailor their working arrangements to fit with their non-work lives with, for example, enhanced effort or commitment (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Likewise, gift exchange proposes that a “gift” of flexibility to manage the work-life interface above the market norm stimulates better performance (Konrad & Mangel, 2000). Similarly, signalling theory has been used to argue that employees respond positively to signals that their employer is concerned about their work-life balance, leading to

greater organisational attachment (Casper & Harris, 2008). Furthermore, based on notions of the psychological contract, flexibility i-deals, negotiated in pursuit of work-life balance, are seen to create mutual benefit (Rousseau, 2005).

Third, there has been longstanding interest in the antecedents of work-life balance. Job related factors such as hours of work, career salience, and managerial support have all been shown to influence perceptions of work-life balance among employees (e.g., Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013; Prowse & Prowse, 2015). Research also shows that for different types of working arrangements to be effective, employers need to show respect for employees' other life commitments and to create an environment that allows them to engage fully with life outside of work. Likewise, family status, work status, and a priori commitment to occupation/work role have been shown to influence the achievement of a satisfactory work-life balance (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Needs theory has been used as a framework for explaining how satisfaction of the basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness impact on perceived work-life balance (Warner & Hausdorf, 2009). Others suggest that a satisfactory work-life balance may be influenced by a combination of opposing factors, such as the job demands and resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Karasek's (1979) job demands and controls model (Chiang, Birtch, & Kwan, 2010; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001).

Fourth, there has been growing interest in the relationship between work and life. This concerns the extent to which conflict or interference may arise between the demands of those domains and how one domain may be a source of enrichment to the other. Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) seminal work on the sources of conflict between work and family roles has been influential here. Border (Clark, 2000) and boundary (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) theories have also been used extensively to examine the relationships between the two domains. Border theory proposes that people cross between the domains of work and family on a daily basis and explains how domain integration and segmentation, border creation and management, and the relationships between border crossers and others at home and work influence their work-family balance (Clark, 2000). Boundary theory proposes that how individuals manage the boundaries between work and life is influenced by how they perceive the relationship between their different roles. Where roles are perceived as mutually exclusive, they engage in segmentation, whereas if those roles are perceived as overlapping, they engage in integration (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

We turn now to our primary argument: the need to reconceptualise "life" and "work" in the work-life balance debate to reflect changing social trends and patterns of how work is carried out. We then examine the implications of this for extant knowledge in work-life balance scholarship and for HRM practice and propose an agenda for future research.

3 | "LIFE"—CAPTURING CONTEMPORARY LIFE WORLDS

From the outset, most studies of work-life balance have focused on the challenges faced by parents, particularly mothers, and more recently by dual-career couples with dependent children. In practice, this means that much of what we know about work-life balance is still based on mothers or, at best, parents (e.g., Eikhof et al., 2007; Ozbilgin et al., 2011). It is noteworthy, however, that extant work-life research has largely excluded other members of the workforce. Little attention has been paid to care given to children by other individuals, for example, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, or family friends. Likewise, relatively little attention has been given to care of the elderly, the disabled, or those with chronic illnesses. This is significant because different types of care may generate different kinds of demands. For example, attending frequent and unpredictable medical appointments as part of eldercare may require different flexibility from generally more predictable childcare arrangements. Furthermore, Wilkin, Fairlie, and Ezzedeen (2016) observe that care of pets requires time and energy and because they are frequently considered as part of the family, work-life policies should be extended to include them. This may be of particular relevance in countries where pet ownership is common such as the USA, United Kingdom, Brazil, and Argentina (GFK, 2016) and especially for types of pets that require a significant time commitment from their owners. It should also be noted that parents may also have additional caring responsibilities, such as for the elderly, those with chronic illnesses, or pets, which they also wish to balance with work.

Furthermore, some observers have suggested that extant work-life balance research has not in practice been concerned with all parents, or even all mothers, but rather has viewed work-life balance as a problem primarily for middle-class, dual-earner parents (Gattrell et al., 2013, p. 300) and that as such, much of what we know only reflects the experiences of middle class, professional parents. Warren (2015), drawing on Ehrenreich's work, argues that the professional middle class both "star in" and "write the scripts" for academic debates of work-life balance, limiting our understanding of the experiences of others. The few studies concerned with work-life balance among the working class (e.g., Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), however, also depict it as a concern primarily for working mothers, neglecting other aspects of life. The extant literature has also been criticised for focusing on heterosexual couples, thereby prioritising a heteronormative view of the family, ignoring LGBTQ couples (Languilaire & Carey, 2017). Likewise, single parents have received relatively limited attention, with the few studies that have been done suggesting that they are likely to struggle to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance (Skinner, Hutchinson, & Pocock, 2012).

A significant omission from extant research is the work-life concerns of those without childcare responsibilities (De Janasz et al., 2013; Eikhof et al., 2007; Gattrell et al., 2013; Ozbilgin et al., 2011; Pedersen & Lewis, 2012). The increasing numbers of single people and couples without children in many economies (The Economist, 2017a) means that many workers do not have responsibilities for dependent children. For example, in 2015, single-person households numbered approximately 30% in the United Kingdom, 25% in the USA, and 35% in Germany (Yeung & Cheung, 2015), yet little is known about their experiences of work-life balance and what aspects of life they value and may wish to balance work with (Wilkinson, Tomlinson, and Gardiner (2018). Notably, younger and older workers are less likely to have dependent childcare responsibilities and as a result, little is known about their work-life concerns in particular. Understanding the work-life balance needs of individuals without childcare responsibilities is especially important given Martin and Kendig's (2012) argument that women without caring responsibilities may bear the brunt of the "long hours culture", which negatively impacts their work-life balance. Likewise, Wilkinson, Tomlinson, and Gardiner's (2017) study found that professionals and managers living alone felt their work-life needs were seen as less legitimate than those of colleagues with children, because of assumptions that their non-work time was entirely leisure-based. Notkin (2014) and Ryan and Kossek (2008) also reported that employers were less sympathetic to the non-work needs of employees without childcare responsibilities, because they are often assumed to have more free time.

The increasing heterogeneity of workplaces demands greater account to be taken of cultural diversity and how it impacts experiences of work-life balance. Kamenou (2008) has called for greater investigation of the impact of culture, arguing that it is very much a part of "life" and should, therefore, be incorporated into work-life research. Based on a U.K. study, she reports how women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are regularly expected to provide hospitality for extended family and friends and to devote significant time to events such as weddings and funerals, which may impact on their ability to achieve a work-life balance. Considering religion, Sav (2016) notes that Islam involves well-defined physical acts of worship (daily prayers and fasting), which may conflict with work commitments. It also encourages multiple roles for its followers in addition to being a worker, such as spouse, teacher, and volunteer, all of which require time and energy.

Given the reported resistance that some employers exhibit towards accommodating employees non-work lives generally (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2009), requests to accommodate noncaring activities, such as hobbies, education, or fulfilling cultural responsibilities, may encounter particular resistance. For some, caring responsibilities may be seen as a duty that deserves to be accorded priority, whereas other activities may be seen as a result of choice or "nice to have" and as such require less accommodation from an employer. However, there are strong business and social justice cases to be made for extending how scholars and HR managers see "life", given reports of a backlash from employees without caring responsibilities who believe that they do not have equal access to work-life policies (Eikhof et al., 2007). Beauregard (2014) argues that perceived inequity of access to work-life balance policies can result in employees engaging in counterproductive work behaviours, with potential implications for organisational performance. She shows that perceptions of informational injustice are more important to employees than whether they are allowed to benefit from a particular work-life policy. Therefore, messages (explicit, implicit, or mixed) that employees with caring responsibilities have priority access to work-life balance policies could have potentially

negative consequences. Likewise, there may be negative consequences if parents feel that other aspects of their lives that they value, beyond parental responsibilities, are not recognised or accounted for in work-life balance policies.

4 | “WORK”—CAPTURING CONTEMPORARY WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Recent years have seen a number of important changes to working arrangements and the nature of employment relationships (e.g., growth in zero hours contracts and self-employment including the “gig economy”) and such changes are predicted to continue (Deloitte, 2018; Vorhauser-Smith & Cariss, 2017). To date, however, these changes have largely not been incorporated into the study of work-life balance. Rather, the primary focus has been on traditional working arrangements and employment relationships—full-time, permanent employment, in standard working time with a single employer. If an increasing number of workers neither have a traditional working arrangement nor a traditional employment relationship (Deloitte, 2018; McKinley, 2016; McKinsey, 2016; WEF, 2016; WorldatWork, 2015), it is important to understand their requirements for and experiences of work-life balance. A recent report suggests that focusing solely on traditional work arrangements “ignores tens of millions who put together their own income streams and shape their own work lives” (McKinsey, 2016, p. 8).

Although limited compared with the extensive body of work on those with standard working arrangements, there has been increased interest in the relationship between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockey, 2013; Pedersen & Lewis, 2012; Prowse & Prowse, 2015; Rubery, Keizer, & Grimshaw, 2016; Timms et al., 2015). Whereas flexible working arrangements may be offered to employees to enhance work-life balance, the degree to which this is realised may depend on a range of factors. For example, whether part-time work facilitates work-life balance may depend on how the part-timer spends their non-working time (Beham, Prag, & Drobnic, 2012). Furthermore, some part-timers may hold more than one job (part- or full-time) and thus may not achieve the work-life balance benefits often associated with part-time work. Recent research found that those with significantly reduced working hours experience a more satisfactory work-life balance than those working longer hours. Those working less than 20 hours per week had a better work-life balance than those working 20–34 hours per week (Beham et al., 2012). Furthermore, part-timers experiences of work-life balance may depend on whether they have elected to work part-time or whether they are unable to secure full-time work and experience a work deficit.

Studies of remote workers also reveal different work-life balance outcomes. For some, not having to travel to work frees up time, which is then available for non-work activities (Richardson & Kelliher, 2015). However, for others, remote working results in work intensification (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), because time saved commuting is used to extend working hours (Richardson & McKenna, 2013). Furthermore, remote workers may expend considerable energy creating visibility to compensate for their lack of physical presence (Richardson & Kelliher, 2015), which may impinge on their non-work time. Where work takes place in the home, there may also be greater spillover from work to non-work life (ILO, 2017).

Although the relationship between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance has received some attention, the relationship between work-life balance and other, newer forms of work arrangements and employment relationships is less well understood. Annual hours' contracts may result in periods of intense working combined with lighter or work-free periods, which may or may not be predictable (Cannon, 2017). This arrangement may therefore have a detrimental impact on work-life balance, particularly during periods of intense activity. Other types of working arrangement, such as zero hours contracts where the amount of work and hence income is often unpredictable (Rubery et al., 2016), may also have a negative impact on work-life balance. Recent research has shown that employees with variable working schedules are also more likely to work non-standard hours (evening, night time, weekends), potentially complicating the relationship between work and life further (Kemmy Business School, 2015). The unpredictability of zero hours contracts may create difficulties for satisfaction with work-life balance,

because employees may at times accept more work than they prefer, because of uncertainty over what future work will be available. Although there have been few studies of zero hours contract workers to date, there is evidence to suggest that some zero hours contract workers are, however, satisfied with their working hours (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2015). Where the employee genuinely has the ability to accept or reject work, they may be free to tailor their work commitments to fit their non-working lives, for example, students may use zero hours contracts to balance work with study. Notably, the recent review of modern working practices commissioned by the U.K. government recommended that those on zero hours contracts should have the right to request fixed hours following a qualification period (Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, 2017).

Public policy and employer initiatives to assist employees achieve a satisfactory work-life balance are largely premised on the assumption that the employee has a single employer. Recent growth in the number of multiple job holders (McKinsey, 2016) has generated a need to understand their requirements and experiences of work-life balance. This argument has particular significance given that for multiple job holders, the responsibility for achieving a work-life balance is likely to fall on the individual rather than the employer. This shift in responsibility has potentially significant implications for individuals and for employers, suggesting a need to consider how policies can be shaped to support work-life balance in such contexts.

In addition to changes in working arrangements for employees, many countries have witnessed a growth in organisations contracting labour outside of formal employment relationships, including increased use of agency workers (Aletraris, 2010; Benassi & Dorighatti, 2015). The lack of employment security often associated with agency work may mean that workers accept work when it is available, with potential negative implications for their work-life balance. Research on agency work often positions it as inferior to permanent employment (Knox, 2012), but other studies have shown some workers choose temporary agency work over permanent employment (Kirkpatrick & Hoque, 2006), a choice that may be influenced by perceived opportunities for work-life balance.

A further omission in extant research is the work-life concerns of the self-employed and those in family businesses, although they represent a significant proportion of the workforce in some countries (The Economist, 2017b) and a growing proportion in others (ILO, 2017; Keizer, 2013). One of the challenges of addressing work-life balance of the self-employed, however, is their diverse nature, including those who are voluntarily self-employed and those sometimes referred to as “bogus” or “false” self-employed (Keizer, 2013), where organisations have changed the contractual status of employees to that of independent contractor (The Economist, 2017b). The limited work that has been done on work-life balance among the self-employed and those in family businesses presents mixed findings (Kirkwood & Tootall, 2008; Walker, Wang, & Redmond, 2008). Some report that self-employed workers have a better work-life balance and overall job satisfaction, due to perceived autonomy (Benz & Frey, 2008; Binder & Coard, 2013; Hundley, 2001), whereas others indicate that they have poor work-life balance, suffering high levels of stress and burnout (Jamal, 2007). Perrons (2003) reported differences between self-employed men and women, where the latter had a less satisfactory work-life balance, because they were juggling both work and domestic responsibilities. For family businesses, there may be challenges in satisfying business needs and non-work responsibilities and interests (Baron & Lachenauer, 2015). These findings point to the “paradox of self-employment”; although it may bestow a greater sense of control, the need to be “always available” for valuable clients may inhibit work-life balance (Hilbrecht & Lero, 2014). Early work on gig economy workers also suggests that their experiences differ depending on the reasons for working in this way (Peticca-Harris, Di Gama, & Ravishankar, 2018). Given the levels of self-employment in some countries and the growth of the gig economy, this merits greater attention from researchers, practitioners, and public policy makers (Deloitte, 2018; Vorhauer-Smith & Cariss, 2017).

5 | OBSERVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Previously, we identified some of the theories that have been used in extant work-life research. If broader conceptions of work and life are adopted, the question arises over whether extant theories will remain relevant or whether

there is a need for further development of these theories and/or for new theory to be generated. In the preceding sections, we have identified the need for new empirical work to explore the implications of these different contexts further. However, at a general level, we expect that the explanatory power of extant work-life theories will be more easily applied to different life contexts than to different work contexts. The inclusion of other non-work activities in how life is considered may operate in a similar way to more traditional family activities, if they are also highly valued by employees, whereas changes to working arrangements and relationships represent a more significant departure from the traditional models of employment on which much work-life research is based, especially where work is undertaken in a more detached relationship and sometimes being contracted outside of employment. Drawing on a more situationist and subjectivist approach, where balance takes individual life circumstances and perceptions into account (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Reiter, 2007), it could be argued, for example, that exchange-based theories, such as social exchange (Blau, 1964) and gift exchange (Akerlof, 1982), could still explain employee responses to work-life policies that acknowledge that they may value and wish to balance work with other non-work activities. Thus, future research should explore circumstances where employees are able to use work-life policies to accommodate noncaring life activities (e.g., sport, education, religious, and cultural) as well as other types of caring (e.g., eldercare, caring for siblings, friends, and pets) and whether they reciprocate in a similar way to those who use work-life policies to balance work with childcare. Research might also explore whether positive behaviours and attitudes are engendered if employers overtly acknowledge differences in employee lifestyles and signal that they recognise life may involve a broader range of non-work activities (Spence, 1973). We also expect that theories based on the notion of the psychological contract, such as i-deals, are likely to remain relevant for workers with different life circumstances, because i-deals by their very nature are about achieving mutual benefit and therefore need to take account of employees' needs whatever they may be.

Theories concerned with the borders (Clark, 2000) and boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000) between work and life would seem to have the potential to encompass a broader notion of life. To do so, they would need to be extended to include the intersection between work and a broader range of non-work activities. For example, the transition between work and activities such as hobbies, religious commitments, and volunteering would need to be included. Management of the relationship between different domains, the degree to which they are integrated or separated, might also be extended beyond the domains of work and family, although the feasibility in practice of integrating some activities with work might be questionable. Further research is needed to investigate the potential for integration and how this varies across different non-work life activities. It would also seem that there is scope for both interference and enrichment between work and a broader range of life activities. For example, someone who participates in sport outside of work might experience a sense of interference between the time and energy demands of their sports training and their work. However, the discipline of, and increased well-being gained through, sports training or the social benefit of participating in team sport might have a positive spillover effect on work. The demands of further education, religious, and community commitments may conflict with work, but may also allow the employee to bring additional knowledge and skills acquired through these activities to work. How spillover (both positive and negative) operates with different life circumstances is a potentially fertile ground for further investigation. In particular, some of these activities may involve a commitment over varying time horizons, which may or may not be predictable. For example, it may be easier to judge the time horizon involved in studying for a qualification and when that activity is likely to be especially demanding, than the commitment to care for a pet or an elderly relative. It could also be argued that some activities involve, at least in the short term, a higher degree of choice over whether to engage in them and how much time to devote to them, than a childcare commitment (Wilson & Baumann, 2015). Research is therefore needed to help understand the role of time, predictability, and choice on how these activities interface with work.

As with life, questions arise regarding the relevance of extant theories if a broader conception of work is adopted. However, changes to the nature of working arrangements and relationships seem to present greater challenges for extant work-life theory. This is primarily because these changes represent either a form of employment relationship that is based on a different, more flexible model than that which much extant work-life research assumes

(full time and permanent with one employer) or involves contracting outside of a legal employment relationship. In this context, exchange-based theories premised on the idea of on-going reciprocal obligations may be of limited use. Where workers are self-employed (particularly those in the gig economy), or on temporary contracts, the relationship with an organisation that hires their services may be short term and restricted to a single or a small number of largely economic transactions. In such circumstances, it is less likely that an on-going relationship and concomitant obligations will arise and need to be fulfilled. However, the principles of gift exchange may still apply here. If organisations offer terms above the market norm, such as opportunities to exercise choice over working arrangements to assist with work-life balance for self-employed workers, they may respond with, for example, increased performance, even in the context of a short-term, transactional relationship. Likewise, although signalling support for work-life balance might normally be associated with traditional employment relationships, organisations that make specific efforts to extend work-life policies to include workers with different types of working relationships might be rewarded with higher levels of commitment or other positive behaviours. For example, those on zero hours contracts may appreciate an understanding of the consequences of their working arrangement for work-life balance and as a result show increased affective organisational commitment. Thus, it would be informative for future research to explore the extent to which an offer above the market norm in relation to work-life balance results in reciprocity between organisations and those working outside traditional employment.

Theories based on the notion of the psychological contract, such as “i-deals”, are generally premised on a longer term relationship where the scope for mutual benefit to arise is greater and hence may be less applicable in the context of short-term and/or ad hoc relationships. However, those in employment with multiple employers could, at least in theory, negotiate an “i-deal” with each employer, although the scope for mutual benefit to be gained might be limited. Theories relating to the antecedents of work-life balance that are focused at the job level, such as job demands and control (Karasek, 1979) and job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), are also likely to be less useful where individuals work outside of traditional employment or where they hold multiple jobs, because the job attributes are harder to identify. In this regard, future research should take a broader approach to examine work demands and resources that facilitate or impede work-life balance rather than focusing simply at job level.

Theories concerned with the intersection of work and life domains need to take account of a broader conceptualisation of work. Those with nontraditional employment relationships may cross borders on a less frequent and regular basis than those with traditional employment relationships. For example, a zero hours contract worker may not cross from non-work to work every day, but instead, their crossings may be more ad hoc. Furthermore, there may be a greater number of borders to cross for multiple job holders and those who are self-employed. This may be of particular importance if the different work domains involve significantly different working arrangements. Boundary theory has focused on the management of the relationship between work and family and would need to be extended to incorporate how a broader range of boundaries are managed. For multiple job holders, work to work boundaries may also need to be managed and each job may afford different opportunities for integration or separation with non-work. Equally, interference and enrichment may occur between jobs as well as between work and non-work. Working simultaneously in different organisations and/or undertaking different work roles might allow spillover between jobs by bringing alternative ways of thinking and practice as well as to non-work domains. For those outside traditional employment relationships, the lack of employment and income security may be a source of interference with work. Employment insecurity may represent an interference if they are distracted by searching for other employment and income insecurity may present financial concerns, although both of these may be influenced by why they work in this way. This all suggests the need for significant further exploration of how the relationship between work and life operates where the relationship between the individual and the organisation is more detached than a traditional employment relationship and/or where the individual has more than one employment relationship.

Incorporating the changing nature of work and life circumstances into future work-life research would also have an impact beyond what and who are studied to how they are studied. Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2017) have observed that hitherto much work-life research has employed positivist research designs, involving the use of large-scale surveys, but with fewer qualitative studies, located within interpretivist paradigms. Qualitative data

collection techniques, such as interviews and focus groups, allow for nuanced understandings of individual life and work circumstances (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), rather than relying on preset questions, determined at least in part by extant knowledge and assumptions. There may also be a need to review questions in current survey instruments to ensure that they capture contemporary work and life contexts. Wilson and Baumann's (2015) inclusion of the personal role in developing interrole conflict constructs is to be welcomed in this respect.

In this paper, we have argued that to maintain currency and relevance, work-life research and theory needs to expand its scope to take account of contemporary developments. First, there is a need to take a broader view of what constitutes life, extending beyond fulfilling childcare responsibilities. There is also a need to include those with living arrangements beyond the traditional nuclear family, such as those living alone, single parents, and LGBTQ couples with or without children. This will allow researchers to develop an understanding of how work-life balance is experienced by all members of the workforce. These other activities that consume time and effort may stem from what might be seen both as obligations (other types of caring responsibilities, cultural or religious commitments) and from what might be seen as personal choice (education, hobbies, social, and community activity). Although in many ways it is hard to distinguish between these in practice without making value judgements, it would be informative to understand how different types of activity impact on work-life balance and whether their perceived legitimacy is influential in this impact. Furthermore, noncaring activities may assume greater importance for employees in the future. As working lives are extended in line with longer life expectancy, a greater number of individuals may decide to pursue personal interests alongside work, rather than postponing these till retirement.

Second, the changing nature of working arrangements and relationships necessitates a move beyond the longstanding focus on a traditional model of employment. How the relationship between work and life is negotiated by those with flexible working arrangements, zero-hour contracts, working for temporary employment agencies, and the self-employed, including those in the gig economy, needs to be addressed. This is of particular importance for the growing numbers who work outside of formal employment who are largely outside the current work-life debate. They are likely to assume sole responsibility for managing the relationship between their work and non-work lives themselves, with little organisational support. However, this shift to individual responsibility offers the opportunity to manage the relationship between their work and non-work lives more effectively. How this operates and what factors might influence the outcomes for achieving a satisfactory work-life balance are important questions that need to be addressed.

Taken together, these two strands of research will allow for a more holistic and contemporary understanding of the relationship between work and life. As we have suggested, existing knowledge is mainly concerned with life meaning caring for dependent children and work based on a traditional model of full-time, permanent employment. However, three other broad contexts for work-life balance also exist, namely, first, balancing activities based on a broader conception of life with traditional employment relationships; second, balancing childcare responsibilities with different working patterns and work relationships; and finally, balancing a broader conception of life with a different range of working arrangements and relationships. Each represents a significant stream of future research.

6 | IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

In this paper, we have argued that work-life scholarship needs to adopt broader conceptions of both work and life to incorporate the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce and their increasingly diverse work and life arrangements. Findings from this reconceptualisation may have significant implications for policy and for practice. Research that takes a more holistic and comprehensive approach will allow for more robust theorisation to inform the development of HR policies and practices to support the achievement of a satisfactory work-life balance for all the workforce and in turn bring wider benefits to employers.

If work-life balance initiatives are to be extended beyond the need to balance work with caring responsibilities and beyond traditional working arrangements and relationships, then the question arises as to whether this involves

adjustments to current policy and practice or whether a complete rethink and reconfiguration is needed. In some cases, extensions of existing policies may suffice. However, in order to ascertain the extent of the adjustment, HR practitioners and policy makers need to understand how the demands of various noncaring activities and different types of caring responsibilities vary from those of parents. Likewise, they need to understand how different cultural and religious affiliations impact on requirements and experiences of work-life balance. In order to allow a greater range of non-work activities to be supported, there may also be a need for cultural change at organisational and societal levels to accord greater value to these activities and to promote greater understanding of why they should be considered as legitimate.

Although work-life policies such as flexible working are ostensibly designed to enhance work-life balance, evidence suggests that this is not always achieved. Managers therefore need to have a greater understanding of how and when such policies enhance and impede the achievement of a satisfactory work-life balance. For example, considering teleworkers, Messenger (2017) proposes that managers should encourage part-time and occasional teleworking and restrict “supplemental” teleworking resulting in excessively long hours and high work intensity. Managers may also be able to provide guidance to employees to help cushion some of the negative effects from the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work life. Further, Messenger suggests that there may be a need for government policy makers to rethink regulation of working time (including limits on working hours and minimum rest periods) in the light of developments in information communication technology enabling working outside of regular working hours and that social partners may be well-placed to work with governments on this.

For those on zero hours or part-time contracts or those holding multiple jobs, it is important for employers to recognise that when an employee is not working for them, it does not necessarily mean that they are not working, or involved in other activities that require a commitment of time and energy. Hence, there is a need to be aware that sudden or ad hoc changes to working hours may cause difficulties in non-work and potentially working lives. This implies a role for line managers to understand how employees' work and non-work lives are constructed, so that this can be taken into account when scheduling work. HR departments have an important role to play in fostering these kinds of behaviours.

Where the level of contribution from an employee is reduced, and/or where work relationships become looser and the individual becomes more detached from the organisation, questions may be raised about the extent to which it is appropriate to invest in work-life policies to support such workers. These questions are also relevant where self-employed contractors are used, including those in the gig economy. HR departments may be faced with trying to gain the benefits from people who experience a satisfactory work-life balance working for them, against the investment in trying to understand and support more varied work patterns. If economies continue to develop in a direction where employment ties become looser and workers are more detached, the responsibility for helping individuals achieve a satisfactory work-life balance may fall to governments and or the voluntary/self-help sector. In these circumstances, a responsible employer might direct employees to these services. Furthermore, organisations may adopt different policies and provide different levels of support to different groups of workers according to the value of their contribution to organisational outcomes.

7 | CONCLUSION

To conclude, in this paper, we have argued for the need to reconceptualise work-life balance in order to take account of contemporary developments in both work and life. We do not, however, in any sense wish to argue that balancing parental care responsibilities with a traditional mode of employment is not a legitimate focus of study. Indeed, there is much still to be done to extend this dimension of work-life balance research. Rather, our aim has been to argue that for some employees, “life” involves things other than childcare responsibilities including activities that are important to them, such as hobbies, education, exercise, religious or community activities, and other types of caring. Moreover, it is important to engage more fully with the impact of cultural beliefs and how they may impact on the value

attributed to work-life balance. Likewise, we have argued that a contemporary understanding of work needs to incorporate the new forms of working arrangements and relationships. Our central argument, therefore, is that work-life balance scholarship and policy making needs to develop a more holistic and nuanced understanding of contemporary life and contemporary work. We urge work-life scholars to respond to this challenge in future work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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