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Navigating Work-Life Balance

Exploring the Interplay Between Work, Family and Flexible Work Arrangements in the
Swedish Labor Market

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Abstract

Researchers and practitioners worldwide have demonstrated significant interest in the topics of work-life balance and employee well-being, to address the challenges arising from the rapid emergence of mental health issues. Fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, an escalating number of companies have introduced flexible work arrangements as a tool to help employees balance work and private life. These policies are especially valuable to employees with parental responsibility as researchers suggest that parents are impacted most by inter-role conflicts between work and family life. This study contributes to research on employee well-being and work-life balance by (1) exploring how work-related stress correlates with work-life balance; (2) investigating how perceptions of a supportive work-family culture relate to perceived work-life balance and employees' willingness to utilize flextime and flexplace work policies; (3) analyzing whether variations in perceived work-life balance and utilization of flexible work policies can be attributed to employees' parental status; and (4) determining how perceptions of work-life balance correlate with turnover intentions. The present study used survey data from 365 employees at two Swedish Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies, complemented by five qualitative interviews related to the utilization of flexible work arrangements. We found that a supportive work-family culture and lower levels of work-related stress, positively contribute to an individual's perception of balance between work and private life. Further, this study found that individuals who perceive improved work-life balance showcase fewer turnover intentions. Despite previous research indicating a positive relationship between a supportive work-family culture and utilization of work-family benefits, the findings from the present study shed doubt on the ability of a supportive work-family culture to facilitate the usage of flexible work policies. We further found that, despite observing the Swedish labor market, permeated by generous work-family benefits, parents are, because of fears of negative career penalties, still hesitant to utilize flextime work policies.

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1. Introduction

Throughout their life, the average individual will spend 90,000 hours at work (*One Third of Your Life Is Spent at Work - Gettysburg College*, n.d.). Despite dedicating substantial time to work, a significant portion of the working days are lost because of mental health issues. Depression and anxiety alone contribute to the loss of 12 billion working days annually (*Mental Health at Work*, n.d.) and in October 2020, 1 billion people around the world were suffering from a mental health issue. (The Lancet Global Health, 2020). Annually, the global economy suffers a loss of US\$ 1 trillion in lost productivity, arising from anxiety and depression (*Mental Health at Work*, n.d.). This cost is estimated to reach \$16 trillion by 2030 (*Mental Health Crisis Could Cost the World \$16 Trillion by 2030 | Reuters*, n.d.), highlighting the importance of securing employee well-being. Beyond the costs associated with anxiety and depression, it is estimated that stress-induced health issues are costing American businesses approximately \$50 to \$150 billion a year (Allen et al., 2000a). In Sweden, mental health issues account for 2% of the GDP, constituting an annual cost of €7.7 billion every year, through healthcare and lost productivity. Currently, mental health issues are the primary work-related health issue in Sweden, impacting 1 million working-age individuals every year (*Mental Health and Work: Sweden | Mental Health and Work | OECD ILibrary*, n.d.). Even though the costs of mental health issues are severe, the benefits of investing in the treatment seem to be substantial. For every \$1 invested in depression and anxiety treatment, the gain in health and productivity corresponds to \$4 (The Lancet Global Health, 2020). Despite this, addressing mental health issues has become a pivotal challenge for labor markets across the OECD nations. Due to the complexity of the problem and the extensive involvement of various stakeholders, collaboration among actors of society is needed. Because of the substantial time spent at work, it is only reasonable that companies and employers lead the way and take responsibility in ensuring that the work conditions contribute to employees' well-being. Work-life balance constitutes an important aspect of well-being (Marks & MacDermid, 1996a), where companies can have a direct impact. The risk arising from not being able to evaluate employee well-being could impede organizational sustainability (Renee Baptiste, 2008) and impact companies' financial performance (Blazovich, 2014). Therefore, companies must create conducive working conditions. However, this is becoming increasingly challenging as the emergence of mobile technology has disrupted the traditional 9-to-5 work structure and made employees constantly available to the demands of their employers (*Work-Life Balance Is A Thing Of The*

Past: Now It's All About Work-Life Negotiation, n.d.). To increase employee well-being and help employees better balance paid work and family life, organizations have responded by offering employees a range of work-family benefits, including flextime, designed to provide employees with greater flexibility in the management of time-based conflicts between work and nonwork activities, as well as telecommuting and other work-at-home arrangements (Ellen Ernst Kossek & Sharon A. Lobel, 1996). However, despite their potential benefits, there is evidence that many employees are reluctant to take advantage of these types of benefits, due to fears of negative career consequences (Munsch et al., 2014). In research, there is a common agreement that employees often are penalized for utilizing various work-family benefits (Boye, 2019; Kramer et al., 2023; Leslie et al., 2012). Thus, although work-family benefits are designed to effectively support employees in reconciling work and family demands, if usage of these benefits results in career penalties, the outcomes of these policies run counter to their initial intentions.

1.2 Purpose

Drawing upon the rapid emergence of mental health issues, flexible work arrangements, and their combined impact, a new scenario unfolds for employees, and especially parents balancing work and personal life. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to shed light on the drivers and impediments to employees' and employers' efforts to enhance employees' work-life balance and its impact on well-being. Further, similar work has been conducted within this field of research, albeit in markets permeated by different norms and cultures. Given that working conditions are highly influenced by institutional differences unique to each country, it becomes imperative to observe if and how the results from prior research, conducted in other countries, differ for companies permeated by Swedish culture, norms, and regulations. Furthermore, the literature on how the well-being of parents with small children is affected by workplace factors is limited. Hence, this study aims to address this gap by investigating whether the well-being of employees with parental responsibilities is affected differently by their work context. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How are work-related stress and a supportive work-family culture related to perceptions of balance between work and private life?
- 2) Does the perception of a more supportive work-family culture affect employees' decisions to take advantage of flexible work arrangements?

- 3) Does a supportive work-family culture increase the likelihood that employees with parental responsibilities utilize flexible work policies to a greater extent and perceive a higher level of work-life balance?
- 4) Are lower levels of perceived work-life balance related to higher turnover intentions?

1.3 Contribution

The research questions were addressed utilizing survey evidence and complementary qualitative data from two prominent Swedish fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies to (1) explore how work-related stress correlates with work-life balance; (2) analyze how perceptions of a supportive work-family culture relate to perceived work-life balance and employees' willingness to utilize flextime¹ and flexplace² work policies; (3) conclude whether variations in perceived work-life balance and utilization of flexible work policies can be attributed to employees' parental status; and (4) determine how perceptions of work-life balance correlate with intentions to leave the company. The present study expands extant research in several ways. First, we demonstrate a relationship between work-related stress and perceived work-life balance, such that higher levels of stress at work negatively impact employees' abilities to balance work and private responsibilities. Second, we expand previous research by highlighting the importance of considering institutional differences between countries when studying the impact of workplace factors on employee well-being. For example, while previous research conducted in The United States suggests that perceptions of fewer negative career consequences are closely related to employees' abilities to balance paid work and family life, we contrast these findings suggesting that perceptions of negative career consequences are less important in facilitating work-life balance when observing the Swedish labor market and more important is managerial support. Third, while previous research has demonstrated that parents often are penalized for utilizing various work-family benefits, such as parental leave, we extend these findings in two ways: firstly, we suggest that fears of negative career consequences also are evident when observing parents' utilization of flextime policies, equally available to all employees, irrespective of parental responsibility. In addition, although most research on parental responsibilities on labor force outcomes is conducted in The United States known for its restricted parental support, we suggest that parents still are

¹ Flextime policies offer employees flexibility regarding "when" to work, such that employees can decide when to start and end their workday with some degree of flexibility.

² Flexplace policies, also commonly known as telecommuting or hybrid workplace policies, offer employees flexibility regarding "how" to work, such that employees can decide to work from home or elsewhere during "normal" working hours.

hesitant to utilize policies designed to help parents better balance paid work and family life, despite observing the Swedish labor market with very generous work-family benefits.

The present study further offers practical insights for managers to consider in their efforts to improve employee well-being. For example, the results from the study shed doubt on the ability of flexible work policies to facilitate work-life balance, and instead suggest that managers should direct their efforts to establish a supportive work-family culture. Especially managerial support was found to be significantly related to perceived work-life balance. Thus, organizations should work to ensure that managers throughout the organization have the tools and knowledge to support employees in their efforts to balance work and family life and evaluate whether managers' actions and decisions align with the established objectives of family-supportive programs. Our finding that perceived work-life balance is negatively related to turnover intentions further highlights the importance for companies to engage in efforts to support employees in balancing paid work and private life in order to retain and attract top talent.

1.4 Institutional differences between Sweden and The United States

Work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, and the effect of having children on labor force outcomes have long been studied across numerous disciplines. However, previous research within these fields is mostly conducted in The United States, shedding doubt on whether the same patterns that were identified in this stream of literature are also present in the Swedish context. Data obtained from OECD's Better Life Index reveal that while slightly over 10% of employees in The United States work 50 hours or more during an average work week, the score in Sweden on this indicator is about 1%, which is one of the lowest rates among the OECD countries. Further, in The United States, full-time workers devote around 14.6 hours per day to leisure and personal care, compared to Sweden which averages around 15.3 hours per day (OECD, n.d.). Sweden introduced shared parental leave in 1974 and was thereby the first country in the world to do so. Further, reversed months were introduced in 1995, whereby one month of leave was reserved for each parent to increase fathers' use of parental leave and to facilitate a more gender-equal sharing of paid and unpaid work (Duvander & Cedstrand, 2022). Today, parents are entitled to 480 days of paid parental leave per child, of which 390 days are based on the parent's income, while the remaining 90 days correspond to SEK 180 per day. Out of these 480 days, 90 days are reserved for each parent (Försäkringskassan, 2018). In contrast, The United States does not, on a national basis, provide any statutory entitlements to

either paid maternity leave or paid paternity leave (OECD, 2022). At the federal level, The United States only provides 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave, which is restricted to companies with more than 50 employees. It has also been observed that female employment in The United States has significantly decreased for the last decade, despite women in The United States having good career prospects (OECD, n.d.).

2. Literature review

This study relates to several research streams, with emphasis on literature regarding employee well-being, work-life balance, human resource policies, and flexible work arrangements. The literature will be reviewed in the following sub-sections: work-life balance and well-being, consequences of work-life balance, parental responsibility and its effect on work-life balance and labor force outcomes, and flexible work arrangements.

2.1 Work-life balance and well-being

Work-life balance could be broken down into two dimensions. The first dimension touches upon the engagement in different roles that one's work and private life constitute. The second dimension builds on the conflict that may arise when there are conflicting interests between these roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2018a). Through these two dimensions, there are a handful of definitions of work-life balance. Marks & MacDermid (1996b) highlight the importance of being fully engaged in the performance of all roles present in one's total environment. Another perspective is brought forward by Kirchmeyer (2000) who states that to achieve positive experiences through all roles, a person's energy, commitment, and time must be equally allocated to the different domains. Emerging from the concepts is the following definition of work-life balance: "The extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with– his or her work role and family role" (Greenhaus et al., 2003a). In contrast, engaging more in one role than the other is considered an imbalance, even if this is aligned with an individual's preferences (Greenhaus et al., 2003b). An imbalanced lifestyle could harm an individual's well-being by contributing to higher stress levels, lower quality of life, and potentially also limiting employees' effectiveness at work (*Balancing Act: How Managers Can Integrate Successful Careers and Fulfilling Personal Lives.*, n.d.). Building on this line of reasoning, (Marks & MacDermid, 1996) found that individuals who are experiencing a balanced lifestyle tend to suffer less from depression than their unbalanced peers, as a more

balanced involvement in family and work life reduces the risk of work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is defined as the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of paid work and family roles are incompatible in that the requirements in one role make fulfilling the requirements in the other difficult (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) Further, the risk of work-family conflict is likely mitigated because individuals who leverage a balance are more likely to evolve routines to meet long-term demands in both work and family life (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Aligning with this, Frone et al. (1992a) suggest that work-family conflict and stress are reduced because of a balanced lifestyle implying that a more balanced involvement positively affects well-being. In addition, (Greenhaus et al., 2003b) find that when time and involvement are high across diverse roles, work-life balance will positively contribute to the quality of life. The individuals who experience the highest quality of life are those who are more satisfied and engaged in their family rather than in their work life. The opposite distribution of time and involvement corresponded to a lower quality of life, implying that being more invested in work than family led to high levels of stress and work-family conflict (Greenhaus et al., 2003b)

2.2 Consequences of work-life balance

One way to view the implications of work-life balance is by dividing it into three categories: work-related outcomes, nonwork-related outcomes, and stress-related outcomes (Allen et al., 2000b). Observing work-related outcomes, (Keene & Quadagno, 2004) highlights that it is not necessarily the hours spent at work, but rather the feeling of job autonomy, that is the most important in facilitating work-life balance. Allen et al. (2000b) suggest that when individuals are experiencing a considerable degree of work-family conflict, these individuals are not likely to do more than the minimum level of what is required of them and show higher turnover intentions. Sirgy & Lee (2018b) study non-work-related outcomes of work-life balance and find a positive effect on individuals' physical health because of an improved balance between private and work life. Allen et al. (2000) further suggest that higher levels of work-family conflict are negatively associated with life and family satisfaction. Regarding stress-related outcomes, previous research suggests two types of stress originating from work-family conflict: psychological stress, and family-related stress (Sirgy & Lee, 2018b). Building on this stream of research, Allen et al. (2000a) found a positive relationship between burnout and increased work-family conflict. Allen et al. (2000a) make further references to Beatty (1996) who concludes that higher levels of work-family conflict are correlated with more anxiety, and

to Frone et al. (1992a) indicating a heightened risk of depression resulting from work-family conflict.

2.3 Parental responsibility and its effect on work-life balance and labor force outcomes

A stream of literature has investigated the effect of parenthood on work-family conflict. Beatty (1996) observed differences in depression related to work-family conflict for women depending on whether they had children or not. A significant relationship between depression and work-family conflict was found only for women with children. The relationship between parenthood and work-family conflict emerges since having children is often perceived as requiring a trade-off between achieving success in one's career and being a successful parent (Datta Gupta et al., 2008). This inter-role conflict has grown with the increase in women's labor force participation and level of education, but also due to the emerging ideal of involved fatherhood whereby fathers increasingly are expected to participate in the daily routine of childcare (Nomaguchi, 2009). To reduce the stress associated with balancing multiple roles, organizations have responded by offering employees a range of work-family benefits, designed to effectively support employees in reconciling work and family demands. However, there is evidence that many employees are reluctant to take advantage of these benefits (Munsch et al., 2014). It is shown that even when fathers have access to paid leave, they take very short periods of paternity leave, or no leave at all (Han et al., 2009). Furthermore, leave to care for sick children (CSC) in Sweden is a welfare measure that allows parents to stay home from work to care for a sick child and can therefore facilitate work-family reconciliation. However, out of the 120 days a year available per child, that this form of policy enables, parents on average use less than 10 days of CSC a year (Boye, 2019). To explain the low utilization rate of work-family benefits, previous research has demonstrated that employees are often penalized for using different policies aimed at facilitating work-family reconciliation (e.g., Kramer et al., 2023). A study that analyzed data from Swedish population registers showed a negative association between parents taking paid leave to care for sick children and wages, even among parents who used a small number of CSC days (Boye, 2019). However, few clear conclusions exist regarding the mediating mechanisms explaining the relationship between parent's utilization of work-family benefits and career penalties. One body of research relies on the signal of commitment hypothesis as support for explaining how employees' utilization rate of policies relates to career penalties. Workers are normally expected to work long hours, be

physically present, and prioritize work over any other private responsibilities (Manchester et al., 2013). These expectations are referred to as the “ideal worker norm” (Williams, 1999). According to the commitment hypothesis, employers seek signals from the environment to interpret employees’ commitment to work, by observing how closely their decisions and behaviors align with the ideal worker norm (Leslie et al., 2012). In support of this stream of research, Albrecht et al. (1999) explain that employees’ usage of work-family policies may be interpreted by employers as a signal of the employee’s lack of commitment to the ideal worker norm resulting in career penalties for those utilizing these policies. To avoid such career penalties stemming from the use of work-family policies, Drago et al. (2006), found that in an academic context, employees attempt to strategically hide their family responsibilities by not taking advantage of work-family policies and thereby enhancing the appearance of commitment to the ideal worker norm. In contrast, a distinct narrative applying policy feedback theory finds support for the mediating mechanisms of general norm-setting and cultural diffusion of family-friendliness in the organizational context leading to a more pronounced adoption of work-family benefits. Drawing from this narrative, Abendroth & Lükemann (2023a) found that fathers exhibited a greater inclination to adapt their working hours following a transition to fatherhood when working in organizations where the adoption of flexible work arrangements already had been normalized, signaling that utilization of such policies was perceived as an available and legitimate practice. Moreover, the results obtained by Bygren & Duvander (2006) support the mediating role of cultural diffusion on the adoption of work-family policies. Their findings indicate that fathers are inclined to use parental leave to a greater extent when other fathers in the organization have previously availed themselves of such benefits, thereby encouraging a culture of support for work-family reconciliation.

2.4 Flexible work arrangements and its relation to work-life balance

The emergence of flexible policies, especially the implementation of hybrid workplace systems, which for many companies worldwide is the new way of working, in part stems because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Oppong Peprah, 2024). Flexible work arrangements are defined as the concept that offers flexibility regarding “when” and “how” to work and are designed to help employees balance their private and work lives (Rau & Hyland, 2002). These benefits can include flextime, designed to provide employees with greater flexibility in the management of time-based conflicts between work and nonwork activities, as well as

telecommuting and other work-at-home arrangements (Ellen Ernst Kossek & Sharon A. Lobel, 1996). Although flexible work arrangements often are implemented in the organizational context to facilitate work-life balance, contradictory results exist in research regarding the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance. Drawing from the evidence that flexible work arrangements facilitate work-life balance, Hayman (2009) found a significant relationship between the perceived usability of flexible work policies and work-life balance, with a stronger relationship for flextime work schedules. Another body of literature contrasts these findings, proposing instead that the provision of flexible policies follows a gift-exchange dynamic. Ortega (2009) states that employers often provide discretion concerning work hours and schedules, with the dual aim of enhancing employees' work-life balance while concurrently expecting increased levels of productivity and performance in exchange. In line with this reasoning, evidence from Lott & Chung's (2016) study on schedule control, showed that when workers were allowed more control over where and how long they work, they increased their average overtime hours.

3. Identified research gap

Despite substantial evidence that mental health issues constitute both a financial and health burden for companies and society at large, previous research on the Swedish labor market is limited. Since work-life balance, is an important component of well-being with substantial research conducted in markets dissimilar to the Swedish setting, there is a research gap, emphasizing further understanding of the correlates of work-life balance in the Swedish labor market. In addition, previous research has concluded that parents are the group of individuals affected most by the conflicting responsibilities of work and family life (Beatty, 1996). Despite this, extant literature is limited to the relation between having children and labor force outcomes, such as negative career consequences. However, few studies have investigated how work-related factors impact the well-being of individuals with parental responsibilities. Furthermore, the evident shift in the ways of working, with the rapid emergence of flexible working arrangements stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a need to understand the effect of these policies. However, contradictory evidence has been presented in previous research regarding its effect on work-life balance, emphasizing the importance of comprehending the mediating mechanisms underlying the relationship between work-life balance and utilization of these policies.

4. Hypothesis development

4.1 Work-life balance

Individuals are trying to create work-life balance by distributing their engagement across different roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2018a) and having minimal conflict between work and private life (Clark, 2000). Aligning with this, Frone et al. (1992), find that when a balance is achieved, conflict and stress levels are lower. On the same note, it is highlighted that conflict between work and private life creates both psychological and family-related stress (Sirgy & Lee, 2018b). Further, Greenhaus et al. (2003b) highlight that distributing more time and involvement to work rather than family, implies higher levels of stress and work-family conflict. Building on these findings, it is reasonable to believe that individuals who perceive a higher level of work-related stress will also perceive a worsened work-life balance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is predicted:

H1: A higher level of perceived work stress is negatively associated with perceived work-life balance.

4.2 Flexible Work Arrangements, Work-family Culture, and Parental Status

It has been suggested that the potential for flexible work arrangements to facilitate work-life balance may be limited (e.g., Allen et al., 2013a). These findings are somewhat surprising given the discretion these policies provide employees in relation to work hours and workplace and therefore the increased ability it enables individuals to spend more time outside of work. However, according to Keene & Quadagno (2004) the hours spent at work are less relevant, and more important is the feeling of job autonomy in facilitating work-life balance. Thus, when the work setting was permeated by autonomy, individuals felt more balanced. Consequently, flexible work initiatives provided by organizations may not be enough to facilitate work-life balance. Indeed, one explanation for this may be that, even though employees have access to flexible work arrangements, they are reluctant to take advantage of these benefits due to fears of career penalties. A laboratory experiment on the use of flexible work practices (FWP) and career success, found that FWP use may be interpreted by managers as prioritizing personal life over work, thus, signaling low perceived commitment, which in turn resulted in career penalties for FWP users (Leslie et al., 2012). Hence, it is likely that employees who experience a feeling of support in utilizing flexible work policies without negative career repercussions

use such benefits to a greater extent and feel more balance between paid work and private life. In support of this argument, there is evidence that if the underlying corporate culture is inconsistent with the policies or programs offered, it is unlikely that employees will feel comfortable utilizing the benefits provided to them (Perlow, 1995). Similarly, there is evidence that employees' perceptions of a supportive work-family culture, and especially managerial support are positively related to adoption rates of benefits aimed at promoting heightened work-life balance (Thompson et al., 1999a). To summarize, it is predicted that employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to the utilization of flexible work policies. It is further hypothesized that employees who perceive a more supportive work-family culture will perceive a higher level of work-life balance. Still, it is not possible to disregard the possibility that the usage of flexible work policies independent of a supportive work-family culture will lead to a heightened work-life balance. Therefore, it is predicted that the proposed relationship between work-life balance and supportive work-family culture will be stronger than the effect of policy utilization on work-life balance alone.

H2a: Employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to the utilization of a hybrid workplace.

H2b: Employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to the utilization of flextime.

H3: Employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to a higher level of perceived work-life balance, when controlling for the effect of utilization of flexible work policies on perceived work-life balance alone.

Whether an employee has children or not, in turn, is likely to affect the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and perceived work-life balance, as well as the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and utilization of flexible work policies. Apart from the ideal worker norm being applied towards them, parents are also expected to adhere to the ideal parent norm, entailing a high level of involvement and time devoted to their children (Kramer et al., 2023). Thus, combined with the ideal worker norm, parents are likely to feel a stronger inter-role conflict between their role as a parent and their role at work, relative to workers without parental responsibility. This argument is supported by evidence from (Beatty, 1996) who found that depression related to a heightened work-family conflict was more likely

for women with children compared to women who had no children. As previously noted, employees perceived a higher level of balance when the work setting was permeated by autonomy (Keene & Quadagno, 2004). Since parents often feel a higher level of work-family conflict, an increased perception of autonomy in the work context, enabling a better balance, would likely benefit those with parental responsibility to a greater extent. This aligns with Allen et al. (2013b) indicating that the group of people who benefitted the most from a hybrid workplace system was individuals with parental responsibility. However, drawing from the literature on parental responsibility and work-family conflict, parents too are often penalized for utilizing various work-family benefits designed to facilitate work-family reconciliation (e.g., Kramer et al., 2023). For example, studying the relationship between CSC usage and wages, Boye (2019) found a negative association between parents taking paid leave to care for sick children and wages, even among parents who used a small number of CSC days. Similarly, Drago et al. (2006), found that in an academic context, employees attempt to strategically hide their family responsibilities by not taking advantage of work-family policies and thereby enhance the appearance of commitment to the ideal worker norm. Thus, although flexible work policies could help better align work with childcare arrangements, an employee with parental responsibility might avoid utilizing such policies, if they do not feel supported in their decision to do so. Therefore, it is suggested that a supportive work-family culture is more important in fostering a balance between paid work and family life, for employees with parental responsibility. Furthermore, since parents are the group of people benefitting the most from the autonomy provided by flexible work arrangements, it is proposed that they will utilize these policies to a greater extent, compared to non-parents, if they perceive a supportive work-family culture. Hence, it is predicted that parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and work-life balance, as well as the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and the utilization of flexible work policies.

H4: Parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and perceived work-life balance, such that parents rely on a supportive work-family culture to a greater extent to perceive higher levels of work-life balance.

H5a: Parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and the utilization of a hybrid workplace, such that parents utilize a hybrid workplace to a greater extent if they perceive a more supportive work-family culture.

H5b: Parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and the utilization of flextime, such that parents utilize flextime to a greater extent if they perceive a more supportive work-family culture.

4.3 Work-life balance and turnover intentions

Lastly, it has been observed that work-family conflict increases turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2000a). Further, since work-family conflict and work-life balance are related constructs (Frone et al., 1992a), it is possible to assume that the same relationship would emerge when work-life balance decreases. Building on this line of reasoning, Bruck et al. (2002) find that as work-family conflict increases, job satisfaction seems to decrease. Similarly, Wayne et al. (2004) emphasize a correlation between an individual's job satisfaction and the extent to which their workplace supports family life. In summary, based on these findings, it is reasonable to assume that higher levels of perceived work-life balance are negatively associated with turnover intentions, such that when individuals experience an enhanced balance between work and family responsibilities, they showcase fewer intentions to leave their current organization. Therefore, the following hypothesis is predicted:

H6: Perceived work-life balance is negatively related to turnover intentions.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

This study was conducted based on quantitative data from two large companies in the FMCG industry, which for the purpose of this study will be called "Company A" and "Company I". At the Swedish headquarters where the study was conducted, Company A employs 250 people, and Company I employs 2000 people. The reason behind this choice of industry is the widespread presence in the Swedish market with around 91,000 FMCG companies (*List of Top 50 Largest FMCG Companies in Sweden*, n.d.). As the study was conducted at two different FMCG companies, the choice of quantitative study ensured that the answers could be interpreted in a more general way, potentially applicable to other white-collar occupations.

5.2 Differences in work conditions at the two companies

Employees at Company A and Company I have access to policies permeated by similar characteristics. At Company A employees can utilize flextime by starting their workday between 7 am to 9 am, while ending it between 3 pm to 5 pm. Similarly, at Company I employees are restricted in keeping their meeting times between 9 am and 4 pm to enable more flexibility outside of these hours. With regards to a flexible workplace, employees at Company A are allowed to work from home or elsewhere if, and when the circumstances allow it, with internal differences based on which department the employee belongs to. At Company I the employees are required to be at the office a majority of what is considered the normal working hours. However, the remaining work time could be conducted from wherever, when it is suitable with regard to the role characteristics. At both companies, an employee's decision to work remotely should be made after dialogue with his or her manager.

5.3 Sample and Procedure

An online survey (Appendix 1) was distributed to employees at the two different FMCG companies. At Company I, the online survey was distributed as a post on the company's intranet, with approximately 2000 employees having access to the post. At Company A it was e-mailed to 250 employees working at the company's Swedish headquarters. At Company I the response rate was close to 13%, with 253 employees completing the entire survey and at Company A, the response rate was 49%, with 112 employees completing the full survey. A total of 124 responses were not included in this calculation since these were not fully completed and therefore discarded from the analysis. Most respondents were women (66%). Slightly over half of the sample had at least one child living with them (56%). The average age of the respondents was between 36 and 45 years, and most held a role without supervising responsibility (75%), while 15% were managers, 7% were team leaders, and 2% held a department head position. Regarding work-related variables, some differences were found between respondents with and without parental responsibility. Parents in the sample were more likely to have a role with supervising responsibility ($p < .05$). However, no significant differences were found between those with and without parental responsibility, concerning average hours worked per week, with respondents reporting an average of 40 hours worked per week. Consistent with other research on differences in work-life balance and parental responsibility (Beatty, 1996), parents on average reported a higher level of work-related stress ($t = -2.18, p < .05$), and indicated that they perceived that their jobs interfered with their private

life to a larger extent than respondents without parental responsibility ($t = -3.89, p < .001$). There were no significant differences, however, in the utilization of either flexplace or flextime work policies between parents and employees with no children, with respondents generally utilizing flextime 3 times per week and flexplace 2 times per week on average.

5.4 Main study and measures

5.4.1 Work-family culture

In line with the literature, there are three underlying dimensions of work-family culture, which are managerial support, negative career consequences associated with devoting time to responsibilities outside of work, and time demands of work that may interfere with private or family responsibilities (Thompson et al., 1999b). Thus, to establish a complete assessment of work-family culture, each of the three dimensions was measured using a 9-item scale developed from Thompsons' et al. (1999b) work-family culture scale. Specifically, four items were developed to measure perceived managerial support (e.g., "In general, managers in this organization are quite accommodating of family-related needs"), another four items assessed negative consequences (e.g., To turn down a promotion or transfer for family-related reasons will seriously hurt one's career progress in this organization) and organizational time demands was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statement: "To be viewed favorably by top management, employees in this organization are expected to constantly put their jobs ahead of their families or personal lives". For each item, respondents indicated the extent to which it characterized their current organizational culture using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For high scores to reflect a supportive work-family culture, negatively phrased items were re-coded. The responses for the nine items were then summed to create a composite score for work-family culture. Alpha for the scale was .81. Following previous literature (Thompson et al., 1999b), a principal component analysis with equamax rotation was carried out to identify the underlying dimensions in the work-family culture scale. The analysis was based on 158 respondents on the 9-item culture scale, consistent with the general guideline of at least a 10:1 ratio of observations to variables needed (Thompson et al., 1999b). A three-factor solution was supported based on an examination of the scree plot showing a significant discontinuity after three factors and the result from the principal component analysis illustrating three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. Together the three factors accounted for 72% of the total variance, with factor 1 explaining 41% of the variance and factors 2 and 3 explaining approximately 20%

and 11% of the variance, respectively. Factor interpretation was based on the items with the highest loading on each factor (items and loadings are summarized in Table 1). Factor 1 represents the extent to which managers were perceived to be supportive of employees' efforts to strike a balance between work and family responsibilities ("Managerial support"). Factor 2 represents the extent to which employees feel stigmatized by others in the organization for taking extended leave to care for newborn or adopted children ("Stigmatization from extended leave"). Factor 3 represents the extent to which employees perceive negative career consequences from prioritizing private or family responsibilities ("Negative career consequences"). Items with the highest loading on each factor were summed to create composite scores for each dimension of work-family culture. The alpha for managerial support (4 items) was .78, the alpha for stigmatization from extended leave (2 items) was .95, and the alpha for negative career consequences (3 items) was .65.

Table 1
Results of Principal Components Analysis of Work-family Culture Items

Item	Factor 1 Managerial Support	Factor 2 Stigmatization From Extended Leave	Factor 3 Negative Career Consequences
Q11. In this organization, employees are encouraged to strike a balance between work and private life	.871		
Q12. In general, managers in this organization are quite accommodating of family-related needs	.830		
Q13. This organization encourages employees to set limits on where work stops, and home life begins	.800		.335
Q14. In this organization, it is very hard to leave during the workday to take care of personal or family matters (R)	.711		
Q16. Many employees are resentful when women in this organization take extended leaves to care for newborn or adopted children (R)		.954	
Q15. Many employees are resentful when men in this organization take extended leaves to care for newborn or adopted children (R)		.939	
Q17. To turn down a promotion or transfer for family-related reasons will seriously hurt one's career progress in this organization (R)			.736
Q18. In this organization employees who use flextime are less likely to advance their careers than those who do not use flextime. ("Flexitime" being the possibility to start/end your workday outside of the normal working hours) (R)		.332	.704

Q19. To be viewed favorably by top management, employees in this organization are expected to constantly put their jobs ahead of their families or personal lives (R)	.394		.696
Eigenvalue	3.68	1.82	1.04
Percentage of total variance explained	40.94	20.25	11.54

Note: $n = 158$. R indicates items were reversed-scored. No loading values indicates that the loading value was $< .3$. Highest loading for each item is italicized.

5.4.2 Work-family benefit availability and utilization

Based on discussions with the HR teams at both Company A and Company I, at which the quantitative data was collected, we limited our research by focusing on the availability of flextime and hybrid workplace policies. Further, in accordance with the literature, flexible work arrangements providing workers with autonomy regarding “when” and “how” to work, have been identified as important benefits affecting both employees' work-life balance and the degree of perceived role conflict between work and non-work activities (Rau & Hyland, 2002). As commonly stated in the literature, flexibility concerns both time and place, and availability and use (Allen et al., 2013c). Thus, we measured flexibility with regard to time, by asking respondents about whether their organization provided policies that allowed for flexible working hours and if that were the case, how often the respondent utilized this benefit (e.g., If there are policies in place that allow for flexible working hours, implying that you are allowed to start and end your workday with some degree of flexibility. On average, how many times during one work week do you utilize this policy?). Flexibility with regards to place was assessed in the same way using the item: “If there are policies in place that allow for a hybrid workplace, implying that you are allowed to work from home. On average, how many times during one work week do you utilize this policy?”. Responses to the two items were assessed using a 6-point scale ranging from 0 days to 5 days per week on average.

5.4.3 Work-family conflict/work-life balance

Work-family conflict was operationalized as work-to-family conflict out of the two types of conflicts often studied (I.e., work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict). The reason for this is that the predictors of work-to-family conflict mainly reside in the work domain, while family-to-work conflict primarily is affected by the family domain. Therefore, utilization of

work-family policies and a supportive corporate culture are more highly associated with work-to-family conflict compared to family-to-work conflict (Allen et al., 2013c; Thompson et al., 1999b). Work-to-family conflict was measured with the item “How often do you feel that the demands of your job interfere with your private life” adapted from Thompson & Blau’s (1993) study. The item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = always to 5 = never. Further, we included 2 additional items developed from a review of the literature tapping specifically perceptions of work-life balance, to assess the several dimensions of work-life balance more completely. One of the items assessed how successful the respondents felt in balancing paid work and family life, with participants indicating their response on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all successful to 5 = completely successful. Furthermore, an important component of work-life balance includes time (Greenhaus et al., 2003a). Thus, time balance was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they perceived that they had enough time to spend with their family. Responses to this item were made on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. A composite work-life balance score was created by summing responses across the 3 items. Alpha for the scale was .83. A high score for the scale represents a higher level of perceived work-life balance.

5.4.4 Work-stress

Perceived stress was operationalized as work-related stress and was measured by asking respondents to indicate how often they found their work stressful. Participants answered this item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = always to 5 = never. For high scores on this item to reflect higher perceptions of work-related stress, the item was re-coded.

5.4.5 Turnover intentions

Turnover intentions were assessed by asking respondents how likely they were to consider leaving their current job for a job that offers better well-being support. The item was developed based on discussions with a subject-matter expert who has conducted research within the area of work-life balance and employee well-being. Respondents indicated the extent to which the item characterized their current turnover intentions using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not likely at all to 5 = very likely.

5.4.6 Career satisfaction, schedule flexibility, overtime work & work-family benefit awareness

Career satisfaction has been identified as closely related to work-life balance. (Greenhaus et al., 1990). Hence, career satisfaction was included as a control variable in predicting perceived work-life balance, as well as work-family benefit utilization and turnover intentions, by asking respondents “How satisfied are you with the success you have achieved in your career?”, developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990). The item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all satisfied to 5 = completely satisfied. Furthermore, findings from previous research indicate that perceptions of autonomy in the work context are highly related to work-life balance (Keen & Quadagno, 2004). Therefore, we included two items adapted from Andrades’ et al. (2019) schedule flexibility scale, assessing the respondents' perceptions of autonomy concerning both time and place. The items assessing schedule flexibility were measured on a 3-point response scale of 1 = Starting and finishing times are decided by my employer, 2 = I do have some flexibility in deciding starting and finishing times, and 3 = I decide starting and finishing times myself. For the item evaluating workplace flexibility the phrase “starting and finishing times” was substituted with “where I should be working from”. The two items assessing schedule flexibility were used as control variables in predicting both work-life balance and the utilization of flexible work policies. Overtime work was used as another control variable in predicting work-life balance, by asking respondents to indicate how often their jobs involved working outside of “normal working hours”, with normal work hours being 8–17. Responses to this item were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = always to 5 = never. It may also be the case that employees do not utilize work-family benefits provided by the organizations because they lack awareness of such benefits. Therefore, we included an additional control variable in predicting work-family benefit utilization by asking the respondents whether they were aware of any policies in their organization that aim to enhance employee well-being. This item was developed based on input from a subject-matter expert who has conducted research in the work-family area and after discussions with the HR teams at the two companies. This item was assessed using a 3-point response scale of 1 = Yes, I am aware of one or a few policies in place, 2 = Yes, I know that there are policies in place, but I am unsure what they say, and 3 = No, I do not know which/if any policies are in place.

5.4.7 Demographic variables

Demographic variables included gender (female = 1, male = 2, other = 3, prefer not to say = 3) with female coded as 0 and male coded as 1, age, job level (1 = co-worker specified as an employee without supervising responsibility, 2 = team leader, 3 = manager, and 4 = department head), and average hours worked per week. To evaluate whether having children impacted the relationship between work-family culture and work-life balance, as well as between work-family culture and work-family benefit utilization, we included the following item: “How many children are living in your household?”. The responses for this item were coded 0 (none) and 1 (at least one child). Gender, age, and job level were used as control variables in predicting work-life balance and work-family policy utilization. In addition, average hours worked per week were added as another control variable in predicting work-life balance as well as turnover intentions.

5.5 Quality of research – reliability and validity of data collection

To ensure that the questionnaire distributed to the employees at the two companies was easily understood and interpreted correctly, the survey passed through multiple checks at the HR department of both companies. Based on the input obtained from this we could adjust the survey to commonly used words, concepts, and policies in these organizations, ensuring better reliability in the answers. The identical questionnaire was distributed to both companies, to mitigate the risk that differences in the formulation of questions and thereby interpretation, affect the results, rather than actual differences in the employees’ experiences. In situations where the HR department at one company had inputs that did not apply to the other company, the questions were formulated more generally to ensure adaptability to both companies, despite their differences. By distributing the questionnaires via email (Company A) and the intranet (Company I), it was ensured that the participation was highly voluntary and hence, permeated by more engagement. Further, the questionnaire consisted of 33 questions. To enhance the reliability of the answers, questions regarding work-life balance were strategically placed in the beginning to ensure that respondents were focused on this part, while demographic questions, typically requiring less cognitive effort, were situated in the end. Lastly, for more complicated questions, the question was illustrated with an example to ensure that it was not interpreted in the wrong way.

5.6 Data analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test all the hypotheses, with control variables entered in the first step, followed by the variables to be tested in the subsequent steps. For the analysis predicting work-life balance, appropriate demographic variables, career satisfaction, utilization of flexible work policies, and perceptions of autonomy in the work context were entered as control variables in step 1. Perceived work stress was entered in step 2 to test hypothesis 1. The 9-item culture scale was entered in step 3 to test hypothesis 3. To test the moderating role of parental status in hypotheses 4 and 5a/b, an interaction item was created by multiplying the recoded item for parental status (no children were coded 0, and one or more children were coded 1) with the mean-centered work-family culture scale. The interaction item was then entered in step 4 to test hypothesis 4. For the analysis predicting utilization of flexplace and flextime work policies, work-family benefit awareness, autonomy in the work context, career satisfaction, perceived work stress, and appropriate demographic variables were included in step 1 as control variables. Work-family culture was entered in step 2 to test hypotheses 2a and 2b, followed by the interaction item for parental status in step 3 to test hypotheses 5a and 5b. After testing the hypotheses involving the 9-item work-family culture scale, the same analyses were performed using the three culture dimensions for a more fine-grained assessment. For the analysis predicting turnover intentions, demographic variables related to age, job level, and average hours worked per week as well as career success and perceived work stress were entered in step 1 as control variables, followed by the 3-item work-life balance scale entered in step 2 to test hypothesis 6. The significance of the results was assessed from the F test for R^2 change, associated with the variables added in the last step, as well as the significance and direction of the standardized beta coefficients for the hypothesized predictors.

5.7 Qualitative research

To get a more profound understanding of the survey findings, related to the utilization of flexible work arrangements, five qualitative interviews were conducted. To get reliable insights three interviews were held at one company and two at the other company, with a gender distribution of 60% women and 40% men (Appendix 2). These interviews were constructed in a semi-structured way, indicating that they started with a predetermined set of open questions. However, if the interviewees had additional insights through the interview, further questions and exploration within these areas were performed. The interviewees had filled in the survey

that was sent out to their company and gave voluntary notice of their participation in the interviews. As a result of the voluntary notice, the interviewees were informed about the theme of the interviews, and questions were to some extent touched upon in each interview to ensure uniformity in the experience (Appendix 3).

6. Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations among the variables within the dataset, as well as their intercorrelations. It also provides reliability estimates for created components. Regarding average hours worked per week, respondents work an average of 40 hours per week ($M = 2.2$). The item assessing overtime work displays a mean of 3.2, meaning that respondents on average report that their job sometimes involves working outside of normal working hours ($M = 3.2$). Concerning policy awareness, respondents on average report that they are aware of a few policies in place, designed to support employee well-being, but are unsure what these policies entail ($M = 1.7$). Furthermore, flextime is utilized to a greater extent compared to flexplace, with respondents using flextime ($M = 3.8$) an average of 3 times per week while using flexplace ($M = 3.2$) an average of 2 times per week. Utilization of flextime and flexplace are both positively correlated with perceived work-life balance, although the correlation between utilization of flextime and work-life balance is more positive. Previous research indicates that the hours spent at work are associated with work-life balance (Thompson et al., 1999a). The negative correlation coefficient between work-life balance and average hours worked per week ($-.38$), as well as the positive correlation coefficient between work-life balance and overtime work ($.44$), align with these findings. Another insight derived from Table 2, is the negative correlation coefficient between turnover intentions and a supportive work-family culture ($-.42$), indicating that respondents who perceive a more supportive work-family culture, tend to display fewer intentions to leave their current organization. With regard to gender differences, men in the sample tend to perceive more stigmatization from extended leave, which is consistent with previous research on equality and parental responsibility (Abendroth & Lükemann, 2023b). Lastly, the negative correlation coefficient between parental status and work-life balance ($-.23$) indicates that parents in the sample tend to perceive lower levels of work-life balance compared to respondents with no children. In addition, the positive correlation coefficient between parental

status and utilization of flextime (.09), as well as between parental status and flexplace (.11), suggests that employees with parental responsibility utilize these policies more often.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Estimates, and Intercorrelations

Variable	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1. Work-life Balance ^b	.83	10.5	2.8																			
2. Work-family Culture ^a	.81	5.4	1.1	.54																		
3. Managerial Support ^a	.78	20.5	4.8	.51	.67																	
4. Stigmatization Extended Leave ^a	.95	10.9	3.6	-.07	.44	.14																
5. Career Consequences ^a	.65	13.4	4.6	.06	.41	.22	.31															
6. Utilization Flexplace ^b		3.2	1.0	.08	.04	.00	-.06	.02														
7. Utilization flextime ^b		3.8	1.8	.12	.15	.02	.09	-.02	.10													
8. Policy Awareness ^c		1.7	.7	-.13	-.27	-.22	-.16	-.09	.08	-.04												
9. Autonomy Time ^b		2.3	.5	.13	.16	.08	.09	.05	.08	.24	.04											
10. Autonomy Place ^b		2.1	.4	.07	.13	.01	-.03	-.01	.10	.10	-.01	.33										
11. Overtime work ^c		3.2	.9	.44	.21	.22	-.06	.01	.00	.03	.00	-.04	-.02									
12. Perceived Work Stress ^b		3.2	.7	-.61	-.41	-.31	-.02	-.06	-.08	-.09	.10	-.05	-.02	-.28								
13. Gender ^d		.3	.5	.01	.00	-.01	-.10	.04	-.07	-.09	-.06	.03	.05	-.11	.04							
14. Age ^b		3.2	1.1	.03	-.03	.00	.04	.04	.05	.10	-.01	.11	.07	-.05	.00	.05						
15. Average Hours Worked/week ^b		2.2	.6	-.38	-.24	-.24	.12	-.07	-.06	-.03	.01	.05	-.02	-.51	.34	.05	.13					
16. Job-level ^b		1.4	.8	-.16	-.01	-.03	.12	-.04	-.09	.05	-.15	.10	.09	-.25	.15	.05	.09	.32				
17. Parental Status ^e		.6	.5	-.23	-.09	-.06	.11	-.09	.11	.09	.06	.04	-.06	-.11	.11	-.14	.13	.02	.11			
18. Career Satisfaction ^b		3.4	1.0	.35	.37	.34	.02	.02	.03	.13	-.19	.18	.07	.03	-.26	.02	.05	-.10	.19	.03		
19. Turnover Intentions ^b		2.4	1.6	-.32	-.42	-.28	-.02	-.07	.06	-.06	.27	-.12	-.12	-.03	.23	-.02	-.02	.04	-.02	.07	-.33	

Note. *N* ranged from 158 to 365, two-tailed

- ^a Higher values reflect a more supportive culture
- ^b Higher values reflect a greater degree of the variable
- ^c Higher values reflect a lower degree of the variable
- ^d Gender was coded 0 (female) and 1 (male)
- ^e Parental status was coded 0 (no children) and 1 (at least one child)

6.1 Work-life balance

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis performed to predict perceived work-life balance with perceived work stress (H1), a supportive work-family culture (H3), and the moderating role of parental status (H4). Appropriate control variables were entered in step 1. These included gender, as previous research has suggested that women often perceive work as conflicting with family responsibilities to a greater extent than men (Kramer et al., 2023), age, and job level, since different positions within the organization likely entail different expectations and demands with implications on work-life balance. Average hours worked per week (Thompson et al., 1999a), overtime work, and autonomy (Keene & Quadagno, 2004) were included as additional control variables in predicting work-life balance, in line with findings from previous research, as well as perceived career satisfaction which also has been found to be correlated with work-life balance (Greenhaus et al., 1990). In line with the prediction that a supportive work-family culture would be positively related to perceived work-life balance when controlling for the utilization of flexible policies alone, utilization of flextime and utilization of flexplace were both included as control variables in the model. Perceived work stress was entered in step 2 (Column 1, Table 3), work-family culture in step 3 (Column 2, Table 3), followed by the interaction term created for parental status in step 4 (Column 4, Table 3).

Hypothesis 1 predicted that a higher level of perceived work stress would be negatively related to perceived work-life balance, with higher levels of perceived work-related stress being associated with lower levels of perceived work-life balance. The results (Column 1 in Table 3) supported the hypothesis; after controlling for appropriate demographic variables, career satisfaction, utilization of flexible work policies, and perceptions of autonomy in the work context, perceived work stress accounted for almost 16% of the additional variance ($R^2 = .159$, $F_{\text{change}} = 112.26$, $p < .001$) and had a statistically significant beta coefficient in the predicted direction.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that a more supportive work-family culture would be positively related to perceived work-life balance when controlling for the effect of work-family policy utilization on work-life balance alone. This hypothesis was also supported by the results, because after controlling for demographic variables, career satisfaction, perceptions of autonomy in the work context, and utilization of flexible work-family policies, as well as perceived work stress, work-

family culture (Column 2, Table 3) explained 7.5% of additional variance in perceived work-life balance ($R^2 = .075$, $F_{\text{change}} = 61.86$, $p < .001$). The positive and statistically significant beta coefficient for work-family culture indicates, as predicted, that a more supportive work-family culture is positively associated with higher perceptions of work-life balance. Further analysis, however, shows that only one of the three culture dimensions has a statistically significant beta coefficient (Column 3, Table 3), indicating that a higher level of work-life balance is associated with higher levels of managerial support ($\beta = .453$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that parental status would moderate the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and perceived work-life balance, such that a supportive work-family culture would be more important for individuals with parental responsibility, to perceive a higher level of work-life balance. This hypothesis was not supported, because after controlling for demographic variables, career satisfaction, perceptions of autonomy in the work context, and utilization of flexible work-family policies, as well as perceived work-related stress and work-family culture, the interaction term for parental status (Column 4, Table 3) explained 0% of additional variance in work-life balance and was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .000$, $F_{\text{change}} = .101$, n.s.). The beta coefficient for the interaction term for parental status was positive as predicted but was not statistically significant ($\beta = .019$, n.s.).

Examination of the control variables shows that consistent with the literature discussed earlier, perceived career satisfaction (Column 1, Table 3) was positively and significantly related to perceived work-life balance, such that individuals who feel more satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career, also perceive higher levels of work-life balance ($\beta = .205$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the positive coefficient for overtime work (Column 1, Table 3) indicates that individuals who work outside of normal working hours more frequently perceive worsened work-life balance ($\beta = .258$, $p < .001$). Gender (Column 1, Table 3) had a positive coefficient indicating that men perceive a higher balance between work and private life, although the relationship was not statistically significant ($\beta = .066$, n.s.). Neither utilization of flextime nor hybrid workplace had statistically significant beta coefficients, and although utilization of hybrid workplace had a positive coefficient in all models (Column 1 - 4, Table 3), the negative coefficient for utilization of flextime, after including work-family culture (Column 2 - 4, Table 3), indicate that the use of flexibility with regards to when to work negatively influenced perceived work-life balance.

Table 3

Multiple regression analysis predicting perceived work-life balance with perceived work stress, work-family culture, and the moderating role of parental status

Predictors	Perceived work stress (H1)	Work-family culture (H3)	Work-family culture dimensions (H3)	Parental status as a moderator (H4)
Step 1 ^a				
Gender (0=female, 1= male)	.066	.064	.013	.064
Age	.025	.039	.076	.038
Job-level	-.058	-.050	-.134*	-.050
Average hours worked/week	-.060	-.033	-.003	-.034
Career satisfaction	.205***	.110**	.035	.108**
Hybrid workplace utilization	.027	.030	.043	.030
Flextime utilization	.009	-.008	-.006	-.008
Work time autonomy	.057	.041	.096	.041
Workplace autonomy	.026	-.003	.019	-.003
Work outside of normal working hours	.258***	.233***	.124*	.233***
Step 2 ^a				
Perceived work stress	-.450***	-.354***	-.371***	-.354***
Step 3 ^a				
Work-family culture		.330***		.315***
Managerial support			.453***	
Stigmatization from extended leave			-.089	
Negative career consequences			.011	
Step 4 ^a				
Parental status interaction term ^c				.019
Summary statistics ^b				
R^2	.506	.580	.698	.581
R^2 Change for last step	.159	.075	.128	.000
F Change for last step	112.26***	61.86***	20.23***	.101

Note.

N Equals 341

^a Entries are standardized beta coefficients from full models

^b Entries are from full models except when indicated as change statistics

^c The interaction term was created by multiplying the recoded variables for parental status (0 = no children, 1 = at least one child) with the mean-centered culture scale

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Figure 1: Modelling the results for predicting work-life balance

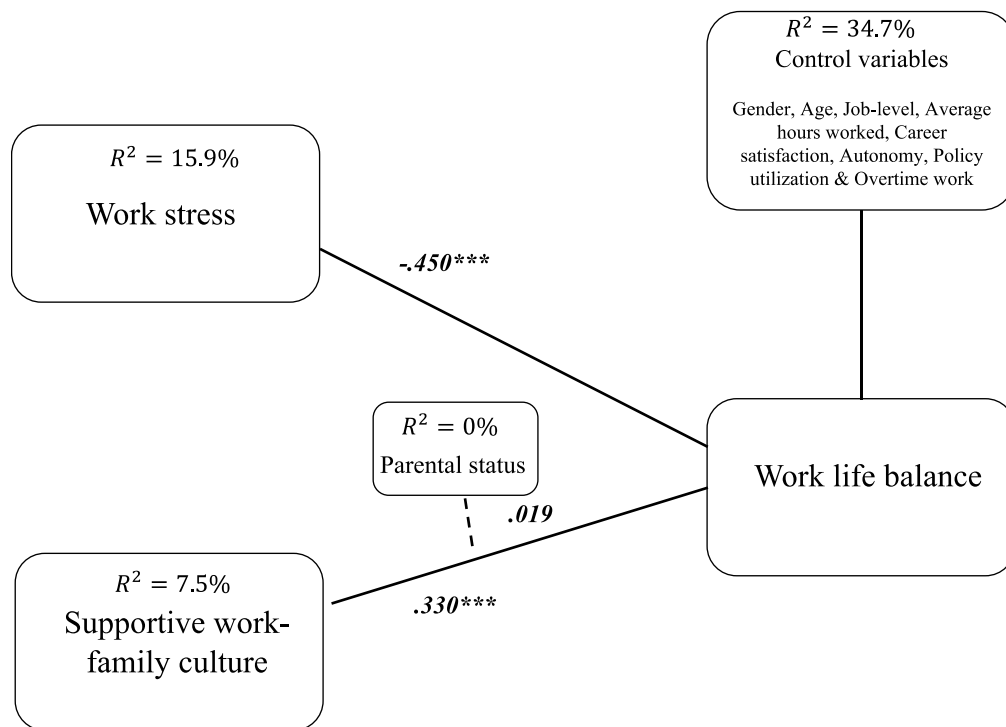
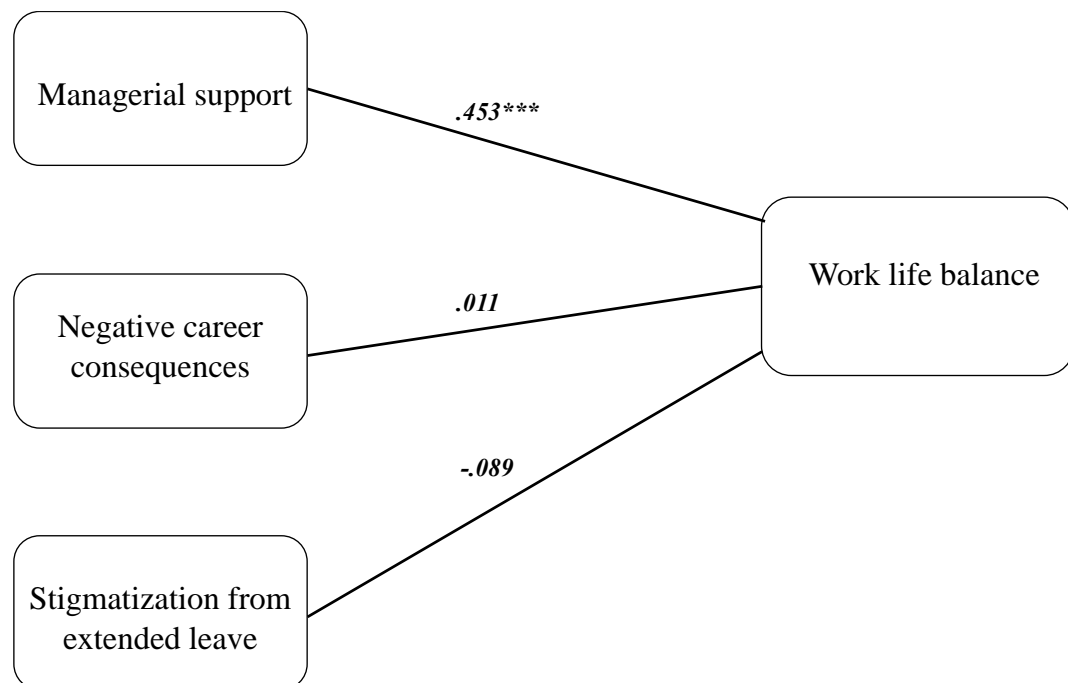


Figure 2: The three dimensions of work-family culture, predicting work-life balance



*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

6.2 Work-family benefit utilization

Table 4 presents the result of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis performed to predict perceived work-family benefit utilization with work-family culture (H2a/b), and the moderating role of parental status (H5a/b). Consistent with findings from previous research, investigating the correlates to work-family benefit utilization, gender was included as a control variable in the model (Thompson et al., 1999a). Job level was included as another control variable since previous research has shown that individuals in higher-quality jobs are expected to adhere to the “ideal worker norm” to a greater extent (Kramer et al., 2023). Policy awareness is also likely to affect the utilization of policies, as employees who are unaware of policies in place are unlikely to utilize such policies. Similarly, perceptions of autonomy in the work context may affect the utilization of flexible work policies, as a higher perception of autonomy, may increase employees’ feeling of support for utilizing work-family benefits. Further, employees who feel more satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career so far may be less hesitant to use work-family benefits because of potential negative career consequences. Hence, these variables as well as work-related stress and age were included as control variables in step 1, followed by work-family culture in step 2 (Columns 1 & 4, Table 4), and the interaction term for parental status in step 3 (Columns 3 & 6, Table 4).

Hypothesis 2a predicted that a supportive work-family culture would be positively related to the utilization of hybrid work policies. The hypothesis was not supported; after controlling for demographic variables, perceived work-related stress, career satisfaction, autonomy in the work context, and policy awareness, work-family culture (Column 1, Table 4) explained 0% of additional variance in the utilization of hybrid workplace policies and was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .000$, $F_{\text{change}} = .030$, n.s.). The coefficient for work-family culture was positive as predicted but was not statistically significant ($\beta = .011$, n.s.).

Hypothesis 2b predicted that a supportive work-family culture would be positively associated with a greater utilization of flextime. However, this hypothesis was not supported either. After controlling for the same variables as for hypothesis 2a, work-family culture (Column 4, Table 4) only explained .2% of additional variance in the utilization of flextime ($R^2 = .002$, $F_{\text{change}} = .930$, n.s.). Although the coefficient for work-family culture was positive, such that a more supportive work-family culture would be positively related to higher utilization of flexplace, it was not statistically significant ($\beta = .061$, n.s.).

Hypothesis 5a predicted that parental status would moderate the relationship between work-family culture and utilization of hybrid workplace policies in the way that parents would utilize hybrid workplace policies to a greater extent if they perceived a more supportive work-family culture. The hypothesis was not supported, because after controlling for the effect of demographic variables, perceived work-related stress, career satisfaction, autonomy in the work context, and policy awareness, as well as work-family culture, the interaction term for parental status (Column 3, Table 4) explained only .1% of the additional variance and was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .001$, $F_{\text{change}} = .267$, n.s.).

Hypothesis 5b predicted that parental status would moderate the effect of work-family culture on the utilization of flextime, such that parents would use flextime even more frequently if they perceived a supportive work-family culture. Like hypothesis 5a, this hypothesis was not supported. After controlling for the same variables as for hypothesis 5a, the interaction term created for parental status (Column 6, Table 4) accounted for .3% of additional variance but was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .003$, $F_{\text{change}} = 1.173$, n.s.). The interaction term had a beta coefficient in the predicted direction, but it was not statistically significant ($\beta = .097$, n.s.). After the analysis, post hoc analysis was performed for each dimension of work-family culture. Thus, three additional interaction terms for parental status were created for the three dimensions of work-family culture. The interaction terms were created by multiplying the recoded parental status variable with each mean-centered culture component. Thus, the same hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test hypothesis 5b with the three dimensions of work-family culture entered in step 2, the interaction term for managerial support entered in step 3, the interaction term for stigmatization from extended leave entered in step 4, and the interaction term for negative career consequences entered in step 5. The result showed that the interaction term for negative career consequences entered in the last step accounted for 2.9% of additional variance in the utilization of flextime, and was statistically significant ($R^2_{\text{full model}} = .081$, $R^2_{\text{change last step}} = .029$, $F_{\text{change last step}} = 4.567$, $p < .05$). Only the interaction term for negative career consequences had a statistically significant beta coefficient in the predicted direction ($\beta = .289$, $p < .05$). The result indicates that parental status only moderates the relationship between perceptions of fewer negative career consequences and the utilization of flextime,

such that parents utilize flextime to a greater extent if they perceive fewer negative career consequences from using work-family benefits³.

Examination of the control variables indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship between work time autonomy and utilization of flextime (Column 4, Table 4) ($\beta = .208, p < .001$). Work time autonomy was also the only variable with a statistically significant beta coefficient in the model. The positive, although not statistically significant, coefficient for workplace autonomy (Column 1, Table 4), suggests that higher perceptions of autonomy regarding where to work are positively related to utilization of flexplace ($\beta = .018, n.s.$). Career satisfaction had a positive coefficient across all models (Column 1 - 6, Table 4), indicating that when individuals are more satisfied with the success they have achieved in their careers, they tend to utilize flextime ($\beta = .031, n.s.$) and flexplace ($B = .012, n.s.$) to a greater extent. The negative coefficient for perceived work stress, when predicting utilization of flextime (Column 4, Table 4) ($\beta = -.041, n.s.$), and utilization of flexplace (Column 1, Table 4) ($\beta = -.052, n.s.$), indicates that individuals who perceive a higher level of work stress utilize flexible work policies less often.

³ Hayes process model was used for simple moderation analysis to further analyze the moderation effect of parental status on the relationship between fewer negative career consequences and the utilization of flextime. However, examination of the interaction term for parental status and negative career consequences did not support a moderation effect of parental status on the relationship between fewer negative career consequences and utilization of flextime ($t = .7694, n.s.$). The inconsistent results may be due to the omission of the control variables when running the Hayes process model. Hence it is possible that the moderation effect of parental status that was found when running the hierarchical multiple regression analysis is contingent on the specific control variables that were included in the model which in turn may have affected the results.

Table 4

Multiple regression analysis predicting work-family benefit utilization with work-family culture, and the moderating role of parental status

Predictors	Utilization of hybrid workplace			Utilization of flexitime		
	Work-family culture (H2a)	Work-family culture dimensions (H2a)	Parental status as a moderator (H5a)	Work-family culture (H2b)	Work-family culture dimensions (H2b)	Parental status as a moderator (H5b)
Step 1 ^a						
Gender (0=female, 1= male)	-.034	.019	-.033	-.098	-.010	-.096
Age	.067	-.001	.062	.062	.017	.052
Job-level	-.093	.047	-.092	.024	-.116	.026
Perceived Work stress	-.052	.095	-.051	-.041	-.010	-.039
Career satisfaction	.012	.014	.009	.031	.041	.024
Work time autonomy	.018	.066	.019	.208***	.108	.211***
Workplace autonomy	.107	.161	.108	.021	.025	.022
Policy awareness	.084	.042	.081	-.030	.019	-.036
Step 2 ^a						
Work-family culture	.011		-.027	.061		-.018
Managerial support		-.006			.011	
Stigmatization from extended leave		-.007			.109	
Negative career consequences		-.069			.024	
Step 3 ^a						
Parental status interaction term ^c			.048			.097
Summary statistics ^b						
R ²	.032	.066	.039	.083	.043	.086
R ² Change for last step	.000	.004	.001	.002	.013	.003
F Change for last step	.030	.234	.267	.930	.669	1.173

Note.

N Equals 341

^a Entries are standardized beta coefficients from full models

^b Entries are from full models except when indicated as change statistics

^c The interaction term was created by multiplying the recoded variable for parental status (0 = no children, 1 = at least one child) with the mean-centered culture scale

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Figure 3: Modelling the results for predicting utilization of flextime

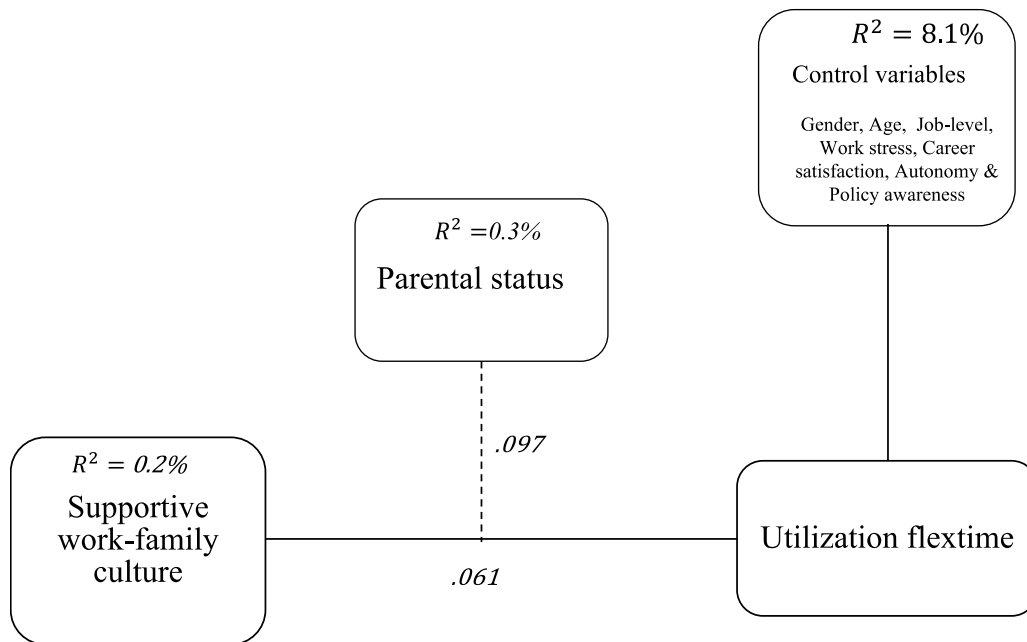
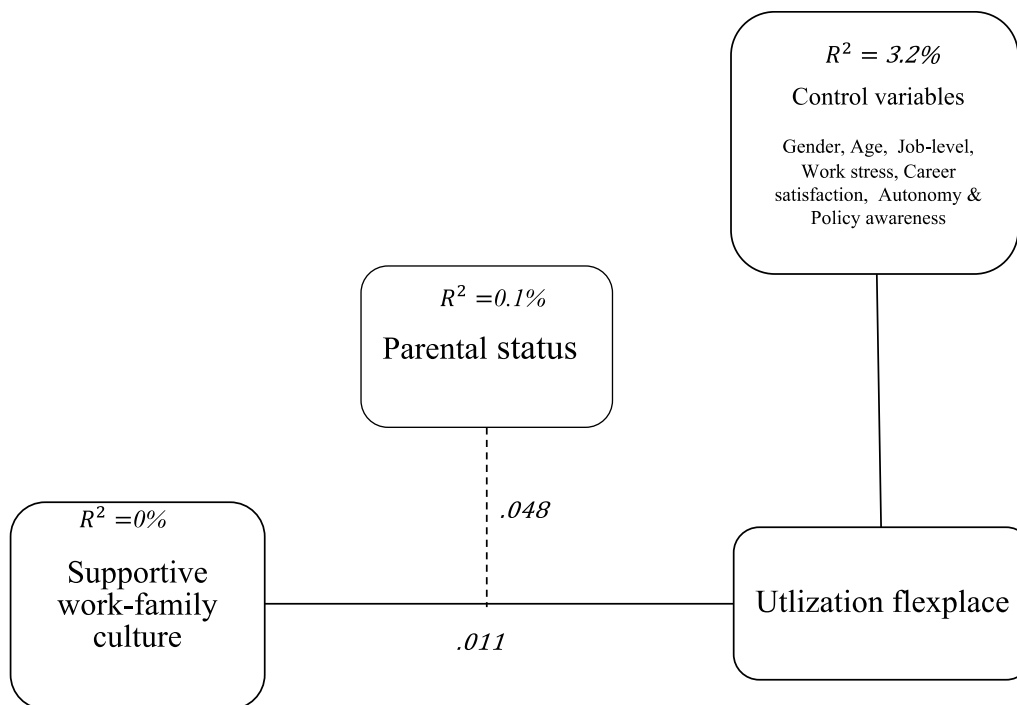


Figure 4: Modelling the results for predicting utilization of flexplace



*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

6.3 The impact of perceived work-life balance on turnover intentions

Table 5 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis performed to predict turnover intentions with perceived work-life balance (H6). Consistent with previous research, age, and job level were included as control variables in predicting turnover intentions (Thompson et al., 1999a). It may also be the case that employees who perceive higher levels of work-related stress are more likely to leave their current job, for a job that offers better well-being support. Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that individuals who are more satisfied with their careers also showcase fewer intentions to leave their jobs. Further, it is possible that employees who spend more hours working also is more committed to their organization, and therefore are less likely to leave their jobs. Hence, age, job level, perceived work stress, career satisfaction, and average hours worked per week were included as control variables in step 1, followed by perceived work-life balance in step 2 (Column 1, Table 5).

Hypothesis 6 predicted that employees who perceived a higher level of work-life balance would be less likely to leave their current organization. The results supported the hypothesis; after controlling for appropriate demographic variables, perceived work-related stress, career satisfaction, and average hours worked per week, work-life balance (Column 1, Tables 5) explained 3.7% of the additional variance and was statistically significant ($R^2 = .037$, $F_{\text{change}} = 16.468$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, work-life balance had a statistically significant beta coefficient in the predicted direction ($\beta = -.262$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of perceived work-life balance were associated with lower intentions to leave the current organization for a job that offers better well-being support.

Further assessment of the control variables (Table 5) shows a negative and statistically significant beta coefficient for career satisfaction ($B = -.277$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who are more satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career, showcase fewer intentions to leave their current organization. Average hours worked per week also has a negative and statistically significant beta coefficient ($B = -.118$, $p < .05$), indicating that individuals who spend more hours working are less likely to intend to leave. In addition, analysis of the beta coefficients indicates that the older the individual is ($B = -.021$, n.s.), and the more senior job level the individual has ($B = -.015$, n.s.), the less likely the individual is to

express an intention to leave the organization. Lastly, the positive coefficient for perceived work stress revealed that more intentions to leave were associated with higher perceived work-related stress ($B = .03$, n.s.).

Table 5
Multiple regression analysis predicting turnover intentions with perceived work-life balance

Predictors	Work-life balance (H6)
Step 1 ^a	
Age	-.021
Job-level	-.015
Perceived Work stress	.030
Career satisfaction	-.277***
Average hours worked/week	-.118*
Step 2 ^a	
Perceived work-life balance	-.262***
Summary statistics ^b	
R^2	.195
R^2 Change for last step	.037
F Change for last step	16.468***

Note.

N Equals 341

^a Entries are standardized beta coefficients from full models

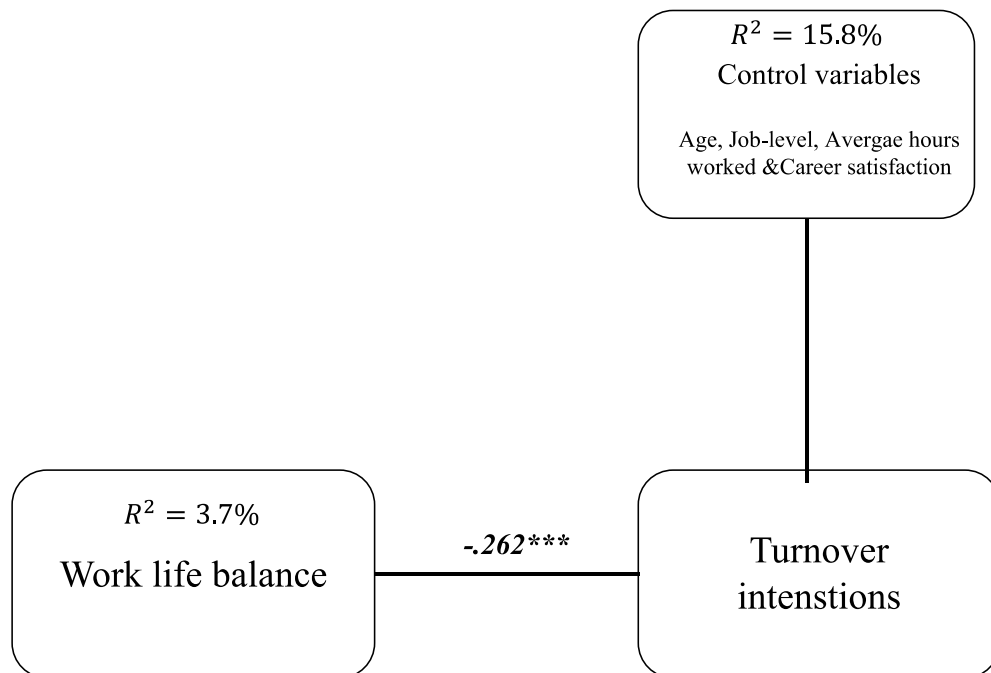
^b Entries are from full models except when indicated as change statistics

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Figure 5: The three dimensions of work-family culture, predicting work-life balance



*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

6.4 Qualitative research

The findings from the quantitative study indicated variables that could not predict the utilization of flexible work arrangements. However, it did not show what factors contributed to the utilization of these policies. Findings from the qualitative interviews therefore gave a deeper insight into the predictors of the utilization of flexible work arrangements. The interviewees highly valued the flexibility that is offered in terms of flextime and flexplace. The perception was that these policies helped contribute to a better work-life balance and allowed employees to take care of personal responsibilities while still meeting the expectations of the organization. The utilization of these policies varies, but all the interviewees utilized at least one of the policies every week. Some of the interviewees highlighted that clear policies provided by the organization helped the employees better understand what is required of them, which could reduce work-related stress. Further, flexible work arrangements seem to have a positive effect on work-life balance, and especially stress levels are highlighted as something that has been lowered because of the new way of working after the pandemic. However, another perspective brought forward on this notion is that when employees are constantly faced with different options in terms of when and where to work, it could potentially increase their stress levels, because of the increased difficulty of planning between work and private life. Productivity levels seem to vary with these policies, as some interviewees highlight that they are more productive when working from home as they are not disturbed by colleagues. However, others report challenges in staying focused when working from home, because of being exposed to other chores in the home environment. Especially noted is the “collective productivity”, which seems to be impaired when employees work from home. This is brought forward as interviewees mention that when tasks need to be solved efficiently in a group, this is increasingly hard when some members of the team join in an online setting. These flexible work arrangements seem to have had a contradictory impact on job satisfaction, as it has increased because of the feeling of autonomy originating from being able to decide when and where to work. However, the aspect of meeting colleagues and having spontaneous interactions is lost, which in the long run is pointed out as something that might prohibit job satisfaction. An additional challenge mentioned as a reason for not utilizing the policies was not having the right ergonomic setup to work from home with the same efficiency as in the office.

7. Discussion

The present study sought to (1) explore how work-related stress correlates with work-life balance; (2), analyze how perceptions of a supportive work-family culture relate to perceived work-life balance; (3) conclude whether variations in perceived work-life balance and utilization of flexible work policies can be attributed to employees' parental status; and (4) determine how perceptions of work-life balance correlate with intentions to leave the company. The results generally accomplished these objectives and supported the majority of our predictions.

<i>H1: A higher level of perceived work stress is negatively associated with perceived work-life balance.</i>	Supported
<i>H2a: Employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to the utilization of a hybrid workplace.</i>	Not supported
<i>H2b: Employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to the utilization of flextime.</i>	Not supported
<i>H3: Employees' perception of a supportive work-family culture will be positively related to a higher level of perceived work-life balance, when controlling for the effect of utilization of flexible work policies on perceived work-life balance alone.</i>	Not supported
<i>H4: Parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and perceived work-life balance, such that parents rely on a supportive work-family culture to a greater extent to perceive higher levels of work-life balance.</i>	Not supported
<i>H5a: Parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and the utilization of a hybrid workplace, such that parents utilize a hybrid workplace to a greater extent if they perceive a more supportive work-family culture</i>	Not supported
<i>H5b: Parental status moderates the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and the utilization of flextime, such that parents utilize flextime to a greater extent if they perceive a more supportive work-family culture</i>	Partly supported for fewer negative career consequences.
<i>H6: Perceived work-life balance is negatively related to turnover intentions.</i>	Supported

7.1 Work-life balance

The first hypothesis proposed that a higher level of perceived work stress would be negatively associated with perceived work-life balance. The test validated this prediction, highlighting that if an individual feels stressed at work it corresponds to a diminished perceived work-life

balance. Previous literature emphasizes that when a balance is achieved between work and private life, stress levels are lower (Frone et al., 1992b). Similarly psychological and family-related stress are highlighted as ramifications when there is a conflict between private and work life (Sirgy & Lee, 2018a). However, the test performed in this study originated from perceived stress at work, whereas other literature has observed stress because of imbalance. The analysis performed in this study indicates that it does not matter from where the stress originates, either way, there is a correlation between imbalance and stress.

7.2 Work-family culture and work-life balance

Consistent with predictions, it was found that a supportive work-family culture was positively related to higher levels of perceived work-life balance. Particularly, the cultural dimension of managerial support was significantly related to employees' efforts to balance paid work and family life. Somewhat surprisingly, the results indicated that employees who perceived fewer negative career consequences for devoting more time to family responsibilities did not report higher levels of perceived work-life balance. This directly contrasts the findings from Thompson et al (1999) who reported that fewer negative career consequences were significantly associated with less work-to-family conflict, while not finding a significant relationship between managerial support and work-to-family conflict (Thompson et al., 1999b). A possible explanation for this, however, could be that although previous research has demonstrated that work-to-family conflict and work-life balance are highly associated constructs, such that work-to-family conflict is reduced, as an individual achieves a more balanced lifestyle (Frone et al., 1992b), some scholars highlight the importance of treating work-family conflict and work-life balance as separate constructs (Allen et al., 2013a). Hence, it could be that fewer negative career consequences are more closely associated with less work-to-family conflict, while managerial support is more important for employees in facilitating more balance between their diverse roles. Another explanation could be the different context in which the present study was conducted. The study conducted by Thompson et al (1999), was performed in The United States and different norms, cultures, and regulations permeating different countries will likely affect the correlates to work-life balance. Other research performed in The United States has found that employees are often penalized for using various policies aimed at facilitating work-family reconciliation (e.g., Kramer et al., 2023; Leslie et al., 2012), potentially making negative career consequences more relevant in facilitating work-life balance. However, it is likely that the “ideal worker norm” is applied less strictly to employees

working within the Swedish market and particularly the FMCG industry, so that they are less likely to suffer from negative career consequences for devoting time to private responsibilities. Instead, it is suggested that daily managerial support may be the most important cultural variable in enhancing employees' perceptions of work-life balance when observing employees working in the Swedish market.

Of particular importance is the finding that the relationship between a supportive work-family culture and perceived work-life balance emerged above and beyond any effect of utilization of flexible work policies on perceptions of work-life balance alone. These results corroborate previous work that found that the potential for flexible work arrangements to facilitate work-life balance may be limited (Allen et al., 2013d). Furthermore, although previous research has found relationships between a supportive work-family culture and less work-to-family conflict (Thompson et al., 1999a), to our knowledge the present study is the first to measure the effect of work-family culture on perceived work-life balance while controlling for the effect of the use of flexible work policies. These findings highlight the importance of including assessments of the organizational culture when evaluating family-supportive programs and other efforts from companies designed to enhance employee well-being.

7.3 Work-family culture and utilization of work-family benefits

It was further predicted that a supportive work-family culture would be positively related to the utilization of both flexplace and flextime work arrangements. However, these hypotheses were not supported. The findings that a supportive work-family culture was not relevant in predicting work-family benefit utilization, is inconsistent with previous research conducted by Thompson et al (1999) that highlighted the importance of work-family culture, and especially managerial support in facilitating work-family benefit utilization (Thompson et al., 1999a). Similarly, the results from Perlow (1995) indicate that employees often feel uncomfortable utilizing various benefits provided to them if the underlying corporate culture is inconsistent with the policies or programs offered (Perlow, 1995b). One explanation for the contrasting results could be attributed to the present study's specific focus on the utilization of flexplace and flextime work policies. For example, Thompson et al (1999) included 16 different work-family benefits in their composite score for work-family benefit utilization in their study investigating the effect of work-family culture on the utilization of work-family benefits (Thompson et al., 1999a). Thus, while there may still exist a relationship between a supportive

work-family culture and work-family benefit utilization for other types of policies aimed at reconciling work and family responsibilities, the results from this study question the impact of work-family culture on the utilization of flexible work arrangements. In line with this reasoning, Leslie et al (2012) found that managers did not view employees as less committed when they used flexible work policies and rather found that managers perceived employees as more committed when they utilized flexible work policies given that they attributed the use of flexible work policies to a desire to increase productivity (Leslie et al., 2012). Further, since the result from this study indicated that the utilization of flexible work policies was unrelated to perceptions of work-life balance, it is possible to assume that flexible work arrangements are utilized for other reasons than to facilitate work-life balance, for example, to increase their work productivity. If that is the case, employees may not be reliant on a supportive work-family culture to utilize such benefits to the same extent. Additional insight regarding the predictors and implications of the utilization of flexible work arrangements was revealed from the qualitative study. While prior research has been conducted to investigate how the utilization of flexible work policies relates to work-life balance (e.g., Hayman, 2009; Allen et al., 2013d) and potential career consequences (Leslie et al. 2012), few clear conclusions exist regarding the predictors of the utilization of flexible work policies. Further, contradictory results from extant studies regarding the potential for flexible work arrangements to facilitate work-life balance make it difficult to understand the effect of the utilization of flexible work policies on the long-term well-being of employees. The findings from the qualitative study suggest that employees value the flexibility of flexible work arrangements and perceive that such policies positively contribute to better work-life balance and reduced stress. However, the use of flexible work arrangements entails challenges that may constrain employees from utilizing these fully. For example, it was emphasized that flexible work arrangements could, because of the inherent uncertainty of where and when to work, potentially increase the stress originating from the difficulty of separating work from private life. Another risk that hybrid workplace policies entail is the lack of social interaction with colleagues in the office, that physical presence otherwise enables. This is highlighted as something that could decrease job satisfaction, with further implications for work-life balance. Aligning with this, the lack of social interaction could further harm “collective productivity”, as collaboration becomes more difficult. Similarly, individual productivity seems to be negatively impacted by a hybrid workplace, as the work environment outside of the office often is permeated by distractions. The results from our qualitative study suggest that the usage of flexible work policies may be more complex than previous studies on the subject reveal. Hence, the omission of these

mediating mechanisms that were derived from the input from the qualitative study may explain the contradictory findings of prior research conducted on the use of flexible work arrangements.

7.4 Parental status

Hypothesis 5 suggests that parental status could act as a moderator between work-family culture and the adoption of hybrid workplace and flextime policies, enhancing their utilization. However, this hypothesis was not supported either for flextime or flexplace. This is inconsistent with previous findings indicating that individuals with parental responsibilities utilize policies to a greater extent than those without parental responsibility (Thompson et al., 1999). Another contradictory theory is that individuals with parental responsibility are the ones benefiting the most from flexible work arrangements (Allen et al., 2013a). Further, the hypothesis was based upon the notation that parents are likely to experience a significant inter-role conflict, aspiring to meet the expectations of the ideal worker norm and ideal parent norm concurrently. However, the results indicate that parental status does not have any effect on the relationship between work-family culture and the adoption of flexible work arrangements. A potential explanation for this could be that prior research was conducted in other markets with potentially stricter work-family cultures. Whereas in the FMCG industry in the Swedish market, the foundation of the culture seems to be more accepting, suggesting that individuals, regardless of parental responsibilities, do not rely on the organizational culture to the same extent for utilizing these policies.

However, further analysis of the three dimensions of work-family culture showed that parental status moderated the relationship between the perception of fewer negative career consequences and the utilization of flextime. The results suggest that when employees with parental responsibility perceive less negative career consequences associated with the usage of flextime, they will utilize this type of benefit to a greater extent. This is in alignment with previous studies which have found support that employees are sometimes hesitant to take advantage of work-family benefits due to fears of career penalties (Munsch et al., 2014b). The results further corroborate Drago et al (2006), who found that parents usually attempt to hide their family responsibilities, by not taking advantage of work-family benefits. The results from this study extend these findings by showing that fears of negative career repercussions also are evident when observing flextime policies. Although flextime is equally available to employees with and without parental responsibility, our results indicate that parents are more aware of

potential career penalties stemming from the usage of this type of policy. It further expands previous research by showing that despite observing the Swedish market, known for its generous work-family benefits, designed to effectively support parents in balancing paid work and family life, parents are still hesitant to utilize this type of policy.

7.5 The impact of perceived work-life balance on turnover intentions

Hypothesis 6 suggested that perceived work-life balance is negatively related to turnover intentions. The hypothesis was supported indicating that when an individual experiences lower levels of perceived work-life balance the intentions to leave the company are greater. This is in alignment with patterns viewed in previous literature. For example, Allen et al (2000) found that when employees experience increased work-family conflict it negatively affects turnover intentions. Although the present study focused on the effect of work-life balance on turnover intentions specifically, previous research indicates that work-life balance and work-family conflict are highly correlated. Thus, our study contributes to research by showing that turnover intentions are not only related to increased work-to-family conflict but also to lower levels of work-life balance. This finding highlights the importance for organizations to ensure that employees feel supported in their efforts to better balance their diverse roles and responsibilities, to facilitate the retention and attraction of top talents.

7.6 Limitations and Future Research

One of the contributions of the present study was to explore work-life balance, and the utilization of flexible work arrangements in the Swedish market and more specifically the FMCG industry. The results of this work did not emphasize that the work culture had any effect on the utilization of policies. This could potentially be explained by assuming that this type of industry has a less strict working culture in comparison to other countries and industries where previous research was conducted. A limitation of this study is that it was conducted by observing two companies, indicating that even though we obtained significant results, it is not possible to assume that they are directly applicable to the rest of the industry and even less to other industries. Hence, for future research, it would be interesting to investigate another industry in the Swedish market and see if the same results were to be obtained, or if the culture would play a bigger role if the work culture were stricter. This study observed the company culture from three dimensions, where one captured the perception of negative career penalties. A limitation regarding this is that this only captures the perception, rather than the actual

outcome. As the literature review indicated that negative career penalties were present in other markets, it would have been interesting to see if actual consequences are present in the Swedish market as well. However, to determine the presence of actual career penalties, studies would have needed to be conducted over time, by observing the outcomes rather than asking individuals of their perception. Post hoc analysis of the three cultural dimensions performed in the present study showed that parental status moderated the relationship between perceptions of fewer negative career consequences and the utilization of flextime. This indicates that individuals with parental responsibilities are more aware of potential career consequences stemming from the usage of flextime policies and are therefore more reliant on a supportive work-family culture to utilize such a policy. However, simple moderation analysis using Hayes process model did not support a moderation effect of parental status. Since the Hayes process model did not allow inclusion of control variables as was possible with the hierarchical regression analysis, this might indicate that the moderation effect of parental status found was contingent on the specific control variables used in the regression model. Hence, future research could analyze whether the same moderation effect of parental status would emerge when controlling for the effect of other variables than those included in the present study. In the qualitative interviews, the social aspect was mentioned as an important component of the downsides of flexible work arrangements. This is a potential limitation of this study, as this component was not targeted in the quantitative study. Hence, future research could investigate how the lack of social interaction with colleagues when working from home could affect the unwillingness to utilize these policies and their effect on well-being. Based on the results from the quantitative research the present study could acknowledge which components did not predict the utilization of policies in place, but did not identify which, if any, components increased the utilization of policies. However, aspects in relation to this were highlighted in the qualitative interviews. As these interviews are not to be seen as a statistical method, future research could investigate what components drive the utilization of policies to make statistical and general findings. Analysis of the data further found that on average, employees utilize flexible workplace and flexible worktime policies, three respectively two times a week. This indicates that the usage of flexible work arrangements is rather frequent. However, in the interviews the notion of whether individuals know what is best for their individual well-being was brought forward. This implies that even though individuals might appreciate these policies as they give autonomy to plan their private and work schedules, it also implies a requirement that the individuals themselves, always know what is best for their well-being and productivity. This notion was brought forward by one of the interviewees, indicating that sometimes these

options might be best decided by the organization and not by the individual employee. Hence, future research could investigate whether employees only employ strategies that are beneficial in the short-term, while not driving work-life balance and well-being in the long run. Lastly, even though work-life balance is correlated to well-being, there are various other components that affect individuals' well-being. Thus, even though the present study emphasizes the importance of promoting work-life balance as a component of well-being, future studies could incorporate other aspects of well-being, aiming to capture a more holistic view of the psychological state.

7.7 Managerial implications

Drawing upon the findings of this study, show that if an individual feels stressed at work, it corresponds to a diminished perceived work-life balance. This highlights the importance for organizations and managers to ensure that employees are faced with an appropriate workload, in order to decrease work-related stress and hence facilitate work-life balance. As highlighted in the qualitative interviews, it is further important that managers communicate what is required of the employees and what policies are in place, since this also could contribute to less work-related stress. The findings showed that a supportive culture did not affect the utilization of policies, and they in turn did not have an impact on work-life balance. However, work-family culture did affect work-life balance, implying that a supportive culture becomes increasingly important, and arguably more important than policies, in fostering well-being and work-life balance. Thus, it is of great importance that organizations work to establish a supportive culture and ensure that managers contribute with their support in helping employees facilitate a better balance between work and private life. On a similar note, it was found that when parents perceive less negative career consequences associated with the utilization of flextime, they are more likely to use it. Hence, organizations should through a supportive culture, ensure that employees with parental responsibility feel secure in utilizing these policies without feeling that it will imply negative consequences for their careers. Companies' efforts to facilitate work-life balance do not only contribute to the well-being of their employees but also equal financial and operational gains for the companies, as turnover intentions are decreased.

8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey

Q1 Which of the following best describe how your working hours are decided (Times you start and finish your work)?

- Starting and finishing times are decided by my employer (1)
- I do have some flexibility in deciding starting and finishing times (2)
- I decide starting and finishing times myself (3)

Q2 Which of the following best describes where you should be working (at the office, from home or elsewhere)?

- Where I should be working from is decided by my manager (1)
- I do have some flexibility in deciding where I should be working from (2)
- Where I should be working from is decided by myself (3)

Q3 Are you aware of any policies/initiatives in your organization that aims to secure employee wellbeing?

- Yes, I am aware of one or a few policies in place (1)
- Yes, I know that there are policies in place, but I am unsure what they say (2)
- No, I do not know which/if any policies are in place (3)

Q4 How often do you work from home or elsewhere during your normal work hours?

(Normal work hours being 8-17)

- Always (1)
- Often (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Hardly ever (4)
- Never (5)

Q5 How often does your job involve working outside of normal working hours?

(Normal work hours being 8-17)

- Always (1)
- Often (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Hardly ever (4)
- Never (5)

Q6 If there are policies in place that allows for a hybrid workplace, implying that you are allowed to work from home. On average, how many times during one work week do you utilize this policy?

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)
- (6)

Q7 If there are policies in place that allows for flexible working hours, implying that you are allowed to start and end your workday with some degree of flexibility. On average, how many times during one work week do you utilize this policy?

- 0 (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3 (4)
- 4 (5)
- 5 (6)

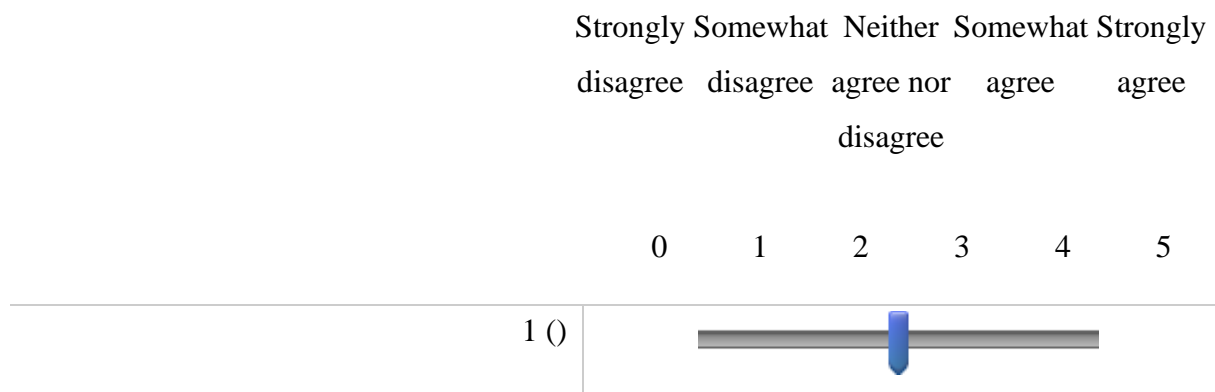
Q8 How often do you find your work stressful?

- Always (1)
- Often (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Hardly ever (4)
- Never (5)

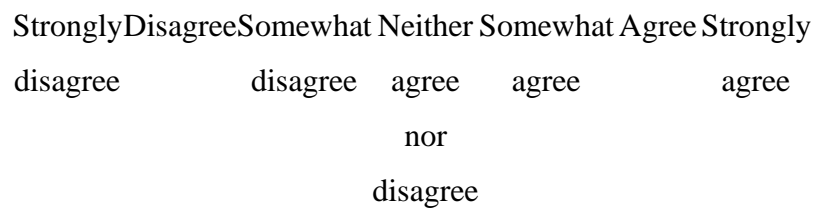
Q9 How often do you feel that the demands of your job interfere with your private life?

- Always (1)
- Often (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Hardly ever (4)
- Never (5)

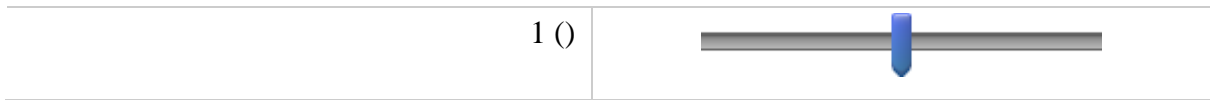
Q10 To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I have enough time to spend with my family"



Q11 In general, managers in this organisation are quite accommodating of family-related needs



0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



Q12 In this organisation, employees are encouraged to strike a balance between work and private life.

StronglyDisagreeSomewhat Neither Somewhat Agree Strongly
 disagree disagree agree agree agree
 nor
 disagree

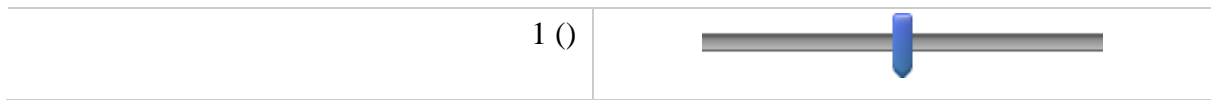
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7



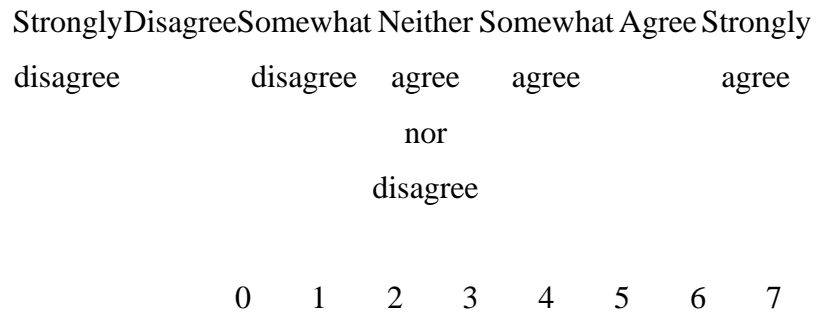
Q13 This organisation encourages employees to set limits on where work stops and home life begins.

StronglyDisagreeSomewhat Neither Somewhat Agree Strongly
 disagree disagree agree agree agree
 nor
 disagree

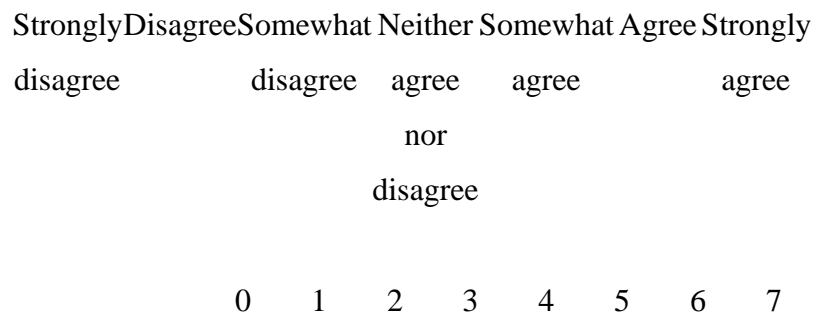
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

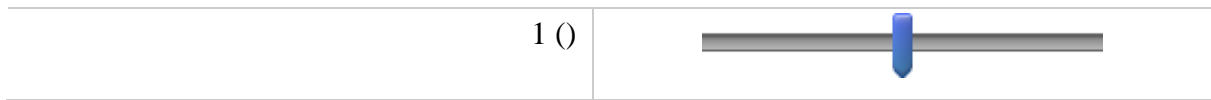


Q14 In this organisation it is very hard to leave during the workday to take care of personal or family matters.

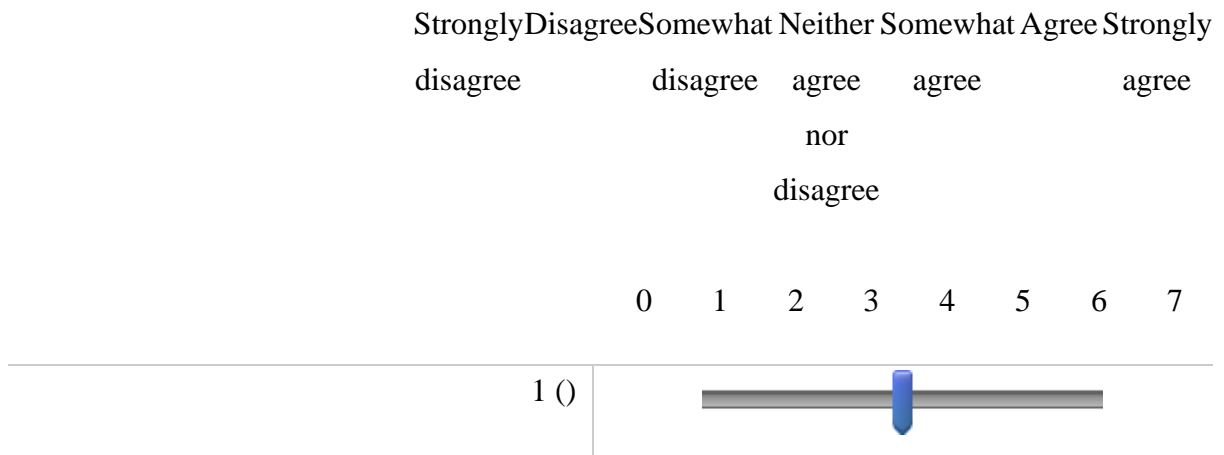


Q15 Many employees are resentful when men in this organisation take extended leaves to care for newborn or adopted children.

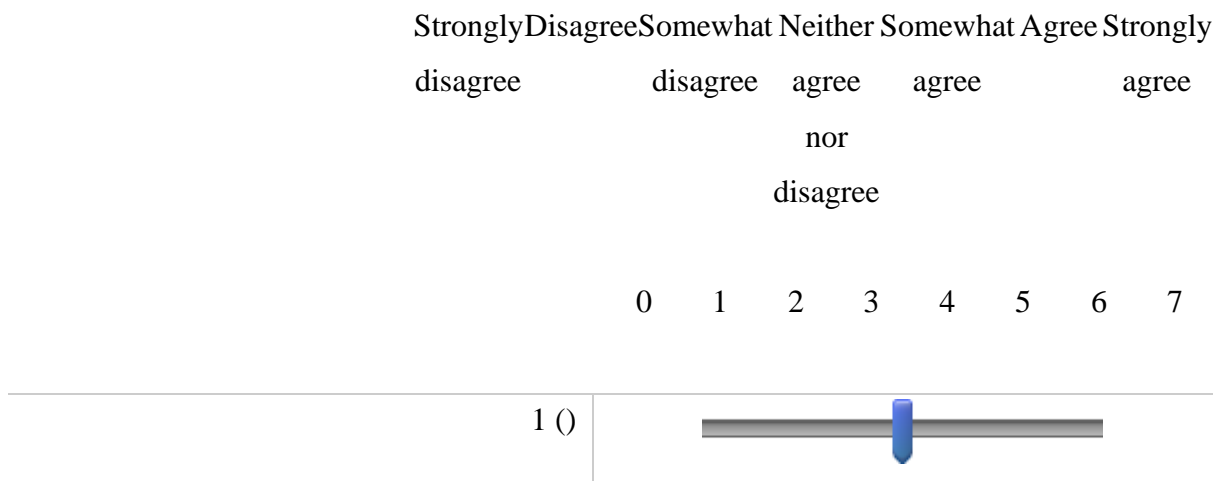




Q16 Many employees are resentful when women in this organisation take extended leaves to care for newborn or adopted children.



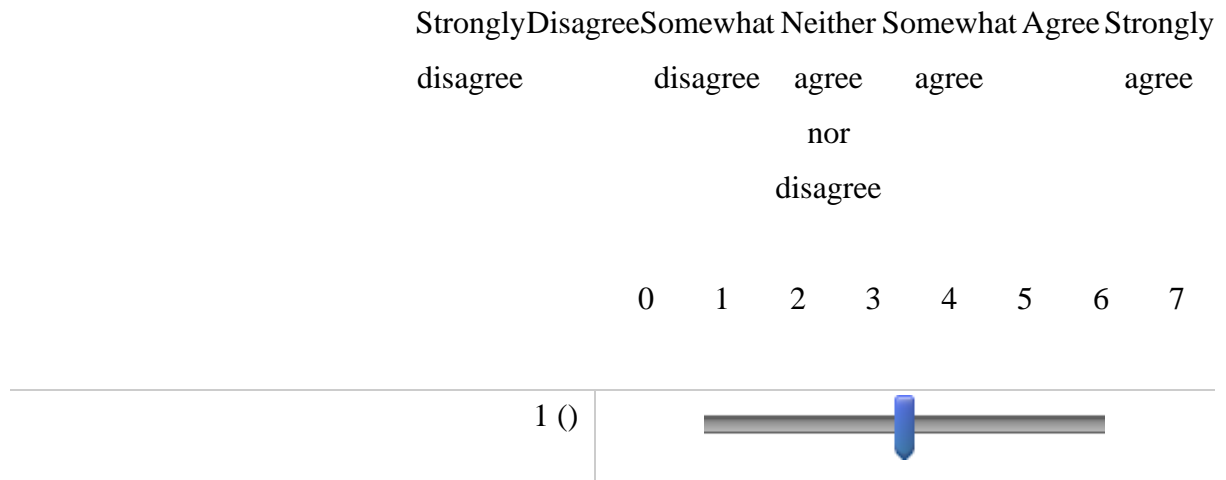
Q17 To turn down a promotion or transfer for family related reasons will seriously hurt one's career progress in this organisation.



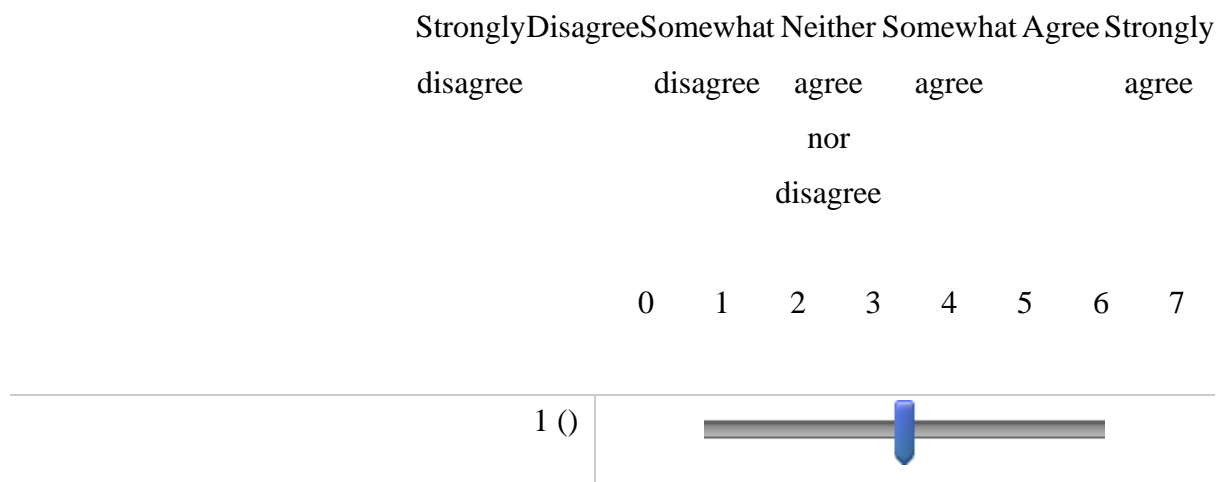
Q18 In this organisation employees who use flextime are less likely to advance their careers than those who do not use flextime.

("Flexitime" being the possibility to start/end your work day outside of the normal working

hours)



Q19 To be viewed favourably by top management, employees in this organisation are expected to constantly put their jobs ahead of their families or personal lives.



Q20 Out of the policies/ways of working in place today, which policies do you find most helpful in supporting your wellbeing?

Q21 What other policies/ways of working could be provided to support your wellbeing?

Q22 I identify myself as

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q23 Which age group do you belong to?

- < 25 years (1)
- 25-35 (2)
- 36-45 (3)
- 46-55 (4)
- 55+ (5)

Q24 Average hours worked/week

- Less than 40 hours/week (1)
- 40 hours/week (2)
- More than 40 hours/week (3)

Q25 Which job level are you at?

* By co-worker we are referring to an employee without supervising responsibility

- Co-worker* (1)
- Teamleader (2)
- Manager (3)
- Department head (4)

Q26 How many individuals (including yourself) in your household contributes with an income to the household economy?

- 1 individual (1)
- 2 individuals (2)
- More than 2 individuals (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q27 What is your total gross monthly household income? (Eg. if you are two people in your household earning 30 000SEK/month each, your household income is $30\ 000\text{SEK} * 2 = 60\ 000\text{SEK}$)

- < 25 000 SEK (1)
- 25 001-40 000 SEK (2)
- 40 001SEK-60 000 SEK (3)
- 60 001 SEK- 80 000SEK (4)
- 80 000+ SEK (5)
- Prefer not to say (6)

Q28 How many children are living in your household?

- None (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3+ (4)

Q29 How many children **under the age of 5** are living in your household?

- None (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3+ (4)

Q30 How many children **under the age of 13** are living in your household?

- None (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3+ (4)

Q31 How successful do you feel in balancing your paid work and family life?

Not at all Completely successful

0 1 2 3 4 5



Q32 How satisfied are you with the success you have achieved in your career?

Not at all Completely successful

0 1 2 3 4 5



Q33 How likely are you to consider leaving your current job for a job that offers a better wellbeing support?

Not likely at all Very likely

0 1 2 3 4 5



Appendix 2: Interview information

Date	Company	Gender	Children
2024-05-02	A	Female	Yes
2024-05-02	A	Female	No
2024-05-03	I	Male	Yes
2024-05-07	I	Female	Yes
2024-05-07	A	Male	No

Appendix 3: Interview guide

How much do you value flexibility in the workplace (such as flexible working hours or working from home)?
How often do you take advantage of such flexible work policies?
How have flexible working hours or the opportunity to work from home affected your work-life balance?
Can you share any specific instances where these policies have directly impacted your personal life or family time? In what ways?
Overall, how have these policies impacted your mental and physical health?
Have you noticed any changes in your productivity levels with these policies in place? Can you provide examples?
Have you noticed any changes in your stress levels with these policies in place? Can you provide examples?
Have you noticed any changes in your job satisfaction levels with these policies in place? Can you provide examples?
Are there any aspects of your job that have become more difficult due to working from home or having flexible hours?
How well do you think the company supports employees in utilizing these policies and their well-being?
What improvements, if any, could be made to how these policies are implemented or supported?

Appendix 4: Use of Generative AI

This study has employed a restricted use of generative AI. ChatGPT have been used a handful times to explain concepts or theories found in literature. The explanations have not been used in the study but rather for the writers' individual understanding of the phenomenon. Generative AI have to some extent increased the quality of this work, as the writers when lacking clarity of some concepts described by literature, have gotten more clarity into the concepts before started writing. The risk of employing generative AI in this way, is of course the risk that it does not interpret the writers' questions in the right way and hence return a wrongly stated answer. Another risk is that generative AI services such as ChatGPT are not up to date, implying that it might return facts that are irrelevant. To avoid these risks, the few explanations of concepts in literature given by ChatGPT have been doublechecked with other sources and once the writers' have gotten a concept from an article clarified by generative AI, the same concept in the same article have been revised again to view it from a different perspective. The insights gained from using AI tools in this process is that for the purpose of these kind of studies, the use of AI is rather restricted. At least personally for us as writers, we feel rather resistant of employing generative AI, because of the fear of obtaining wrongful information.

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