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A Qualimetric Approach to Work-Life Balance

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Abstract

Work-life balance research has employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Self-reported surveys dominate the field, with interviews and document analysis used to a lesser extent. Whether stated or not, workers in these studies are generally assumed to have two separate lives or roles and are, therefore, implicitly two different people. We adapted a qualimetric socio-economic intervention research approach to study individualized meanings and impacts of work-life balance in a complete academic/administrative unit of a business college, thereby offering the potential for applicability and scalability to an entire college or university. Treating each worker as a single person immersed in extended social networks revealed that while symptoms or superficial effects may differ at home and at work, the root causes of challenges both at work and at home were the same. The qualimetric approach produced findings that differed from previous research in the broader field of work-life balance research, and offered insight into the power relations that reduce work-life balance to a work-only monologue.

Purpose of the Study

Our study was prompted by a search for a better way to understand and improve work-life balance. Interest in the topic had been growing in the administrative ranks of our university and we sensed how an initiative might unfold. There would be talk, there would be a survey, there would be vague statements of support, and then nothing would really change. All of our narratives detailing the unique circumstances of life and work within a diverse population of faculty and staff would not be captured with a survey instrument. The dominant narrative of an excessive workload split from life might even gain

power and legitimacy from the process. Therefore, solutions and effective policy changes would be elusive, if not impossible to devise and implement. Surely, we thought, there must be a better way.

An initial overview of previous research into work-life balance revealed multiple perspectives on the same general topic. We found many conflict-centered models of work interference with family and family interference with work, an extensive sub-genre on perceived organizational support, and a number of well-being at work studies that ranged from stress and happiness to recent applications of socio-technical era industrial democracy intervention research. A striking feature of this broad range of research is the imposition of numerous questionable dichotomies onto the field. At the research design stage, for instance, there are binary choices of descriptive versus prescriptive, qualitative versus quantitative, and convenience versus purpose. Yet, falling into dichotomies may not bring researchers any closer to the heart of their topics. Our study was problem-centered and sought to gain a sufficiently grounded understanding of work-life balance challenges to offer data for organizational development and change. Therefore, we said yes to all of these questionable dichotomous choices. Inclusion of narrative methods (Boje, 2001) into an open systems approach to work-life balance seemed to be possible with Savall & Zardet's (2008, 2011) qualimetric socio-economic approach to management and organizational research. However, their methodology had never been applied to such a focused topic as work-life balance and therefore, we conducted a more in-depth review of previous research to assess the compatibility of Savall & Zardet's intervention research with our needs. Before presenting that compatibility review, we will give a brief overview of the methodology.

Qualimetric Socio-Economic Intervention Research

As the name implies, qualimetric is a combination of qualitative methods with quantitative metrics, but also includes financial measures. The approach follows an integrative spiraling process of semi-structured interviews to study problems and their intersubjective context with qualitative depth, descriptive effects, frequency of impacts, costs, and validation of data through mirror feedback sessions. Hypotheses also spiral through descriptive, explicative, and prescriptive phases as data reveals the interconnectedness of problems throughout the organization (Savall & Zardet, 2011).

All problems encountered during the semi-structured interviews are coded into six themes or domains: working conditions, work organization, communication-coordination-cooperation, time management, integrated training, and strategic implementation (Savall & Zardet, 2008). Direct interview quotes give context to each problem, thereby allowing a map of directional causal relationships to be drawn downward from surface level symptoms to reveal the fundamental challenges facing the organization (Boje et al, 2007). The most frequently cited problems in interviews are often symptoms or latent effects from distant hidden issues. After the first phase of the diagnosis, the intervention researcher mirrors a representative selection of the six themes in direct quotes back to the organization for feedback and validation of meaning. The next phase involves jointly delving into root causes to gain a deeper understanding of causal relationships and to ultimately develop and implement viable solutions. Savall (1981) developed the approach in the 1970s as an intervention research methodology to diagnose the complex rhizomatic causal networks that originate from deficiencies in management practice and spread through an organization. Savall (1981) found that the roots of problems result from an interaction of organizational structures and behaviors, not from one or the other in isolation. The industrial age assumption that people could cognitively separate one whole life into compartments for work and life outside of work was similarly found to be detrimental to human performance.

The qualimetric socio-economic theoretical and methodological approach appeared to be appropriate for our application of studying work-life balance. However, we had concerns as to whether the six themes used for coding interview data were specific enough to capture the narrow range of factors that scholars have deemed to be critical. Therefore, we conducted a focused review of previous work-life balance research to determine whether the six domains had sufficient relevance to findings, operationalized definitions, and both strengths and limitations of research designs.

Compatibility Review

Although work and life are seemingly contrary forces, they are actually complementary and interconnected parts of the whole human life experience. The mindful goal of equilibrium between work and life is reflected in Jones' (2003: 4) definition of work-life balance as

“the desire of all individuals – not just those with families or caring responsibilities - to achieve and maintain a ‘balance’ between their paid work and their life outside work, whatever their ‘life’ involves, from childcare and housework to leisure or self-development”.

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The concept of work-life balance originated in the United Kingdom in the mid-19th century, spurred by studies that showed that the reduction of factory working hours had no impact on production levels (Cole, 1925). Further studies found that a reduction in hours actually led to greater productivity due to decreased fatigue and increased morale and concentration (Hogarth & Bosworth, 2009). In the United States, workers advocated for the ten-hour day as early as 1791, but it took until 1874 for the first state, Massachusetts, to adopt this work-life balance initiative. After the U.S. Supreme Court upheld this as constitutional (Lalor, 1899), other states and the federal government followed with similar legislation. In 1938, the U.S. Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the 40-hour work week. The economic shift from production to service sectors from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s reinvigorated the work-life balance movement. The most notable additions during this era were increased opportunities for female employment and a pronounced need for more flexible forms of work (Hogarth & Bosworth, 2009). Finally, the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 guaranteed qualified male and female employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave for specified family and medical reasons. The U.S. Congress specifically noted the intent of the FMLA was “to balance the demands of the workplace with the needs of family” (29 U.S.C. §2601 et seq.). With family-friendly legal guarantees in place to limit excessive work hours and other remnants of 19th century industrial organization, the stage was set for an ever-broader concept of work-life balance. Yet, scholarly research took a zero-sum turn toward work-life and work-family conflict.

Meta-analyses have done an admirable job of characterizing much of the literature from the 1980s forward, including extremely common limitations in the field. Qualitative studies tended to treat balance as a goal, while quantitative studies largely defined balance in terms of low conflict (Chang et al, 2010). To illustrate the overdependence on descriptive quantitative methods, the meta-analyses we reviewed utilized 77% (Chang et al, 2010), 83% (Amstad et al, 2011), and presumably 100% (Kurtessis et al, 2015) cross-sectional survey methods. The quantitative surveys compiled in the meta-analyses also took a very loose interpretation of sampling to elevate convenience populations (e.g. a researcher’s personal industry contact lists) to the level of probability sampling. While generalizability concerns are often stated, the more serious issue of validity, or lack thereof from convenience data, is rarely considered.

From an ethnostatistical perspective, the main body of work-life balance scholarship has served to create and naturalize performance measures as instruments of control, based on hidden social and political organizational goals, and reified “through use in communities of practice....for abstract competitions where one organization’s or individual’s performance is compared to that of other organizations or individuals” (Gephart, 2012: 76). The polyphonic discourse of work-life balance is thus reduced to a work maximizing zero-sum game, thereby denying the value-creating potential of individuals as humans with complex lives. Managerial control over the work-life balance narrative may be a means to encourage and give structure to “unconscious symbolic significance for the modern workaholic” (Morgan et al, 1983: 12). Pondy (1983: 159) adds that “a given objective reality can support a number of symbolic realities,” each forming an intersubjective rhizome of meaning to individuals and small groups within the larger organization.

Pondy and Mitroff (1979: 9) noted that individual humans are self-aware and self-conscious language using systems, but a group can only be “a symbol-processing entity if its members share a common definition of reality.” This understanding of human behavior corresponds to Level 7 in Boulding’s (1968) hierarchy of system complexity and is relevant to our discussion because a viable framework for studying work-life balance needs to be conceptualized at Boulding’s (1968) Level 8 multi-cephalous systems to allow these different meanings within non-dominant story networks to coexist within the same organization. This high system complexity level of shared meaning seemed more readily applicable to an entire human civilization or culture and although Pondy and Mitroff (1979) noted that it could possibly apply to some organizations, cross-sectional research is mired in the static frameworks of Boulding’s Level 1. Thus, reducing the work-life balance story web to a monologue for control is also problematic from a purely methodological perspective.

Context of Work

Metaphor, myth, and the symbolic realities embodied in storied organization life advance from the mediation of individual micro dramas and whatever shared process ontology binds the group together for collective action (Wexler, 1983). Yet, intersubjectivity has been largely absent from quantitative research designs, and there has been an implicit assumption in survey research evident in, for example, the instrument used by Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996), that the meanings of work, family, and conflict were the same to all respondents. Pindek and Spector (2015) claim that these meanings are subject to idiosyncratic individual perceptions and interpretations of contextual factors. They also suggest that workplace context may be partially grounded in the shared objective existence of policies and procedures, but variance associated with the meaning and impact of such structures that define work organization then diverges into common and individual components. Similarly, Pindek and Spector (2015) found meta-analytic evidence to suggest that working

conditions specific to an occupation could account for up to 24% of the variance in perceptions of work conflicts. This finding highlights the strong connection between individually perceived work-life balance issues and the contextual factors that are shared not just within an organization, but more so by work groups in the same occupation.

As a further illustration of variance explained by occupation within the same organization, Doherty and Manfredi (2006) reported on an action-based research study in the UK that compared work-life balance differences among administrative, professional, technical, and clerical (APT&C) staff and academic faculty. The study found that APT&C staff thought that they could achieve work-life balance if they were given greater workplace autonomy and trust, and they expressed a sense of entitlement to a balanced life. These findings are consistent with context in that APT&C staff have fixed expectations concerning work hours and duties. It is understandable that they would find viable solutions in changing working conditions and policies concerning work organization. In contrast, the academic faculty in the study considered the assignment of a more manageable workload as the key to self-balancing their work and life. The entitlement of academic faculty may also have been of a different variety in that, failing active workload management by a superior, they can exercise discretion on how much effort to allocate to duties perceived to be unnecessary or forced upon them without participative input. In support of this self-balancing finding among academic faculty, Mäkikangas et al (2015) noted that in a 10-year longitudinal study of Finnish managers, well-being at work moved up and down with significant changes in measures of job control. Therefore, the academic faculty concept of autonomy includes a voice in choosing and setting the workload, while the clerical staff view autonomy as the freedom to accomplish a given workload as they determine to be most efficient.

The meta-analytic importance of a feeling of valued participation was brought to the fore by Kurtessis et al (2015) in that the antecedents of perceived organizational support include fairness and a sense of support from one's direct supervisor. At a higher level of analysis, human resource practices have been theorized to impact perceptions of organizational support. However, the immediacy of one's own work group likely has the greatest potential impact, as this is the level at which support flows on a daily basis in social exchange processes.

Time and Hidden Costs

Using a bi-directional inter-role conflict approach in their meta-analysis, Amstad et al (2011) found that the amount - and implicitly the quality - of time spent at work moderated the relationship between work interference with family and family-related outcomes. Further, they expressed support for a matching domain effect in that the main impacts of interference stay within the domain of the perceived cause. For instance, if a person perceives that excessive workload is the reason for missing time with family, then counterproductive work behaviors might be targeted at a supervisor responsible for the work time imbalance. Although the matching domain hypothesis seems a bit too rationally calculative, it is easy to imagine that an employee might feel justified in withdrawal behaviors that take time from an organization that took time away from his or her family. The strongest relationship, however, showed that people tend to quietly internalize conflicts in the work domain, with outcomes presenting as physical and mental health problems, as well as substance abuse and lower life satisfaction. Although revealed by a researcher's survey, internalized conflict would likely remain immersed in a hidden causal network, undetected in its daily impact on organizational life.

A common thread between Amstad et al (2011) and Savall and Zardet (2008) is that both identified quantifiable work related outcomes that indicate the presence of deeper issues. For instance, turnover, absenteeism, and variations in productivity and quality of work can all be measured quantitatively, financially, and qualitatively. However, the findings compiled for the multiple meta-analyses that we reviewed were almost exclusively attempting to build descriptive cross-sectional (and perhaps even convenience) data into explicative statistical models. Researchers may generally prefer to remain in a descriptive-only mode for fear of unduly influencing the results. However, in our opinion, the primary reason for studying work-life balance is to prompt evidence-based organizational change to improve the quality of both life and work. Savall and Zardet (2011: 339) transcend the researcher's non-interference dilemma:

“the intervener-researcher becomes the co-producer of the metamorphosis of the object under study when...he or she assists actors in the development of their transformative energy....Thus, when the intermediary findings are presented, the reactions they provoke enrich one's own knowledge and at the same time reveal the internal composition of the object of the research.”

Active engagement between the intervener-researcher and organizational stakeholders offers a means for validating findings that in turn provide evidence for meaningful transformation.

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In their meta-analysis of 558 studies, Kurtessis et al (2015) found that by far the strongest negative impacts on perceived organizational support were organizational politics, breach of psychological contract, and abusive supervision. Their comment on the most serious of these, organizational politics, seems to be particularly applicable to the outsized damage emanating from an insincere initiative on work-life balance:

“organization members who are willing to damage the organization’s future to further their personal welfare may have little interest in generally supporting other organization members....Such a political organizational orientation would suggest to employees that the organization cares too little about their welfare to rein in harmful behaviors” (Kurtessis et al, 2015: 11).

So many in academia have laid claim to the sentiment that “academic politics are so bitter because the stakes are so low” that the true origin has been lost in the competition.

Training

In terms of HR practices, it was apparent that the diversity of unique individual needs could not be met by blanket policies to show support for life beyond work. For instance, flexible work practices were only seen as beneficial by employees who actually needed flexibility, and family-friendly policies can have limited value to older single workers who may rely on their organization to fulfill more of their socio-emotional needs. Due to the inability of organization-wide HR policies to target individual work-life balance needs and perhaps the more local nature of perceived support, the expected positive user benefit effect was lost. Interestingly, training and developmental opportunities and the related job enrichment constructs of skill variety, autonomy, and feedback showed very strong relationships to employee perceptions of a supportive organization (Kurtessis et al, 2015). Under a broader whole-life conception of work-life balance, training can easily be seen as integral to human intellectual growth.

Strategy

Mäkikangas et al (2015) reported on a 10-year study of employee well-being, one of a very few studies to take a life-span perspective of work and life. Their job demands-resources model employed a living combination of working conditions, work organization, and communication as crucial job resources to form an adaptive ideal balance of autonomy, participative decision-making, social support, and homonomy. In essence, their job resources were a reified implementation of Fred Emery’s six psychological requirements for productive activity put to a much longer practical test than ever was accomplished in the heyday of the socio-technical era.

The significance of the Mäkikangas et al (2015) study does not lie in any of the individual components of the job demands-resources model. Rather, the study highlights the strategic vision guided by unwavering values required for an organization to purposefully devote resources over such a long time horizon to maintain psychological conditions necessary for productive work. Well-being of employees goes hand in hand with the comprehensive strategic implementation needed for the organization to continually fulfill its purpose in the broader social field beyond its boundaries.

In summary, previous research into work-life balance in its broad sub-themes of conflict, interference, support, and well-being is consistent with the six themes of Savall and Zardet (2008). Moreover, a qualimetric socio-economic approach has an appropriate complex systems level to transcend the limitations of conventional work-life balance research methods. When applied to a complete academic work unit, the qualimetric approach is not just an appropriate methodological choice for a thorough descriptive and explicative study of work-life balance, but also, the causal analysis offers prescriptive potential for solutions and a scalable model for the college and entire university.

Research Design & Process

The unit of analysis for this study was an academic unit in a business college at a regional teaching-focused institution. In-depth, one-on-one interviews with members of the academic unit were conducted to gather individualized work and life stories. Interviewees included a dean, a department chair, senior faculty near retirement and never retiring, junior faculty and mid-level, tenured and untenured, and one in the process of leaving for another school.

Due to the lack of gender diversity within the school, 78% of the interviewees were male and 22% were female. All members of the academic unit were in tenure-track positions and 78% were tenured. Concerning their family obligations, 45% were married without children, 33% were married with children, and 22% were single and never married. Concerning ages, 56% were older than 50, 33% were in their 40s, and 11% were in their 30s. Concerning commute distances, 67% lived

within a 15-minute commute to campus, 22% lived within one hour of campus, and 11% lived 2.5 hours from campus. Interviewees in this last long commute group taught primarily in an online program, but also had on-campus duties. All interviews were conducted in the unit member's office or at a familiar and private place of their choosing to encourage open discussion.

Concerning previous experience, 78% of the interviewees had taught at other schools prior to this one, and all had left those institutions because of organizational politics, specifically administrative decisions that negatively affected quality of work-life. All cited specific deficiencies from their previous jobs that were not lacking or that could be remedied at this school. Concerning academic preparation, 67% had followed a traditional business PhD route into the professorate. The remaining 33% of the interviewees had come from careers in industry and into academia through the DBA route or had completed a bridge program from a non-business discipline. The 22% in their first teaching position after their doctoral programs were evenly split in their prior work experience between short and long careers in industry. All cited quality of work-life issues as reasons for leaving their previous employers to transition into academia.

We asked each interviewee the same 14 interview questions (Appendix 1) designed to capture their individual perceptions of the meaning of work-life balance in their own stories of their lives at work, at home, and in their communities. Several word association questions were included as a way to elicit each interviewee's subjective perspectives, thereby giving structure to the ensuing discussion about their views of work, life, and concepts of balance. Short answers to these prompts opened into more detailed stories upon follow up. We then transcribed each interview word-by-word and coded each person's work and life stories using the six qualimetric socio-economic themes. By categorizing individual stories and mapping the relationships between diverse and common stories across all interviewees, we were able to decipher the fundamental meanings of work-life balance for each unit member, ascertain the challenges that each person faced, and discover the root causes of work-life imbalances. With multiple perspectives and individual contexts, a causal modeling procedure like that of Savall and Zardet's (2008, 2011) qualimetric socio-economic intervention research is essential for moving beyond ethnographic description and into behavioral explanation and prescription for organizational change.

Stories of Work-Life

The content and theme analysis of the interview data suggested in an emergent sense that the assumptions of traditional construct-driven work-life balance survey methods may have pre-destined the particular concepts of work-life balance that researchers expected to find. In allowing interviewees to tell their own stories, a polyphonic understanding emerged. Although all interviewees shared a common workplace, three distinct sub-groups voiced contrasting perspectives on all sections of the socio-economic dysfunction themes, as well as their understandings of the concepts of work, life, and work-life balance. These subgroups can be labeled work only or work-work balance, work versus life, and work-life balance.

Work Only or Work-Work Balance

The dominant narrative of the academic work unit was voiced as a monologue from a subgroup of administrators and former executives. In terms of conventional approaches to work-life balance research, they espoused a work-work balance ethos in that work was so sharply segmented from personal aspects of their lives that the concept of balance was irrelevant or non-existent. Within their personal lives, there was a similar segmentation and a life-life balance issue concerning how to choose among family and personal activities. The greatest source of angst within each side of the segmented divide came from interacting with people, including family members, behaving irrationally or inconsistently. It is notable that these dysfunctions in others were expressed as traits instead of learned or modifiable behaviors. If a spouse was unhappy due to facts of the environment such as rural isolation, limited anonymity from living in a small town, and lack of urban amenities, both person and environment were treated as undesirable traits. Short of searching for another job or moving to a more urban area with a much longer commute to work, the primary option was to try to regulate these irrational perceptions by allocating lunch hours and more personal home-life time to family. Instead of learning to adapt with a system-environment context to focus on aspects that could be changed, this tactic merely increased the segmentation within the life-life balance.

Coding the work-work subgroup's interview data with the six socio-economic dysfunction themes produced a root cause analysis that revealed a fundamental challenge in the work organization domain. Specifically, interviewees were critical of a top-heavy administrative hierarchy that in their eyes lacked legitimacy and they did not feel bound by its inefficient non-visionary micromanagement. Ironically, interviewees expressing this theme appeared to be no better than those they critiqued in creating a strategic vision and taking responsibility for management tasks to implement goals for their own work and life activities. While interviewees maintained a passive segmentation between work and life, their dysfunctions in work organization occasionally found an authoritarian voice (Emery, 1993) in response to uncertainty attributed to the irrational,

inconsistent, and emotional behavior or colleagues, superiors, students, and family members. For instance, if students lacked competences or professionalism needed for college level work, the expressed solution was to enforce higher standards, increase power distance between professors and students, and improve recruiting efforts instead of teaching to build and develop student capabilities.

In terms of socio-psychological explanations, the work-work subgroup lacked or rejected a sense of belonging or homonomy (Emery, 1977) with the organization and with colleagues. As outsiders to the fundamental educational purpose of a university, their reluctance to take their place in the hierarchy came with a demotivating disinterest in their work. Surface dysfunctions growing from these roots in work organization appeared in time management, with inefficient scheduling and completion of routine tasks and trouble regulating distractions and disturbances. The lack of belonging at work translated into time spent to manage their images to appear committed and engaged. While not as pronounced at home, the homonomy deficit was expressed as tension between family and “me” time, with obligations to family usually winning. Lack of meaningful feedback on their work was perhaps rightly attributed to institutional failures to measure student learning and relevance of research, but interviewees expressed a reluctance to accept and act on feedback in their personal lives as well. For instance, negative feedback on health did not motivate them to exercise more or seek medical help. For a subgroup that firmly believed in trait-based leadership, their frustrations at work and at home were not confronted by any innate ability to rescript problems and enact solutions. Rather, others who lacked appropriate traits and natural abilities were blamed as the roots of problems.

It is somewhat ironic that the narrative that dominates work-life balance in scholarship and practice tends to deny the nature and existence of the phenomenon. This sentiment was best summed up with an assertion that other people’s emotional baggage was not real, not worthy of consideration in the workplace. Interviewees also noted that administrator performance was evaluated based on the amount of work that they can get others to do. With a top-heavy administrative hierarchy in roles somewhat distant from a largely separate and flatter organization involved in direct value creation, administrator control of work-life balance data collection, policy creation, and implementation would likely reinforce existing imbalances.

Work vs. Life

The second thematic story subgroup was a marginalized narrative marked by a proliferation of ideal versus actual dialectical conflicts throughout all aspects of work and life. Interviewees staged most of their dramas with themselves in tragic roles, fighting the good fight, but ultimately scripted to come up short in playing by the rules in the games of more powerful characters. Hence, this subgroup seemed to always be storying their experiences in terms of work versus life instead of the ever elusive balance. Further, their narrative seems to have taken on a theme of passive resignation or anti-narrative to the dominant voice instead of an active ante-narrative competitive resistance. In life activities, responsibilities and family obligations turned vacations into work. Single interviewees had no one with which to share the burdens of maintaining a house and car, or sharing the enjoyment of traveling and recreation. Yet, a loss or fear of loss of individual autonomy was voiced by both single and married interviewees. The same loss-greater-than-gain concept was echoed in the tradeoff between working with colleagues to coordinate competencies taught throughout a major program of study and academic freedom not to work together. The sense of resignation seemed to come from the trap of an irreconcilable dialectic. Only one option could be chosen, and neither path leads to unqualified happiness because that would require others to cheerfully enact roles in a generally tragic plot.

The work vs. life subgroup described themselves as members of a pure academic tradition, a revered profession with an obligation for research and scholarship to advance knowledge in one’s field. Not surprisingly, this subgroup was the most familiar with work-life balance literature and superficially, their stories echoed the themes of role conflict. However, the substance of their anti-narratives was that their roles as professors, spouses, friends, and community members were not in conflict. Rather, they were in conflict with what they perceived as broken social contracts, as other parties were not playing their expected idealized roles. For instance, under working conditions, students not attending classes, not completing assignments, and not seeking their professor’s guidance to improve learning and career development were expressed as a partnership in which the other side was failing to enact their expected roles. In dramaturgical terms, the plot, dialogue, and character roles had been corrupted to the point of undermining the sacred professor-scholar role in the act. In addition to reducing the workload and level of difficulty for student lessons in response to role failures in working conditions, the work vs. life subgroup expressed frustration with work organization dysfunctions. Instead of helping students, they saw administrative decisions taken for political reasons and service committees not designed for efficient problem solving. No one they interacted with on stage seemed to know how to play their roles in the drama. In a broader extension, they expressed

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a sense of disconnected surrealism in their teaching and scholarship. They knew that their roles in academia were part of the real world, but the real business world was somewhere beyond their work and life experience.

Dysfunctions in organizational communication and strategy were interconnected in the work vs. life anti-narratives. The work of the business college in terms of student learning and accomplishments were not publicly shared, as contrasted with engineering, science, art, music, and practically every other major area of study on campus. The problems with communicating activities in the college were tied to a general lack of strategic vision to create distinctive student-focused programs to develop practical career skills. There was limited communication because no one had taken responsibility for the role of creating and implementing a strategy. Interviewees in the work vs. life subgroup knew what needed to be done and would have been willing to volunteer for curriculum service, but no one was enacting the administrative role needed to direct such an initiative. Thus, the fundamental challenge in work organization for the work-work subgroup presented a barrier to allowing members of the work vs. life subgroup to apply their expertise toward improving the college's programs.

From an academic perspective, members of this subgroup expressed that the school met their expectations as a legitimately rigorous home for scholars. However, they felt that the rural mountain location required them to make a quality of life sacrifice. Prior to this school, all had had the urban amenities that they desired in their personal lives, but their workplaces lacked academic purity. Hence, a theme of one-or-the-other pervaded their work vs. life dramas, with the other never being ideal. In terms of socio-psychological explanations, the work vs. life subgroup understood and accepted that they belonged in the organization, but they were struggling with dysfunctions in reifying the ideal of nurturance (Emery, 1977) needed to facilitate student learning and to serve the institution through service and research.

Causally, the fundamental root of their network of dysfunctions was in training, or lack thereof. They observed a lack of mentoring and talent management in the administrative role, functions that were essential to releasing faculty potential to perform the pedagogical work needed for program improvement. Barring system-wide change to re-design majors with an integrated interdisciplinary competence and problem-solving orientation, training would give the work vs. life subgroup permission to re-design their own courses. While capable of leading, they knew that their role as scholars was to participate in, but not to direct such an enterprise. Unfortunately, their unshakable role clarity meant that the leadership role would fall to members of the work-work subgroup who lacked sufficient homonomy to want to improve the system. Further, the need for pedagogical improvement to release human potential was incompatible with the trait-based perspective of the work-work subgroup.

Work-Life Balance

The third thematic subgroup viewed the barriers between work and life outside as psychological, not physical, and focused on mentally balancing personal and professional activities as part of enjoying everything that they did. To them, work-life balance meant that life and work were intertwined together and built into a coherent system to tell a story about them as individuals. As in Savall's socio-economic approach, the hyphen between work and life for this subgroup brings the two into dialectical mediation, not competition. Their stories do not have the either-or character of the work vs. life subgroup or the monological work-only perspective of the other subgroup. Yet, it seems important to note that the work-life subgroup was just different from the others and not an evolution beyond or a voice that should be privileged in the organization. All three thematic subgroups coexist in the same mass of living story. Re-scripting from a socio-economic management perspective would still allow all voices to speak, but a new dominant story would emphasize a cohesive path to reducing dysfunctions.

Whereas the first two subgroups' perspectives of dysfunctions could be characterized as denial and resignation, the third subgroup voiced a reflexive understanding of their work-lives and approached organizational dysfunctions as praxis. For instance, under training, it was noted that teaching is challenging in that a professor must keep up with current events in practice and research. However, comments focused on improving the process to stay current, and on the necessity of humility as a learner helping others to learn. These ideas contributed to a sense of professionalism, whereas the other two subgroups explained professionalism in terms of subordinates respecting authority or the academic profession.

The dysfunction themes that generated the most unresolved problems were in time management and strategic implementation. Interviewees felt that they were being pulled in all directions and that the time demands of teaching could easily devour time needed for home and self. From the strategy dysfunction perspective, the same issue reappeared in a story of the pressure of a tenure-track position's deleterious impact on health. Stress, weight gain, and being too busy to exercise were cited as results of giving work priority over all other life considerations. Thus, the root causes of dysfunctions for the work-life balance subgroup were in setting strategic priorities and in managing time to make everything happen as needed for a healthy outlook.

Hidden Cost Estimate

An analysis of how people spend their time offers a simple but effective way to estimate the quantitative impact and financial value of dysfunctions. In Savall and Zardet's (2008, 2011) intervention research, an initial qualitative diagnosis to identify likely root causes is followed by a participative hidden cost analysis to confirm causal relationships and to quantify the potential benefits to be gained from correcting the root cause dysfunctions. Time spent on regulating the impacts of dysfunctions detracts from time available for value creation activities, and the first step to reducing dysfunctions is to recapture a relatively small amount of time each week to begin working in earnest. We utilized interviewees' weekly time estimates to conduct an initial hidden cost estimate focused entirely on time management.

Teaching well as praxis is a constantly evolving process that can consume as much time as is available. However, with the triple work demands of teaching, research, and service, there must be a practical limit to the time allocated to each area. For the academic/administrative unit, teaching and grading duties consumed 35 to 50 hours per week, with an additional 10 to 12 hours for email and phone calls in the evenings and on weekends. Service and research varied between 5 and 20 hours, depending on the week. No one offered a weekly estimate for time spent on research and writing, but there were comments about scholarship being relegated to odd hours, summers, and breaks. Therefore, we assumed that the time budget for research operated at a deficit, extracted from personal time outside of work. A conservative estimate of 1 hour per week was assumed for calculation purposes. On average, interviewees spent a total of 67 hours per week on teaching, service, and research.

A second stage of participative intervention research would be necessary for a more detailed estimate. While this would be beyond the scope of a proof-of-concept study, we can make a rough estimate based on standard work hours. If the weekly total of 67 hours were confined to two 16-week semesters per year, then the annual time of 2,144 hours would exceed that of any job with a standard 8-hour workday (i.e. 2,080 hours per year) by 64 hours. Thus, a minimum of 2 hours per week during a semester should be recoverable, and that small amount would be sufficient to begin the transformation of hidden costs into organizational renewal, starting with individual work-life praxis.

Conclusion

The limitations of this study are numerous, but in a field dominated by quantitative cross-sectional survey research and theoretical predestination, advancement may depend upon exploring different paths. We have endeavored to study work-life balance with hopes of offering something different than the usual survey approach that can only learn that yes, people have work-life balance issues, but we have no idea what they are or what to do about them. The small number of interviewees may be viewed as a limitation, but as we noted earlier, the scope of the study involved a complete academic/administrative work unit. Proving the concept at this level of analysis offers potential for replicating and scaling the approach to serve the entire university.

Pondy and Olsen (2005) argued that social science does not reject theory based on extreme or limited case data, but rather, it is based almost entirely on such cases. They noted casually that Kuhn's monumental work on scientific paradigms was effectively based on one conceptual revolution, thereby ignoring other more numerous cases of innovative tools that would have offered a different conclusion. Yet, the field turned on Kuhn's one case and never looked back. Denying Pondy and Olsen's truth of how management and organization science advances takes us back to Boje's (2001) realization upon launching Tamara that we were perhaps too busy chasing stories to solve the mystery for ourselves.

Our approach to studying work-life balance modeled on Savall and Zardet's qualimetrics found more voices than predicted by the standard approach. Qualimetric causal reasoning allowed us to draw connections among the six socio-economic dysfunction domains and trace the branches of three separate rhizomes back through the themes toward their origins in work organization, training, and strategy+time management. Although these root cause rhizomes could be traced farther back, we did not delve into discourses of power and the additional perspectives attainable from applying a discursive framework for management research (Hillon et al, 2016). However, the three subgroups discovered in this study included the trait-based logic of Taylorism and quality management for the work-work theme, the human relations school for the work vs. life theme, and a critical version of socio-technical open systems thinking for the work-life balance theme. Three voices in the work-life balance discourse with three different theoretical groundings would likely lead on to different sources of power and grand narratives. The interview data also offered discussions of the workplace culture and insight into multiple sub-cultures and power dynamics within the organization – administration, faculty, students, gender, minorities, as well as in the surrounding communities. Thus, many more dimensions of analysis could be pursued by the richness of the data.

Our study offers qualimetric evidence that there is a viable option to the qualitative versus quantitative dilemma. However, our findings are not merely methodological. They offer a fundamentally different theory of work-life balance.

A Qualimetric Approach to Work-Life Balance

The work-family interference sub-genre of work-life balance research seeks to locate the source of conflict, presumably to identify the appropriate domain in which to make policy changes. The negative spillover sub-genre of research is similar, but the emphasis is on the domain of impact of the role conflict instead of on the source. Although not explicitly stated, the underlying assumption of studying two domains and two roles is that each worker is also a twin, with home and work in dialectical opposition. Research sub-genres into work context, autonomy, well-being, organizational support, and participation have focused on understanding aspects of the work role that can be improved essentially to reduce work-work conflict. Thus, the question of whether each worker is treated as two separate people never surfaces, but the twin nature is implied.

The qualimetric approach, when applied to work-life balance research, revealed a fundamentally different hypothesis in contrast with all other sub-genres. Each worker is a single person and while symptoms or superficial effects may differ at home or at work, the root causes of challenges at both work and at home are the same. The roots of dysfunction affecting the academic work unit that we studied grow from the interaction of all structures and behaviors in the collective work, family, home, and community networks in which their members' lives unfold. Causal mapping extends from the hidden roots of dysfunctions throughout these networks until visible symptoms appear in work and home life. For instance, the frequent complaint of not having enough time for the workload and family/home obligations was not a spillover issue. Rather, interviewees revealed common deficiencies in prioritization, scheduling, and task completion, all of which were exacerbated by voluntarily taking on additional loads in both work and personal domains. The desire for autonomy as described by most of the interviewees was not autonomy in any true sense because it lacked personal discipline and accountability for performance. Autonomy was a smokescreen to hide the fact that they were unable to consistently make effective decisions on how best to allocate their time and resources. Variability in life was seen as desirable to prevent boredom, but this expressed preference also masked tendencies to be easily distracted from tasks, thereby delaying completion and lowering quality of performance. A dependence on technology for teaching, communication, and entertainment also presented irresistible distractions.

Interviewees frequently categorized themselves as introverts and they expressed solitary tendencies in their life stories. Autonomy in regard to academic freedom was cited as a reason for not working more closely with colleagues, but beyond work, they were also very purposeful in seeking out limited social engagement. Remaining single, marrying late in life, and having a tightly knit social life with a spouse and/or a few close friends reflected the pattern of work interactions. Work colleagues were often part of this limited social network, thereby further blending work and life.

Administrators tended to be rational actors, with a preference for policies, processes, and organizational structures – the non-human aspects of work-life. This no-nonsense approach was present in their personal lives as well – agendas for daily accomplishments, reading non-fiction, and puttering around the house building and fixing things. Their greatest frustrations at work concerned people behaving with emotion, without consistency from day to day, and demanding to be understood as individuals. The needs for compassionate communication and action were bewildering and unpleasant aspects of their work and they preferred to keep a professional distance.

Finally, there was an element of personal identity in academic work-life balance. “Work” is commonly perceived as an obligation to fulfill in order to receive compensation, while “life” includes everything outside of this context (Guest, 2002). Yet, complex socio-technical systems across organizational, geographical, cultural, and temporal boundaries (Carayon, 2006) often blur the line between the two seemingly distinctive frameworks of work and life. Savall and Zardet's method was developed specifically to search for the complex interlinkages of problems in the workplace, but the search is not limited to factors exclusively in the province of work. Organizations are open systems and the primary connections to the world outside of work occur at the individual level.

Very few researchers have touched on the role of identity in work-life balance. Kurtessis et al (2015) allude to the socio-emotional needs that can be fulfilled from perceived organization support, which in turn may lead to identification with and commitment to an organization. A positive relationship may add the role of organizational membership into a person's self-identity, yet without getting to the core of their being. Avanzi et al (2012) emphasized shared internalized values underlying a sense of belongingness or homonymy to characterize organizational identification, but identification had a strong element of indeterminate psychosocial construction to distinguish it from the nominal self-reflective process of individual identity formation. While the study demonstrated interesting curvilinear relationships among identification, workaholism, well-being, and job satisfaction, the six-item scale used to assess organizational identification was insufficient to capture a complexly meaningful sense of individual identity. Our adaptation of the qualimetric approach may be the first study to capture the personal and individual sense of identity that we found in regard to the meaning of work-life balance.

It is often easier to treat the visible symptoms of a virus in hopes that the body can learn to fight it off on its own. If they could find the time to participate, our academics and their work-life imbalances could in theory benefit from workshops on teaching, goal setting, and communication. However, without a root level strategic reappraisal, any incremental gains in efficiency would simply be offset by more non-purposeful initiatives. We can infer a rather complex relationship from the finding that trust in the executive level decision-makers is more important than trust in co-workers and supervisors (Kurtessis et al, 2015) and conclude that it is necessary for a provost, president, or chancellor to set the tone and direction for work-life balance change efforts, but successful implementation depends almost entirely upon cohesive action at the department or smallest work unit level. From Mäkikangas et al (2015) we learned that well-being at work is relatively stable and moves incrementally over long periods of time, thereby indicating that the impact of work-life balance policy changes most likely will not appear immediately. No amount of university level support can compensate for dysfunctions in the day-to-day work reality of faculty and staff in their ongoing efforts to balance the needs of work and life into one full and fulfilled life in academia.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Tell us/me a little about yourself, background, interests in life. Anything you would like to share.
2. What brought you to this university?
3. If I say the following words, what comes to mind?
 - a. Work
 - b. Life
 - c. Academia
 - d. Students
 - e. Teaching
 - f. Professionalism
 - g. Time
 - h. Culture
4. If your friends came to visit, what would you show them about your work environment and the work you do?
 - a. What are the top 3 places/activities/people that you would tell them about?
 - b. What would you avoid showing them and why?
5. If your friends came to visit, what would you show them about your social life?
 - a. What are the top 3 places/activities/people that you would tell them about?
 - b. What would you avoid showing them and why?
6. Can you describe a typical week for you during a semester?
 - a. How many hours each week do you spend on work related activities?
 - b. How many hours each week do you devote to yourself or your family or things you love to do outside of work?
 - i. What do you do to relax?
 - ii. What would you like to do to relax, but have not had time to do?
7. What do you enjoy most about your job?
8. Do you use technology to stay connected professionally?
 - a. How many hours each week, outside of work, do you use technology for professional activities and when?
9. How would you define your professional life, what it includes and its boundaries?
10. What is your biggest challenge/barrier in your professional life?
11. What are some specific aspects or initiatives at work that motivate or demotivate your professional aspirations?
12. What is the biggest challenge/barrier in creating your desired personal life?
13. Looking at your life as a whole, what is most important to you?
14. Lastly, how would you define “work-life balance”?