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HR as a Bridge Between Work and Life: An Empirical Study on Employee Well-Being and Flexibility

This study examines the challenges of work–life balance from a human resource management (HRM) perspective, with particular attention to changing labour market expectations and organisational culture transformation. The central assumption is that the integration of professional and personal life, together with the promotion of mental well-being, is becoming increasingly important for both manual and knowledge workers, with a significant impact on employee performance and commitment. The study used a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative phase was based on an online questionnaire completed by 131 active employees, of whom 69% worked full-time, 17% part-time, and 14% on a project basis. The analysis revealed that part-time and project-based employees reported lower stress levels and more favourable work–life balance perceptions compared to full-time workers. The qualitative phase drew on a semi-structured interview with an experienced HR professional, which provided deeper insights into internal HR practices and talent retention. The findings show that although 45% reported job satisfaction, organisational measures for well-being are often missing. The most common sources of stress include excessive job demands, lack of feedback, and rigid work organisation. The study highlights that supporting work–life balance should not be considered an additional benefit but rather a key element of sustainable HR strategy. By fostering trust, promoting flexibility, and prioritising well-being, organisations can gain long-term competitiveness and stronger retention.

Keywords: employee well-being; flexible employment arrangements; human resource management; organisational commitment; stress; work–life balance

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1. Introduction

Amid the accelerated economic and technological changes of the 21st century, work–life balance has become a central theme in social discourse. The societal significance of this balance lies in its close connection to individual well-being, family life, and mental health.

Research shows that the prolonged disruption of work–life balance may lead to increased stress, burnout, and health deterioration (Molnár, 2023), which not only negatively affects the employee and their family but also generates broader economic consequences. For instance, the decline of mental health in the workplace results in measurable national economic losses: according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024), approximately 12 billion working days are lost globally each year due to depression and anxiety, corresponding to an estimated productivity loss of around USD 1 trillion.

Conversely, the harmonious alignment of work and private life has a positive impact on quality of life and job satisfaction – it supports the maintenance of overall employee well-being, enhances performance, and reduces turnover and absenteeism (Molnár, 2023). It is therefore unsurprising that for younger generations, the opportunity to achieve work–life balance is among the most important factors in choosing an employer (Guti et al., 2023; Farkas, 2025).

In parallel, the role of human resource management (HRM) has gained new dimensions in supporting employee well-being. Modern organisations increasingly emphasise employee health

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and satisfaction in their strategies, recognising that HR, as a strategic partner, can play a pivotal role in creating a balanced working environment.

It is now a fundamental expectation that HR departments should not only perform administrative tasks but also actively initiate programmes and policies that promote work–life balance. In line with this, many companies have introduced flexible working hours, remote work opportunities, health and mental well-being programmes, and fostered organisational cultures that support the reconciliation of personal life and career (Kaur, 2023). The strategic shift in HRM is also evident in that employee well-being has become a core element of corporate culture: organisations are increasingly focusing not solely on productivity but also on holistic employee health and satisfaction (Maven Team, 2024). Against this backdrop, it is particularly relevant to examine how employees experience work–life balance in their everyday lives and which HR tools and strategies contribute to supporting their well-being. Accordingly, this study explores employees' experiences with work–life balance, with special emphasis on the role and impact of HR strategies. This study seeks to demonstrate how human resource management can facilitate more balanced and healthier working conditions for employees. In doing so, it shows how HR can also contribute to organisational effectiveness and sustainable employment.

2. Literature Review

Over the past two decades, the issue of work–life balance has become a prominent field of study not only in psychology and sociology but also in management and human resource research. The literature consistently emphasises that work–life balance is a multidimensional phenomenon affecting individual well-being, social networks, and organisational effectiveness (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Guest, 2002).

International comparative studies suggest that work–life balance has a positive impact on mental health and life satisfaction (Haar et al., 2014).

The classical notion of balance – defined as an individual's ability to meet both professional and personal obligations – has in recent years been complemented by an emphasis on flexible life management and the consideration of individual preferences (Kossek & Lambert, 2005). Strategies aimed at managing conflicts between workplace demands and family roles play a key role in reducing stress, increasing commitment, and maintaining health (Allen et al., 2000).

In Hungarian scholarship, Juhász (2011) and G. Fekete (2013) also highlight that the boundaries between work and private life are becoming increasingly blurred, particularly with the spread of digital technologies and remote work. This emerging work culture, however, represents not only opportunities but also challenges for both organisations and employees.

In recent years, the international discourse has increasingly addressed the dimension of mental health. Following Máté (2022), chronic stress arising in the course of work can lead not only to decreased performance but also to psychosomatic illnesses if employees lack sufficient internal or external support. Similar conclusions were reached by Chapman et al. (2021), who argue that organisational trust and psychological safety play a decisive role in preserving employees' mental health.

The HRM literature increasingly underlines that supporting employee well-being and work–life balance is not merely a welfare measure but also a factor of competitiveness. Flexible forms of work – such as telework, flexible start and end times, or hybrid models – significantly enhance employee satisfaction, while simultaneously creating new challenges regarding control and collaboration (Kaur, 2023; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Well-designed HR strategies – including recognition systems, managerial support, and opportunities for participation – facilitate the achievement of balance and, in the long run, strengthen retention and loyalty (Maven Team, 2024). One of the keys to retention and employee loyalty lies in the evidence-based development of HRM systems aimed at improving well-being (Allen et al., 2013).

In summary, the literature indicates that achieving work–life balance depends on the interplay of complex organisational and individual factors, with HRM as a conscious strategic partner playing a significant supporting role.

The literature also highlights that certain social groups face particularly pronounced challenges in achieving work–life balance. Single parents, employees with caregiving responsibilities for elderly family members, and shift workers are frequently identified as especially vulnerable due to time constraints, emotional demands, and limited flexibility (Guest, 2002; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). These groups often experience heightened stress and reduced opportunities for recovery, underscoring the importance of organisational and HR-level interventions. Situating work–life balance within this broader social context reinforces the argument that supportive HR strategies are not universally applied solutions but must be sensitive to diverse life circumstances.

3. Research Methodology

This study explores employees' experiences with work–life balance, focusing on the role and impact of human resource strategies. The research applied a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative elements.

3.1 Sampling and data collection

The target population of the quantitative survey consisted of active employees. Data were collected using an online questionnaire created in Google Forms, which was publicly accessible during the data collection period. The survey link was initially distributed through the authors' professional and personal networks via social media platforms, primarily Facebook and LinkedIn. In addition, respondents were encouraged to share the link further within their own networks.

As a result, the study employed a non-probability sampling strategy, combining convenience sampling with elements of snowball sampling. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous; any individual who accessed the link and met the criterion of being an active employee was able to complete the questionnaire. While this sampling approach does not allow for statistical representativeness, it is appropriate for the exploratory aims of the present study and provides valuable insights into employees' experiences of work–life balance and organisational support.

3.2 Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative phase was conducted through an online survey completed by 131 respondents between February and March 2025. The participants were active employees representing a variety of industries and sectors. The questionnaire included 20 closed and semi-open questions covering the following themes: overall job satisfaction, sources of workplace stress, subjective perceptions of work–life balance, availability and frequency of flexible work arrangements, and experiences of organisational support, recognition, and managerial attention.

The design of the questionnaire was informed by insights from relevant Hungarian and international literature in work psychology and HRM (Allen et al., 2000; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). The data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods (frequency and mean analysis, percentage distributions).

3.3 Qualitative phase and sequencing of the mixed-methods design

The qualitative component of the research was conducted after the completion of the quantitative survey, following a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The online survey was open for five weeks, from 22 February to 29 March 2025. The semi-structured interview with an experienced HR professional was conducted subsequently, on 7 April 2025.

The primary purpose of the qualitative phase was to deepen and contextualise the findings of the quantitative survey. Accordingly, the interview questions were developed based on the preliminary analysis of the survey results. Particular attention was paid to themes that emerged as

especially salient among respondents, such as perceived work–life balance, mental well-being, flexibility expectations, and the role of organisational support.

The interview explored how these issues are interpreted and addressed from an HR professional's perspective, including differences between blue-collar and white-collar employees, the perceived impact of work–life balance on productivity, and its contribution to organisational competitiveness. This sequential approach allowed the qualitative findings to complement and explain the quantitative trends, thereby enhancing the overall interpretative depth of the study.

3.4 Research Limitations

The study did not aim to produce nationally representative conclusions but rather employed an exploratory approach to provide insights into the interrelations between employee experiences and HR practices. The voluntary nature of participation and the online format of the survey may have influenced the generalisability of the results. Nevertheless, the findings provide a valuable starting point for understanding the effectiveness of HR methods.

In addition, the survey did not include detailed questions regarding respondents' family status, parenthood, or caregiving responsibilities. Previous research suggests that such factors may significantly shape experiences of job satisfaction, stress, and work–life balance. The absence of these variables limits the possibility of more nuanced subgroup comparisons within the present sample. Future research would benefit from incorporating family-related and caregiving dimensions in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how work–life balance expectations and experiences differ across life situations.

4. Results

This section explores employees' experiences of work–life balance, with particular attention to the role of HR tools and organisational support. The findings presented below are based on the survey and the in-depth interview, together outlining the key dimensions of the employee experience.

The quantitative data provide insights into job satisfaction, employee well-being, and the need for organisational support, while the qualitative data complement and nuance the statistical trends. The findings provide a comprehensive picture of how employees perceive their work–life balance and the extent to which they attribute significance to HR practices in this regard.

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In total, 131 individuals participated in the survey, all of whom identified themselves as active employees. The socio-demographic analysis focused on age distribution, educational attainment, employment sector, and type of employment.

With respect to age, the majority of respondents (77%) fell within the 25–34 (45%) and 35–44 (32%) age groups. This suggests that the study primarily reflects the experiences of employees in the active stage of their careers. At this stage of life, work commitment, career development, and family responsibilities often coincide, making work–life balance particularly salient. A further 12% of respondents were aged 18–24, representing early-career entrants, while only 11% were over 45, meaning that the perspectives of older, more experienced employees were less represented in the sample. The distribution of respondents by employment type is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by employment type (N = 131)

Employment type	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Full-time	90	68.7
Part-time	22	16.8
Project-based / contract	19	14.5
Total	131	100.0

Source: Authors' own compilation based on survey data.

4.1.1. Educational background and occupational distribution

While the majority of respondents reported holding a higher education degree, educational attainment alone does not necessarily determine the nature of the work performed. For this reason, conclusions regarding the type of work were not drawn solely on the basis of education level.

To gain a more accurate picture of respondents' work characteristics, the questionnaire included an open-ended question asking participants to specify their current occupation. Based on these responses, occupations were grouped into broader professional fields, such as education, human resources and administration, finance and accounting, information technology, logistics and procurement, engineering, commerce and hospitality, manufacturing and quality management, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, public administration and legal services, and skilled trades.

This occupational grouping suggests that the sample includes a diverse range of job roles across multiple sectors, encompassing both physically demanding and predominantly knowledge-based positions. Accordingly, the findings primarily reflect the experiences of employees working in heterogeneous organisational and occupational contexts, rather than assuming a direct correspondence between education level and type of work.

4.2. Job Satisfaction, Stress, and Perceptions of Work–Life Balance by Age Group

Employees' workplace experiences were examined through three key indicators: job satisfaction, stress, and perceptions of work–life balance, with particular attention to variations across age groups.

The data indicate that the 25–34 age group, which constituted the largest respondent group, reported job satisfaction averages ranging between 3.15 and 3.43, while their perceptions of work–life balance fell between 2.79 and 2.91. This indicates that although young adults are moderately satisfied with their current jobs, they report less favourable work–life balance. This may be due to greater workplace pressures and career-building expectations typically experienced at this stage of life.

Stress levels in this age group were higher (averaging 2.85–2.86) than in other cohorts, which may be related to job insecurity, difficulties in career advancement, or the challenges associated with starting a family.

Among respondents aged 18–24, job satisfaction was relatively high (average 4.0); however, their perceptions of balance and stress levels were less favourable. This implies that while early-career employees are motivated, they face difficulties in harmonising work and private life.

Interestingly, the few respondents under the age of 18 (likely interns or student workers) reported balanced perceptions of work–life harmony and low stress levels. Although these data are not representative, they nevertheless illustrate how age and level of work experience shape psychosocial assessments.

Overall, in both young and middle-aged cohorts, job satisfaction and stress levels appear strongly interconnected, while perceptions of work–life balance are heavily influenced by life circumstances (e.g., family formation, career orientation).

4.3. Job Satisfaction, Stress, and Perceptions of Work–Life Balance by Employment Type

The analysis of respondents by employment type clearly demonstrates that different forms of employment are associated with distinct workplace experiences and psychosocial outcomes. Four main groups were identified: full-time employees, part-time employees, project-/contract-based workers, and student workers. The comparative patterns across employment types are summarised in Table 2.

Among full-time employees (69%), the average level of job satisfaction was 3.36, reflecting a moderately positive perception. Scores ranged from 2 to 4, indicating neither extreme dissatisfaction nor complete satisfaction. Perceptions of work–life balance were weaker, with an average of 2.86 (range 1–4). This suggests that full-time employment often involves compromises at the expense of private life. Stress levels were relatively high in this group, with an average of 2.78 (minimum 1, maximum 4).

For part-time employees (17%), the average job satisfaction was 3.38, similar to that of full-time employees but with greater variation (range 2–4). Perceptions of work–life balance were more favourable, averaging 3.25 (on a 1–4 scale), indicating a more positive experience. Stress was still present (average 2.75) but slightly lower than among full-time employees.

Project-/contract-based respondents (14%) reported slightly higher satisfaction (average 3.4), though their balance perception did not exceed a 3.0 average (range 2–4). Stress levels averaged 2.6, somewhat more favourable compared to full-time employees. However, given the small sample size, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

The single student worker (0.7%) reported highly positive workplace experiences, with all indicators rated at 3 or above. While not statistically representative, this nevertheless provides an interesting complementary data point.

In summary, employment type appears to influence perceptions of work–life balance: part-time and project-based forms of work are associated with more favourable work–life balance perceptions, whereas full-time employment more often correlates with stress and imbalance. Lower stress levels and improved perceptions of balance in flexible and entrepreneurial work may be linked to more autonomous time management and adaptable work arrangements.

These findings reinforce the importance of increasing employment flexibility within HR strategies. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that gender-related data were missing for nearly one-third of respondents. This may reflect both sensitivities in data collection and the broader complexity of how gender identity is socially understood. Such cultural dimensions should not be overlooked in future HR and organisational well-being strategies.

4.4. Insights from the HR Expert Interview

The in-depth interview highlighted that work–life balance has become a matter of strategic importance in contemporary organisations. According to the HR expert, employees increasingly consider not only pay and benefits when evaluating job opportunities, but also attach great importance to human-centred leadership, individual flexibility, and a culture of recognition and respect.

The expert further emphasised that, particularly among younger generations, a lack of flexibility often leads to job changes even within a short period. In their view, HR tools are less effective if not accompanied by genuine, exemplary leadership attitudes. They stressed that “soft” elements—such as trust, feedback, and recognition—are at least as important as structural changes.

The results confirm a growing consensus in the literature that work–life balance is not merely a welfare issue but a key determinant of organisational functioning, employee commitment, and long-term competitiveness (Guest, 2002; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Survey data further revealed that job satisfaction does not automatically translate into overall well-being. More than half of respondents reported feeling regularly overburdened, which is consistent with the findings of Molnár (2023), who argues that workplace stress is one of the fundamental challenges of modern organisational environments. This is particularly concerning given that the deterioration of mental health directly impacts productivity and turnover rates (WHO, 2024).

The distribution of preferred HR tools across age groups suggests that there is no universal solution to supporting balance. While younger employees (18–34 years) expressed particularly high demand for flexible working hours and remote work options, older employees placed greater value on stability and direct managerial support. This aligns with the generational analysis of Guti, Szilágyi, and Németh (2023), which found that workplace values vary significantly across age cohorts.

Table 2. Average job satisfaction, stress and work–life balance scores by employment type

Employment type	Job satisfaction (Mean)	Stress level (Mean)	Work–life balance (Mean)
Full-time	3.36	2.78	2.86
Part-time	3.38	2.75	3.25
Project-based / contract	3.40	2.60	3.00

Note: Higher values indicate greater job satisfaction, higher perceived stress, or more favourable work–life balance.

Source: Authors' own compilation based on survey data.

As shown in Table 2, part-time and project-based employees report slightly higher levels of job satisfaction and more favourable perceptions of work–life balance compared to full-time employees. At the same time, full-time employment is associated with higher perceived stress levels, suggesting that reduced working time and greater flexibility may contribute to improved well-being outcomes.

The HR expert interview reinforced this view: well-being initiatives are most effective when adapted to the cultural and structural characteristics of the organisation. From a practical perspective, it is notable that more than half of survey respondents did not perceive HR tools as being systematically integrated. Although many organisations have introduced formal well-being elements—such as home office arrangements or individual development programmes—their effectiveness is often limited when not supported by authentic leadership and cultural acceptance (Kaur, 2023; Chapman et al., 2021).

Taken together, both the qualitative and quantitative findings suggest that HR strategies can only exert meaningful impact if organisations:

- acknowledge the diversity of individual employee needs,
- provide opportunities for choice and flexibility, and
- strengthen the role and sensitivity of middle managers in supporting well-being.

Promoting balance is therefore not merely a matter of tools but of mindset. The interview underscored the notion that HR success depends less on the number of initiatives introduced than on their integration and credibility. As the importance of trust and psychological safety becomes increasingly emphasised in the international literature (Chapman et al., 2021), there is also a pressing need in the Hungarian context for HR to act not only at the operational level but also as a strategic advocate of well-being and sustainable employment.

The distinction between satisfaction and well-being highlights the complexity of the employee experience, which is not determined solely by job roles or benefit systems. Psychological well-being is closely linked to whether employees feel valued, perceive a sense of control, and are able to reconcile workplace obligations with private life needs.

The responses make it clear that satisfaction alone is insufficient: employees who lack opportunities for rest and recovery, and who do not receive meaningful managerial feedback, are at risk of emotional exhaustion, which in the long run may reduce both performance and commitment. In light of these insights, it becomes crucial to examine the role that opportunities for work–life integration play in shaping employee well-being experiences.

5. Conclusions

This study explores employees' experiences of work–life balance and the role of human resource strategies in shaping these experiences. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, it can be concluded that many employees regularly experience the negative effects of overload, inflexibility, and lack of recognition. These factors directly influence overall job satisfaction, mental health, and organisational commitment.

One key finding is that work–life balance is not solely an individual responsibility but also an organisational one. Among respondents, demand was particularly high for flexible working hours, opportunities for remote work, recognition systems, and managerial support—in other words, HR tools that promote individual autonomy and psychological safety.

At the same time, the mere presence of HR tools is insufficient: their effectiveness largely depends on organisational culture and leadership attitudes.

The analysis of age-related differences also highlighted that HR strategies must take into account variations in employees' life stages and value orientations. While younger employees prioritise flexibility and development opportunities, older employees place greater emphasis on security, predictability, and interpersonal relationships. This finding supports the need for personalised, target group-oriented HR management.

The practical implication of this study is that supporting work–life balance is not an optional initiative but a key factor in sustainable employment and organisational effectiveness.

Organisations that integrate well-being considerations at a strategic level are more likely to reduce turnover, increase employee loyalty, and enhance their competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic labour market. These findings are consistent with earlier evidence that managing the work–family interface effectively benefits both employee health and organisational performance (Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009).

6. Suggestions for Further Research

The limitations of this study include the non-representative sample and the voluntary participation of respondents, both of which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, the identified trends provide an important starting point for further, more targeted research. Future studies could:

- examine sectoral differences in greater depth (e.g. public vs. private sector),
- analyse more thoroughly the impact of generational differences on employee expectations, and
- conduct longitudinal research on the effects of introducing HR tools on employee well-being.

Work–life balance is therefore not only a guarantee of individual well-being but also a cornerstone of organisational sustainability. Strategic involvement of HR actors in this area is indispensable. In summary, HR as a strategic partner plays a pivotal role in shaping work–life balance, and future research should continue to explore this multifaceted role—both from the perspective of practical applicability and organisational effectiveness.

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