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## **Perspectives on the compatibility of work and private-life**

A qualitative study of managers' work-life balance in the Swedish retail sector

### **Einblicke in die Vereinbarkeit von Arbeit und Privatleben**

Eine qualitative Studie über die Work-life balance von Managern im schwedischen Einzelhandel

Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Business Administration  
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## **Abstract**

### **Project context**

A qualitative study of managers in the Swedish retail sector was conducted in this thesis. The Handelsns Utvecklingsråd was the project sponsor and assigned the Working Life Science department, Karlstad University, to research the working conditions in the retail sector. The department, as the project owner, approached the assignment by carrying out a national study and several smaller projects. The subject of this thesis is one of those smaller projects which was conducted by two German students, the project team, in Karlstad, Sweden.

### **Project purpose**

The purpose of the thesis was to explore how managers deal with the various demands of work-life and private-life. The factors retail sector and work-life balance set the general framework for the study. The interest in managers as a target group arose from the image that it is especially hard for this group to combine work and private-life.

### **Project procedure**

In the initial phase the project purpose was defined and the procedure was planned in cooperation between the project owner and the project team. This was followed by the compilation and evaluation of data which included the theoretical foundations plus the empirical study. Theories served as preparation and evaluation of the study. As empirical approach a qualitative research was chosen to collect relevant, first-hand data. Eight managers of the Bergvik Shopping Centre, Karlstad, were interviewed.

### **Findings**

On the basis of the empirical study different factors with significance for the compatibility of work and private-life were identified. On a general and abstract level five determinants were defined. Responsibility, "Do-it-good-principle", social factor, autonomy, and "No-problem-principle" exist in work and private-life and have impact on work-life balance. In regard to human resources management, questions concerning the topic work-life balance were drawn from the evaluation of the theoretical and empirical study.

## **Abstract**

### **Kontext**

Gegenstand dieser Thesis ist eine qualitative Studie über Manager im schwedischen Einzelhandel. Als Projektsponsor fungierte der Handels Utvecklingsråd, der den Fachbereich Working Life Science der Universität Karlstad in Schweden beauftragte, die Arbeitsbedingungen im Einzelhandel zu beleuchten. Der Fachbereich Working Life Science initiierte eine nationale Untersuchung und mehrere kleinere Projekte. Eines der kleineren Projekte wurde im Rahmen dieser Thesis von einem Projektteam bestehend aus zwei deutschen Studentinnen in Karlstad, Schweden, durchgeführt.

### **Zielsetzung**

Die Zielsetzung der Thesis bestand in der Untersuchung der Vereinbarkeit von Arbeits- und Privatleben von Managern im Einzelhandel. Der Bezug zum Einzelhandel und zu Work-life balance bildete die vorgegebene Rahmenbedingung der Studie. Das Interesse an Managern als Zielgruppe des Projektes resultierte aus dem Image, dass es für diese besonders schwierig ist, Arbeits- und Privatleben zu vereinbaren.

### **Vorgehensweise**

In der Anfangsphase des Projektes wurde in Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Fachbereich Working Life Science der Universität Karlstad und dem deutschen Projektteam die Zielsetzung des Projektes definiert sowie das generelle Vorgehen geplant. Als empirische Methode wurde eine qualitative Studie gewählt. Theoretische Grundlagen dienten zur Vorbereitung und wurden bei der Evaluation der Untersuchung hinzugezogen. Es wurden Interviews mit acht Managern des Bergvik Shopping Centres in Karlstad geführt. Die erhobenen Daten wurden bearbeitet und aufbereitet.

### **Ergebnis**

In der Untersuchung wurden verschiedene Faktoren identifiziert, die einen relevanten Einfluss auf die Vereinbarkeit von Arbeitsleben und Privatleben haben. Fünf generelle Determinanten können hervorgehoben werden, die sich durch die

Bereiche Arbeits- und Privatleben ziehen und Einfluss auf die Work-life balance haben: Responsibility, "Do-it-good-principle", social factor, autonomy und "No-problem-principle". Aufbauend auf den Ergebnissen der Studie wurden Fragestellungen in Bezug auf die Relevanz des Themas Work-life balance für das Personalmanagement erhoben.

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## 1 Introduction

In the period between 2006 and 2020 an additional gross domestic product of € 248.000.000.000 could be generated by expanding work-life balance measures.<sup>1</sup>

This model calculation of the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth highlights the importance of work-life balance topics in Germany. Dealing with figures, statistics, and forecasts is a possible approach towards the topic. Experiences and perceptions of individuals' work-life balance provide other perspectives. This thesis gives an insight in managers' lives with focus on how they combine work and private-life.

Against the background of specific working conditions in the Swedish retail sector the thesis' interest is originated. It is based on information from two main sources: theoretical research and empirical research. The empirical qualitative study is the centre of the thesis whereas theoretical foundations served as preparation and evaluation of the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore how managers deal with the various demands of work-life and private-life. In order to collect relevant, firsthand data interviews with managers in the Bergvik Shopping Centre, Karlstad, were conducted. The originality of this study lies in the combination of the German origin of the project team and the Swedish research area.

In the first part of the thesis the background of the context is presented in more detail. In the following theoretical foundations are set which include aspects of work-life balance, managerial work, work-life and private-life in general as well as characteristics of Sweden related to the thesis' purpose. The project report with the time schedule, description of the methodology, and the analysis of the empirical data follows. The reflection part mirrors the entire process of the thesis which ends with a final conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2005), p. 8.

## 2 Project context and organization

This chapter gives information about the purpose of the study, the different project actors, and their interests. General characteristics of the retail sector are given to introduce the research background.

The retail trade is an important economic factor in Sweden<sup>1</sup> and provides a high amount of jobs. A significant aspect associated with this sector is the length of opening hours which include the opening on evenings and weekends. Those result in long working hours outside usual business hours. The sector is known of a relatively high share of female worker. Flexible working arrangements and part-time contracts are widely used. Further conditions which are observed within retail sector are overtime, limited career prospects and compressed wage structures.<sup>2</sup> The following figure shows the different project actors which were involved in the study.

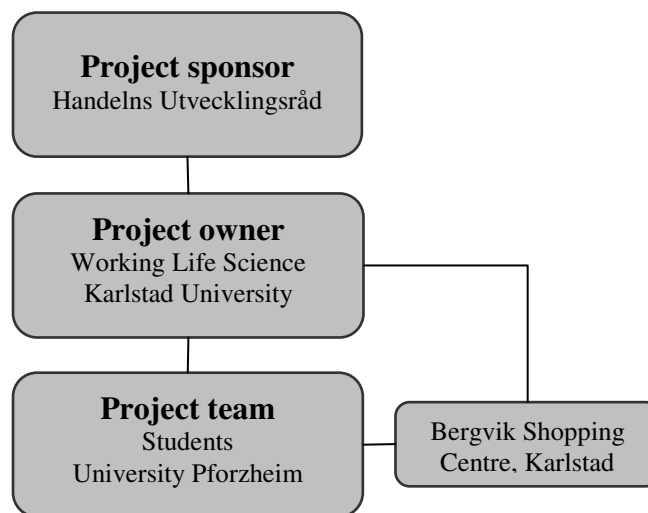


Fig. 1 Project Organization

The Handelns Utvecklingsråd<sup>3</sup> is in the position of the project sponsor. It is the head institution within the retail sector in Sweden and consists of different employers and employees associations. Among other activities the board finances research projects that are related to business within retail. Relatively high

<sup>1</sup> See Einarsson (2007), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> See Lehndorff (2001), p. 83 and Anxo and Nyman (2001), p. 137-145.

<sup>3</sup> See Handelns Utvecklingsråd (URL).

employee fluctuation and rather low employee retention are the main challenges in the retail trade sector. Therefore the concern of the Handels Utvecklingsråd about the working conditions within the sector arose. This concern resulted in the initiation of the overall research project with the idea to analyze of the working situation in the sector.

The Working Life Science department of the Karlstad University was assigned to conduct the overall project. Therefore it functioned as the project owner in the context of this thesis. The purpose of the overall research is to get insights of the current working situation and conditions with particular emphases on the compatibility of work-life and private-life. In order to execute the assignment of the project sponsor the project owner initiated two research approaches. One approach consists of a qualitative and quantitative national survey which examines work-life balance in the sense of the concept of availability for work, family and customers. The other approach consists of several smaller projects which reflect specific subjects. Those are conducted by different research teams. During autumn 2008 two projects were conducted. One project was a qualitative study about women working part-time conducted by Dutch students. The other one refers to manager in the retail sector and is subject of this thesis.

As described this study is part of an overall project which was initiated by the project sponsor the Handels Utvecklingsråd and assigned to the project owner, Karlstad University. The project owner operated as counterpart, supervisor, and partially organiser of this study. Representatives of the Bergvik Shopping Centre were another interest group since the empirical study was conducted there.

This thesis investigates the work-life balance of managers in the retail sector. The purpose is to explore how managers deal with the various demands of work-life and private-life. In the process of the thesis the following research questions were developed and point out the direction of the study. While the primary research question expresses the overall interest, the secondary research questions specify the different fields.

### Primary research question

How do managers deal with the various demands of work-life and private-life?

### Secondary research questions

What are demands, attitudes, experiences, and conditions in work-life?

What are private-life demands, how do managers deal with those, and how do they perceive them?

What are mutual impacts between work-life and private-life and how do managers perceive them? What are consequences of combining work-life and private-life and what facilitates the compatibility?

How do managers perceive their work-life balance according to their definition and how important is work-life balance at the work-place?

### 3 Theoretical foundations

The theoretical foundations give information about relevant aspects regarding the empirical study on the basis of literature and former studies. A focus lies on the concept work-life balance which is treated in four chapters. Different views on the expression are looked at and various interests as well as practices are outlined. A glimpse on the work-life balance discourse gives voice to critical views towards the concept. In literature different factors with impact on work-life balance can be identified. Those with importance for the empirical project will be described. Besides the concept of work-life balance further three main topics are addressed in the theoretical foundations. These are the features and characteristics of managerial work, the relation between work-life and private-life and relevant background information about Sweden.

#### 3.1 About the definition and the expression work-life balance

Work-life balance is a widely used and discussed theme. It is introduced subsequently by highlighting aspects of the term, its use, and flaws. Further the utilization in the context of this thesis is outlined.

In popular literature work-life balance is a topic as numerous work-life balance advisors exist.<sup>1</sup> Not only there work-life balance is an issue but it is also part of agendas in politics and companies. Moreover it is explored in different sciences such as psychology, sociology, organizational psychology, economics and gender studies.<sup>2</sup>

Work-life balance is said to be a rather "slippery"<sup>3</sup> concept. There is neither an exact definition nor a commonly valid theoretical concept.<sup>4</sup> The meaning and content vary depending on the context and motives in which it is used.<sup>5</sup> The manifold and popular use in discourses, researches and practices shows the contemporary interest in the topic.<sup>6</sup> A small selection of different definitions in the context of employment shall give an insight in distinct understandings.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lewis et al. (2007), p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> See Kastner (2004), p. 68-103.

<sup>3</sup> See Fleetwood (2007a), p. 354.

<sup>4</sup> See Metz-Göckel (2004), p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> See Fleetwood (2007a), p. 352f.

<sup>6</sup> See Lewis et al. (2007), p. 360.

"... 'good' work-life balance is defined as a situation in which workers feel that they are capable of balancing their work and non-work commitments."<sup>1</sup>

"Frame and Hartog (2003), for instance, imply that good work-life balance means that employees feel they are freely able to use flexible working hours programmes to balance their work and other commitments (family, hobbies, art, travelling, studies and so forth), rather than focusing exclusively on work."<sup>2</sup>

"Work-life balance is the stability characterized by the balancing of an individual's life complexity and dynamism with environmental and personal resources such as family, community, employer, profession, geography, information, economics, personality, or values."<sup>3</sup>

"The concept could generally be described as successfully balancing the needs arising from work and other life roles."<sup>4</sup>

"I define 'balance' as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict."<sup>5</sup>

"... a perceived balance between work and the rest of life."<sup>6</sup>

The expression work-life balance is widely used and at the same time harshly criticized. The critics dart for the term, its use and practices. The expression itself is estimated as being misleading. The understanding of "balance" implies that the weight or amount of work and life should be distributed equally. It is questionable if balance is automatically good and imbalance is bad.<sup>7</sup> "Work" and "life" seem to be two distinct spheres. The term work-life balance gives the impression that "work" is not a part of "life" and "...rather bad [and that] life is rather good"<sup>8</sup>. Moreover both words are indistinct expressions. It is not clear in how far "work" is including unpaid work, commuting or travelling. Further it is not clear what "life" is including.<sup>9</sup> Often it refers to family-life and caring responsibilities and leaves out other aspects of life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moore (2007), p. 386.

<sup>2</sup> Frame and Hartog (2003). In: Moore (2007), p. 386.

<sup>3</sup> Crooker et al. (2002), p. 389.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron-Corbin (1999). In: Villiers De and Kotze (2003), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Clark (2000), p. 751.

<sup>6</sup> Guest (2002a), p. 263.

<sup>7</sup> See Guest (2002a), p. 261.

<sup>8</sup> Fleetwood (2007a), p. 352.

<sup>9</sup> See Guest (2002a), p. 261f.

<sup>10</sup> See Fleetwood (2007a), p. 353f.

The concept of availability was introduced by Bergman and Gardiner to create a "...potential analytical framework for comparative work-life balance research"<sup>1</sup>. According to that approach to be

"...available is to be accessible in time and space and responsive to the needs and wants of others, for example one's employer or family. Availability is both a disposition and a capacity, emphasising both structural conditioning and action"<sup>2</sup>.

This framework is aiming to provide a basis for a rather objective investigation on work-life balance as it is referring to concrete actions and behaviours. It looks at multiple requirements of work-life and private-life which are addressed to an individual. Demands from work-life refer to temporal and spatial availability according to contracted hours as well as to further activities related to work which range outside the usual working context. This might be for example overtime hours, contacts by phone, work-related travel or working at home. Availability for private-life is primarily referring to the time to fulfil familiar and domestic responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the impression that the term work-life balance is self explaining it leads to discussion. The topic is named under various expressions such as work-family balance, work-life conflict or work-family integration which are often used synonymously. In this thesis the expressions will not be distinguished. In order to clarify the use in this paper it is outlined in the following how work-life balance is understood in this context.

In this thesis work-life balance is generally based on the individual perception of personal quality of life. It is understood that the perception is strongly determined by the compatibility of work and private-life. For convenience in this context it is abstained from a detailed description of work and private-life. "Work-life" refers to paid work and the time outside paid work is named "private-life". "Balance" can be indicated by objective factors to some extent and by the individual situation and attitudes. But the primarily determining factor is the personal perception of every individual.

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<sup>1</sup> Bergman and Gardiner (2007), p. 400.

<sup>2</sup> Bergman and Gardiner (2007), p. 401.

<sup>3</sup> See Bergman and Gardiner (2007), p. 401 and Bergman and Gustafson (2008).



### 3.2 Interests in work-life balance

Work-life balance practices can be regarded creating a win-win-situation as advantages result for individuals, companies, governments, and societies.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the different levels have specific interests. A brief overview of activities is focussed on the companies' level.

Changes in working place with rising amounts of working hours and more intensifying work are outlined to put more pressure on the individual.<sup>2</sup> These factors make it more difficult to combine work-life and private-life. Therefore individuals aim to find a positive state where they feel comfortable. From companies' view the wellbeing of the individual is of economical importance, as the companies' outcome is related to the state of the employees.<sup>3</sup> There is the assumption that employees have more energy and motivation for work when facilitating circumstances and policies to combine work with private-life exist.<sup>4</sup> Worker friendly working arrangements are seen as suitable measures which enhance the workers health, wellbeing, and commitment and therefore raise productivity and efficiency of companies.<sup>5</sup> Further competitive factors cause employers to implement work-life balance policies to fortify attractiveness and to serve as measure of employee retention.<sup>6</sup> Governments as well have an interest in work-life balance. "At a time when birth-rates are in decline..."<sup>7</sup> family-friendly workplaces are one concern of governments. They shall facilitate the compatibility of working and having children to guarantee the future labour force.<sup>8</sup> In European context work-life balance is an important issue on the EU-political agenda. They aim to "...achieve more harmony between work and family life..."<sup>9</sup> and focus on flexible working-time arrangements as they shall enhance

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<sup>1</sup> See Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2005), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Guest (2002a), p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> See Robbins (2001), p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> See Kastner (2004), p. 70f.

<sup>5</sup> See European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007b), p. 17f.

<sup>6</sup> See Hyman and Summers (2004), p. 423f.

<sup>7</sup> Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 328.

<sup>8</sup> See Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 328.

<sup>9</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007b), p. V.

the compatibility of work and family. This is seen as an important factor to raise the international competitive economic situation of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the several interests in work-life balance each level initiates programmes and uses practices to deal with the issue. In the following the focus lays on policies related to companies. Work-life balance policies depend to some extent on welfare systems and legislations. Countries' cultures and mentalities as well set the background for companies' approaches.<sup>2</sup> Since there is no valid concept for work-life balance policies they vary from company to company.

In the following a few examples for work-life balance policies are mentioned. The most common policies offered by companies refer to flexible working-practices. They include temporal and spatial flexibility or temporal reduction such as flexible working hours or flexible working schedules, job-sharing, tele-working or work-time accounts. Further policies refer to long-term leaves like sabbaticals or parental leave. Moreover work-life balance programmes can include health care, seminars about stress-reduction, handbooks, and so forth.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.3 Aspects of the work-life balance discourse**

Hereafter some critical aspects which are discussed in work-life balance discourses are outlined.

A critic on work-life balance is the lack of a concept which is generally shared and accepted. This results in an unlimited number of approaches, theories, and practices. Fleetwood points out that it is not defined

"...whether WLB [work-life balance] refers to: an objective state of affairs, a subjective experience, perception or feeling; an actuality or an aspiration; a discourse or a practice; a metaphor for flexible working; a metaphor for the gendered division of labour; or a metaphor for some other political agenda"<sup>4</sup>.

In the work-life balance debate it is mentioned that with the rising emphasis of individuality in societies work-life balance is a matter of choice and personal

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<sup>1</sup> See European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007b), p.1-4.

<sup>2</sup> See Straub (2007), p. 290 and Lewis et al., (2007), p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> See Straub (2007), p. 290 and Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2005), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Fleetwood (2007a), p. 352.

responsibility.<sup>1</sup> Individual liability in combination with a collection of different working time arrangements is an argument of some employers and their supporters that the issue "has been successfully resolved...adopting temporally flexible working practices"<sup>2</sup>. In contrary Lewis et al. criticise that work-life balance policies "...aim for quick fixes...to reach the mythical balance, but rarely seeking more fundamental change"<sup>3</sup>. It is argued that the success of work-life balance policies depends on in how far they are embedded in a work-life balance concept and in how far the companies' culture values the integration of work and private-life.<sup>4</sup> Further it is emphasized that the work-life balance issue cannot be the main responsibility of individuals as circumstances should be granted by the surrounding systems.<sup>5</sup>

Workplace cultures, evident in rigid team cultures and resistant superiors, can limit the acceptance and therefore the effectivity of work-life balance initiatives.<sup>6</sup> This can be seen as one reason of the gap between work-life balance policies and practices as discrepancies between official regulations and actions in practice are observed.<sup>7</sup> Another reason is said to be the adoption of policies which fail to meet employees' needs or are inadequate to improve the working conditions.

Work-life balance policies often refer to family-friendly programs and this implies that the work-life balance issue primarily targets women.<sup>8</sup> It is highlighted that a huge part of work-life balance policies refer to flexible working arrangements. The implementation and use of those were encouraged when the female labour force was needed by governments and economies. The aim was to enable women to participate in the labour market and to fulfil caring responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> As women usually are still mainly responsible for domestic tasks their ability to work while raising children is stated as a double burden.<sup>10</sup> Additionally career perspectives for women can be limited when taking flexible working arrangements if the

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<sup>1</sup> See Lewis et al. (2007), p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> Hyman and Summers (2004), p. 418.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis et al. (2007), p. 368.

<sup>4</sup> See Toth (2005), p. 365 and Straub (2007), p. 299.

<sup>5</sup> See Lewis et al. (2003), p. 826.

<sup>6</sup> See Straub (2007), p. 292.

<sup>7</sup> See Wahl and Höök (2007), p. 442.

<sup>8</sup> See Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 326.

<sup>9</sup> See Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 328f. and Fleetwood (2007b), p. 394.

<sup>10</sup> See Fleetwood (2007b), p. 394 and Hochschild (1997).

workplace culture does not support family-friendliness.<sup>1</sup> Lewis et al. state that the work-life balance discourse seems to be gender neutral but it is

"...the old, deeply gendered debate about managing work and family, dressed up in new terminology but nevertheless constructed as women's issue"<sup>2</sup>.

By focusing on working women other groups with demanding work and private-lives may be ignored. This can be for example men experiencing the same double burden as they continue to work and take more part in domestic work.<sup>3</sup> Further it can be people with responsibility for elderly care, young professionals and young potentials which can experience high work pressure.

In human resources practices work-life balance is a very popular issue. Some established policies get the new label "work-life balance" in order to promote the companies' image such as different kind of working time arrangements. Work-life balance is used as medium for recruitment and retention of highly qualified employees.<sup>4</sup> In the work-life balance debate it is stated that the primary interest of companies is less to have happy workers but to have productive workers. Therefore the work-life balance label seems to be misused to attract prospective employees, to strengthen employees' loyalty and to execute bureaucratic control<sup>5</sup>.

### **3.4 Elements determining work-life balance**

Work-life balance is a complex issue with manifold aspects. In the literature numerous factors are described and examined. In the context of this thesis several elements are outlined which have influence on the individual. They were chosen because they were estimated to be suitable in the context of the thesis. Namely they refer to flexible working, amount of working hours, control and support.

#### **3.4.1 Flexible working**

The most common work-life balance practices refer to employees' temporal and spatial flexibility. In a European study<sup>6</sup> flexible working schedules are viewed

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<sup>1</sup> See Straub (2007), p. 299 and Perlow (1998). In Lewis (2003), p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis et al. (2007), p. 364.

<sup>3</sup> See Fleetwood (2007b), p. 394 and Johansson (2002), p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 246 and Hyman and Summers (2004), p. 424.

<sup>5</sup> See Edwards (1979).

<sup>6</sup> See European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007b)

under the aspect of employers' needs as well as employees' needs. As classification the dimensions worker-orientation and company-orientation are used. As worker-orientated and company-orientated working arrangements part-time work, flexible working hours and schedules as well as early retirement arrangements are described. Only worker-orientated arrangements are parental leave or other kinds of long-term leaves. Unusual working hours such as night work or weekend-shifts, overtime or temporary employments are described as company-orientated but not worker-orientated. In the same study Finland and Sweden are mentioned to have the largest share of companies which offer worker-orientated flexible working arrangements.<sup>1</sup>

These classifications show general tendencies of the effect of flexible working arrangements but the impact on work-life balance is as well influenced by the situational context of employees and their personal preferences and behaviours. The subjective perception decides in how far flexible working practices contribute to the work-life balance of the individual. They might improve employees' work-life balance but at the same time they bear the risk of having the opposite effect.<sup>2</sup> Especially high-skilled workers with flexible working schedules are likely to work extensively overtime.<sup>3</sup> Further working at home might enhance spatial flexibility but at the same time it can "...extend the working day rather than just reshaping it"<sup>4</sup>.

### **3.4.2 Amount of working hours**

The amount of working hours is a further factor with a strong impact on the work-life balance. Stress is often reported to be caused by long working hours and extensive overtime.<sup>5</sup> A consequence is the reduction of time which is available for private-life, especially family and recreation time.<sup>6</sup> Results are the experience of stress and work-family conflicts.<sup>7</sup> This has a negative impact on the personal well-being and work-life imbalance is more likely to occur.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007b), p. 30

<sup>2</sup> See Moore (2007), p. 397.

<sup>3</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 347.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 348.

<sup>5</sup> See Frey et al. (2004), p. 311.

<sup>6</sup> See Lewis et al. (2003), p. 826.

<sup>7</sup> See Judge et al. (1994). In: Frey et al. (2004), p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> See Sparks et al. (1997). In: Lewis (2003), p. 344.

### 3.4.3 Control

The experience of having control and choice over personal circumstances are seen as relevant factors for maintaining work-life balance. Crooker et al. refer to the feeling of personal control which leads

"...to greater work-life balance and more positive personal and organizational outcomes such as better health, improved organizational commitment, and productivity"<sup>1</sup>.

In combination with highly expanded working hours, the positive effect of control is diminished. This is especially valid for employees in managerial positions:

"...it is these workers who have most control over their own working hours and who can be flexible to fit in family and leisure who are under most pressure."<sup>2</sup>

### 3.4.4 Support

Support given by the social network in work-life and private-life is seen as important enabler to combine the two domains and to enhance the wellbeing of individuals.<sup>3</sup> A distinction can be made between instrumental support and expressional support. Instrumental support might be helping activities, whereas expressional support includes emotional support, attitudes, and behaviours.<sup>4</sup> In how far offers made public institutions and by companies are seen as supporting is influenced by the perceived attitude of society and members of the social network at the workplace and in private-life. Especially the influence of a friendly and understanding workplace culture, emotional support by colleagues and superiors have an elementary impact on peoples' workplace satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Backup and emotional support by partners, friends or relatives in private-life is complimentary to support in work-life.

One characteristic of the impact of work-life balance is the perceived availability of different kinds of support. The knowledge that professional and personal support is available is seen as even more important than the actual given support.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Crooker et al. (2002), p. 404.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> See Crooker et al. (2002), p. 396.

<sup>4</sup> See Marcinkus et al. (2007), p. 86-91.

<sup>5</sup> See Robbins (2001), p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> See Marcinkus et al. (2007), p. 90.

### 3.5 Managerial work

Approaching the specific characteristic of a managers' work a classical picture is given subsequently.

"Managerial work is stressful."<sup>1</sup> This citation from Powell highlights the general image of the managers' work. Moreover high self-satisfaction and identity through work are associated characteristics of managerial work.<sup>2</sup> By focussing on achieving status<sup>3</sup> in combination with high responsibility they invest a particular large proportion of time and emotional involvement in their profession.<sup>4</sup>

In the following several specific aspects of the work-life of managers shall be described. Conditions which are often addressed in context of straining managerial work are the need to be available, the presenteeism culture and the heavy workload. The modern electronic devices make it possible that managers can be reachable irrespective of place and time.<sup>5</sup> This enhances the need to be "on call" for managers even if they have left their workplace.<sup>6</sup> The aspect of unlimited availability has been identified as a main stress factor for managers.<sup>7</sup> Parallel to the factor of the unlimited availability is the so called presenteeism culture. That means that not only the availability outside working hours but also the time spent on the workplace is a measure of personal dedication for work.<sup>8</sup> In managerial work presenteeism is likely to occur since the

"...commitment and productivity are difficult to quantify, as they are in most knowledge work, then they are often measured by workers' willingness to work late to meet a series of deadlines"<sup>9</sup>.

According to research heavy workload is quoted as a factor that creates stress for manager.<sup>10</sup> Workload can be divided in quantitative and qualitative dimensions. A high number of different and parallel assignments have to be fulfilled in a limited time. Additionally these requirements are often highly demanding and complex

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<sup>1</sup> Powell (1993), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> See Powell (1993), p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> See Moore (2007), p. 385.

<sup>4</sup> See Simpson (1998). In: Kasper et al. (2005), p. 441.

<sup>5</sup> See Stock-Homburg (URL).

<sup>6</sup> See Drew and Murtagh (2005), p. 272.

<sup>7</sup> See Stock-Homburg (URL).

<sup>8</sup> See Powell (1993).

<sup>9</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 352.

<sup>10</sup> See Stock-Homburg (URL).

work tasks.<sup>1</sup> In combination with high performance standards this results in a heavy workload.

Another frequent mentioned aspect is the autonomy to determine work individually. This rather positive aspect in combination with arrangements such as flexible working hours might have the opposite affect. It can lead to "...the fact that it is now possible to work 24/7 means that there is more pressure for employees to do so"<sup>2</sup>. Viewing flexible working arrangements from this perspective it can be assumed that they have "...made for more, rather than fewer, problems in maintaining managers' work-life balance"<sup>3</sup>. Concerning the work-life balance there has been research which claims that the resources manager devote to their job "...brings profession and family into competition for a limited amount of time and emotional commitment"<sup>4</sup>. Due to the demands of management positions it is assumed to be especially hard for managers to combine work and private-life.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.6 Work, private-life, and relations between the two domains**

In order to get an understanding of the relation between the two distinct spheres of work-life and private-life some assumptions and experiences as well as theoretical models are described.

#### **3.6.1 Assumptions about work and private-life**

"Work less, live better."<sup>6</sup> This citation underlines the general assumption that "...work is assumed to have a negative impact on life"<sup>7</sup>, that "...work is experienced as negative..."<sup>8</sup> and simply that "...work is bad"<sup>9</sup>. Private-life is often assumed to be the antithesis of work because it is non-obliged time and activities are "...perceived as freely chosen, intrinsically motivated"<sup>10</sup>. Home can be seen as

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<sup>1</sup> See Powell (1993), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Moore (2007), p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> Moore (2007), p. 391.

<sup>4</sup> Kasper et al. (2005), p. 441.

<sup>5</sup> See Lyness and Kropf (2005), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Fagnani and Letablier (2004). In: Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 326.

<sup>7</sup> Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 329.

<sup>8</sup> Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 326.

<sup>9</sup> Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 326.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 345.



a place where individuals can be themselves, experience leisure and relax.<sup>1</sup> These general assumptions show main associations about work and private-life which also can be seen in a different way. Lewis points out that people chose their work and enjoy doing it. She found that work is for some individuals more satisfying than other aspects in life.<sup>2</sup> The subtitle "When Home Becomes Work and Work Becomes home" of Hochschild's book "The Time Bind" expresses that paid work can be absorbing, stimulating and a source of identification while home becomes straining and overloaded with work.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.6.2 Relation between work and private-life**

There has been intensive research on work-family respectively work and private-life relationship. Several models have been developed to explain the connection between work and life outside work.<sup>4</sup> As there still is no complete theoretical comprehensive framework<sup>5</sup> aspects of the role-theory, separate spheres model and spillover theory are outlined.

#### **3.6.2.1 Role theory**

The concept of social roles is well established and a widely used model in social theory.<sup>6</sup> Researchers argue that in order to study experiences on work-life balance it is necessary to understand the underlying role conflicts experienced by individuals.<sup>7</sup> In the context of this thesis the role theory is connected to family models.

Social roles are defined "...as sets of activities performed by individuals..."<sup>8</sup> which are established by communicative interaction and expectations by other individuals.<sup>9</sup> Traditional gender roles consisted on the women's primary social roles as wife and mother while the breadwinner was the men's role.<sup>10</sup> This so called breadwinner model is no longer widespread in societies. Instead many

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<sup>1</sup> See Nippert-Eng (1995). In: Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 344 and p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> See Hochschild (1997).

<sup>4</sup> See Guest (2002a), p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> See Clark (2001), p. 750.

<sup>6</sup> See Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> See Villers De and Kotze (2003), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Goffman (1959) and Kahn et al. (1964). In: Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> See Goffman (1959) and Kahn et al. (1964). In: Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 57f.

<sup>10</sup> See Barnett (1999), p. 145.

societies, such as Sweden, have adopted the dual-earner-model which emphasizes that, both, men and women work and fulfil domestic demands.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence individuals have to fulfil various roles simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand those multiple roles can "...create opportunities for multiple sources of satisfaction and well-being..."<sup>3</sup> but on the other hand they can also "...create the potential for stress"<sup>4</sup>. Researcher identified that distinct role expectations in work and private-life can lead to role-conflicts.<sup>5</sup> A role conflict is defined as a "...simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that the compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other"<sup>6</sup>. Lewis highlights that potential stress and conflict caused by managing work and family roles initially was focused on women "...but later acknowledging to some extent that men also have multiple roles"<sup>7</sup>.

### **3.6.2.2 Separate-spheres model and spillover theory**

The basic idea of the separate-spheres model is that work and non-work are distinct spheres with two functions and different behavioural rules.<sup>8</sup> According to Barnett<sup>9</sup> the model is based on following assumptions:

- the spheres work and family have clear boundaries
- in each sphere different demands exist
- the competing demands lead to an unavoidable struggle
- it is predominantly a women's issue to manage the demands
- interference of family issues in work reflect inadequate boundaries

This model is not seldom used as an argument by companies which corporate culture emphasizes that family matters shall be "...left at the workplace door"<sup>10</sup>.

"...Rosabeth Kanter's work (1977) had made many decision makers aware that the spheres of work and family were not separate and, indeed, that there was spillover

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<sup>1</sup> See Powell (1993), p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> See Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 345.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 345.

<sup>5</sup> See Kasper et al. (2004), p. 442.

<sup>6</sup> Kahn et al. (1964). In: Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 345.

<sup>8</sup> See Barnett (1999), p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> See Barnett (1999), p. 146.

<sup>10</sup> Barnett (1999), p. 147.

between them ..."<sup>1</sup>. This aspect is embedded in the spillover theory. According to this theory work and private-life cannot be regarded segregated. Instead connections exist since emotions and behaviours are transferred between the spheres.<sup>2</sup> Guest highlights that over spills can influence the other sphere in either a positive or negative way.<sup>3</sup>

The strength of the boundaries is seen as decreasing<sup>4</sup> and transitions from one sphere to the other become more frequent and easier<sup>5</sup>. Borders between work and private-life become increasingly blurred as "...time expands in the global 24-hour market place, and space and distance are compressed by information and communication technology"<sup>6</sup>. Today it is possible to conduct work at home as well as to conduct personal matters at work.<sup>7</sup> There is however evidence that there is a wish to keep the spheres separate. Toth found out that employees developed "...a strong commitment to maintaining the separate spheres of work and home"<sup>8</sup>. The spillover theory is acknowledged as one fundamental approach to study work-life balance.<sup>9</sup> It gives an image of what spillover is but it does not explain the beginning and end of spillover.

### **3.7 About Sweden**

Aspects about Swedish background focussing on compatibility of work and family and gender equality are described from governmental view and contrasted with critics of practices.

#### **3.7.1 Official background**

To approach the work-life balance issue from the side of the Swedish government in this chapter a selection of public policies under special attention towards gender discourses are described.

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<sup>1</sup> Kanter (1977). In: Barnett (1999), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> See Staines (1980). In: Clark (2000), p. 749.

<sup>3</sup> See Guest (2002a), p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 345.

<sup>5</sup> See Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis (2003), p. 343.

<sup>7</sup> See Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Toth (2005), p. 368.

<sup>9</sup> See Kastner (2004), p. 75.

The work-life policy of the Swedish government is aiming to "...ensure that people enjoy a good working life"<sup>1</sup>. The focus is on the creation and maintenance of working conditions which "...enable as many people as possible to enter the labour market..."<sup>2</sup> and to ensure that each individual can earn her/his own livings. Official gender equality goals and political efforts are central mechanisms which facilitate women's and men's participation in labour and family.<sup>3</sup> In international press, studies, and surveys as well as in popular literature Sweden is often "...seen as a forerunner in gender equality and parents' possibility to combine work and family"<sup>4</sup>.

The gender equality is generally evident in the Equal Opportunity Act and the Parental Leave Act. The Equal Opportunity Act promotes equal rights for men and women in relation to work. It includes the employers' duty to ensure that working conditions "...facilitate the combination of gainful employment and parenthood with respect to both female and male employees"<sup>5</sup>. Further the Swedish parental leave system is named to be a mechanism of gender egalitarianism and "...receives the most attention, as it is considered the most developed leave system in the world"<sup>6</sup>. It implies that mothers and fathers in Sweden have equal responsibilities in childcare.<sup>7</sup> The Parental Leave Act mainly concerns the prohibition of discrimination against one sex<sup>8</sup> and enables parents to actively take part in childcare<sup>9</sup>. According to this act parents have the right to stay away from work for 480 days with partly payment in order to care for the born or adopted child. For each parent 60 days, the so called maternal or paternal month, are reserved for childcare which cannot be transferred and expire if not taken.<sup>10</sup>

It can be assumed that these factors contributed to the increasing replacement of the single-breadwinner family by the dual-earner-model over the last decades in

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<sup>1</sup> Swedish Institute (URL).

<sup>2</sup> Swedish Institute (URL).

<sup>3</sup> See Elvin-Nowak and Thomson (2001), p. 409.

<sup>4</sup> Allard (2007), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jämställdhetsombudsmannen a (URL), section 5.

<sup>6</sup> Allard (2007), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> See Elvin-Nowak and Thomson (2001), p. 409.

<sup>8</sup> See Government Offices of Sweden a (URL).

<sup>9</sup> See Allard (2007), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> See Swedish Institute (URL) and Jämställdhetsombudsmannen b (URL) and Forsakringskassan (URL).

Sweden.<sup>1</sup> This implies that both members of a couple "win bread" and "make home" instead of women being the "homemakers" and men being the "breadwinner" which the single-breadwinner model emphasizes.<sup>2</sup>

Another factor which receives attention in the work-family support is the involvement of companies in relation to the Swedish welfare system. Lyness and Brumit Kropf pointed out that employers are least likely to contribute to supplementary benefits when governments' childcare provision is well-developed.<sup>3</sup> This holds true for many European states such as Denmark, Finland, Belgium or France. Sweden seems to be different since

"Although the state is an active provider, company involvement is very high. It seems that Swedish companies have recognised that they also have an important role to play in the provision of childcare in order to overcome work family-related problems at work"<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.7.2 Critics of the practice

The described Swedish public policies in combination with the well-developed childcare system provide governmental facilities to promote the combination of profession and family.<sup>5</sup> A few citations shall give an image in how far Sweden, as member of the Nordic countries, contrasts with other societies in reference to the aspects of gender and governmental welfare.

"Gender equality has been a prominent part of Swedish politics for several decades, and has achieved a general political-rhetorical status as a goal that practically everybody favours."<sup>6</sup>

"Nordic countries, such as Finland, Sweden and Denmark have a high proportion of women in the workforce....They do not build on the assumption that women act only as mothers....Furthermore, the combination of a strong public child care sector and policies that encourage fathers to take over the carer role might help women to take jobs."<sup>7</sup>

"...the Nordic "paradise for women."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Allard (2007), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> See Powell (1993), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> See Lyness and Brumit Kropf (2005), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Straub (2007), p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> See Cousins and Tang (2004), p. 533.

<sup>6</sup> Magnusson (2000), p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Straub (2007), p. 296.

<sup>8</sup> Fougner et al. (1994). In: Holli et al. (2005), p. 148.

"A 'passion for equality' is often pointed out as a special marker of Nordic societies....Today this passion also encompasses gender equality."<sup>1</sup>

However critics are reasoning that "The gap between rhetorics and practice, political goals and society reality..."<sup>2</sup> still exists and that this is a major topic of research. Advocates adduce the reason there are still differences between women's and men's work-life and family-life commitments. It is highlighted that men still hold to a larger extent the breadwinner role. Determinates which indicate a incomplete implementation of gender equality are differences in participation in the labour market, working time arrangements, preferred sectors, hierarchical levels and height of the wages.<sup>3</sup>

Further it is reasoned that despite the fact that in Sweden women spend less time on domestic work than in other European countries and the relative share of domestic work performed by men is largest in Sweden (40 per cent)<sup>4</sup> women are to a greater extent involved in household responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

"It is suggested that men are more likely to participate in childcare, shopping and cooking, and less likely to take on less creative and interesting domestic work – particularly cleaning and laundry."<sup>6</sup>

Reasons for that are assumed to be the compatibility of masculine identity with childcare and the incompatibility of masculinity with housework. As a consequence housework is rather seen as women's responsibility.<sup>7</sup> It can be concluded that "...at the level of everyday practice, gender is socially constructed through difference"<sup>8</sup>.

A further critical issue is the contradictory effect of generous social provision to support work-life balance. The possibility to perform in all spheres requests implicitly that all chances shall be taken and high performance is expected. The requirement that women "...must be a good employee, a good partner and a good parent..."<sup>9</sup> may create an inevitable burden.

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<sup>1</sup> Holli et al. (2005), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Holli et al. (2005), p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> See Allard (2007), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> See Dulk Den and Doorne-Huiskes Van (2004), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> See Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001), p. 409f.

<sup>6</sup> Duyvendak and Stavenuiter (2004), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> See Kitterød and Pettersen (2006), p. 476.

<sup>8</sup> Elvin-Nowak and Thomson (2001), p. 410.

<sup>9</sup> Guest (2002b), p. 322.

The described aspects give hints that the combination of work and family still seems to be an issue for working parents in Sweden and political gender goals have not yet been achieved.<sup>1</sup> Cousins and Tang found that in Sweden "...higher proportions of both mothers and fathers than in the other two countries [Netherlands and United Kingdom] report a conflict between their work and family lives"<sup>2</sup> and experience more difficulties maintaining a work-life balance.

### **3.8 Conclusion theoretical foundations**

The chapter pointed out aspects of work-life balance, managerial work, relation between work and private-life, and Sweden. Those themes were outlined in regard to the purpose of this thesis. Additionally snapshot of ongoing discourses were touched to describe the current interest in the topic in public. As the different areas are very complex and no suitable concept for examining work-life balance according to the studies purpose exist, different elements were drawn out from theory to frame the further procedure.

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<sup>1</sup> See Allard (2007), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cousins and Tang (2004), p. 533.

## 4 Project report

This chapter includes the project plan with the time schedule regarding the whole thesis. Further the methodology of the qualitative study is described. The chapter ends with the analysis of the collected data.

### 4.1 Project plan

The whole process of the thesis consisted of five phases. It started with the project definition in September 2008 and ends with the oral presentation in January 2009. In the following the sequences are described briefly. The time schedule and sequence plan illustrates the entire process.

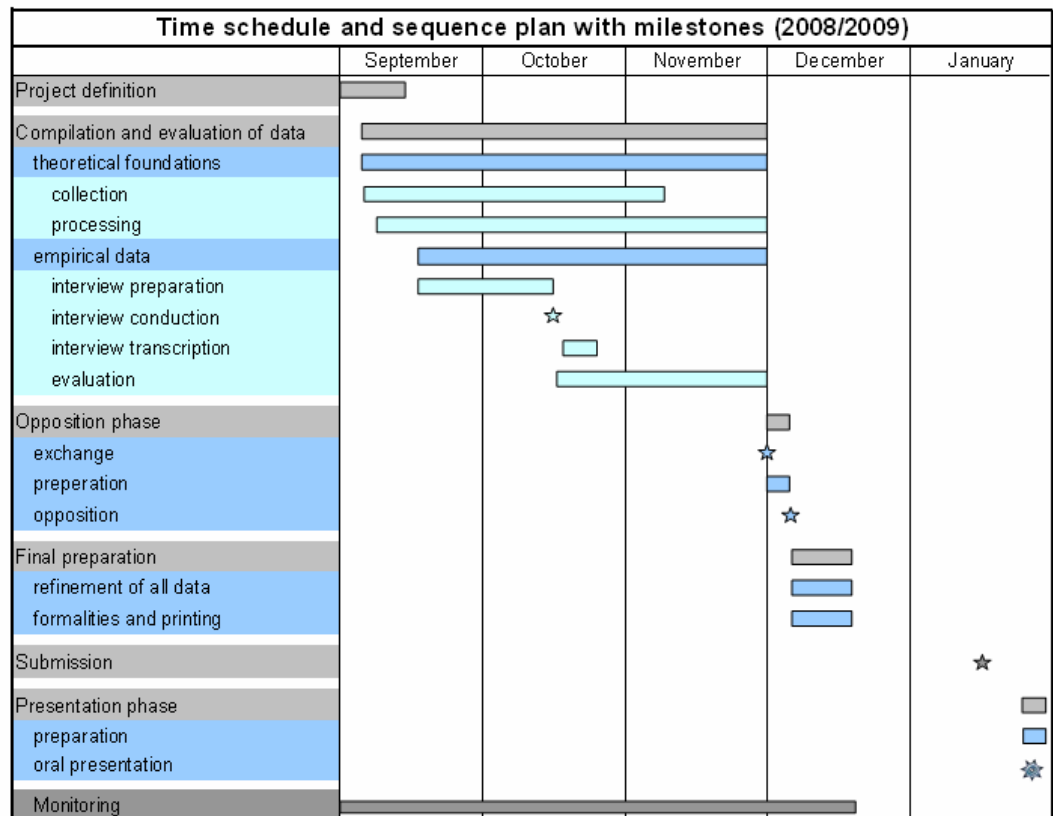


Fig. 2: Time schedule and sequence plan

#### *Project definition*

The project owner and the project team were involved in the project definition. In this phase several meetings took place to define the study. Information about the project sponsor, the context, and the intention of the overall project were gained. The interests of the concerned actors and the framework for the study were clarified. In a process of feedback-loops the focus and purpose of the study was



defined. Further the overall procedure and methodology to gain relevant data were chosen and the organization including timetable, milestones, and target group planned.

#### *Compilation and evaluation of data*

In this phase theoretical foundations were collected and processed. Further the empirical study took place. This included the preparation, conduction, and transcription of interviews. The collected data were subsequently evaluated. The interviews took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> October 2008 in the Bergvik Shopping Centre, Karlstad.

#### *Opposition phase*

According to the Swedish academic procedure an opposition takes place. This includes the exchange of the thesis' between the counterparts, the preparation and the actual opposition seminar. The exchange took place on 1<sup>st</sup> December and the opposition on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

#### *Final preparation and submission*

Final adoptions and refinements of the paper as well as formalities were completed. A milestone of handing the paper to the supervisors of the thesis was planned for the middle of January 2009.

#### *Oral presentation of thesis*

The final oral presentation of the thesis in Pforzheim, Germany, was scheduled for the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

#### *Process monitoring*

Throughout the conduction of the thesis different methods were used to monitor the thesis' process and the internal cooperation. The thesis was surveyed by continuous reflection of the process, close orientation on the purpose, and regular exchange with the project owner through feedback meetings and supervision. The following tools contributed to the internal team cooperation: time management, discussions, feedback, constant exchange, and reflexion. At the beginning of the cooperation personal objectives were clarified. Content related methods were for example brainstorming, mind-mapping, and meta-plan.

## **4.2 Methodology**

This chapter points out the different interests in the study. Further it describes how the study was conducted by outlining the preparation and conduction of the interviews and the evaluation of the empirical data.

### **4.2.1 Interest of the study**

The project sponsor's initiative resulted from a rather negative image of the retail sector as labour sector. Specific factors such as long working hours, a high share of part-time worker and female dominance are linked to the retail sector. They result in the image that it is especially hard for employees in this sector to combine work-life and private-life. Therefore the project sponsor assigned the Working Life Science department of the Karlstad University to research and investigate the situation in more detail. In order to get a clearer understanding of the situation and of working conditions, several aspects were looked at in a national survey and several smaller projects.

The investigation in the topic work-life balance related to the retail sector was the framing condition for this study which was determined by the overall project. The specific focus of this research project was developed in cooperation between the project team and the project owner. It resulted in the investigation of the work-life balance of managers in the retail sector. The interest in the situation of managers arose from the image that due to high work demands it is especially difficult for this group to maintain a work-life balance. Additionally the motto "Look into the situation" was formulated by the project owner to frame the focus of this study. The empirical method of a qualitative research was chosen to explore perceptions and to capture views from managers.

### **4.2.2 Preparation of the interviews**

The interview preparation included the development of the preliminary research questions and the interview guide<sup>1</sup>. In the theoretical part different themes and factors were outlined which were identified to stand in a relevant relation to work-life balance. These themes served for the development of the preliminary research questions and the interview guide.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview guide see appendix.

The focus of the study was to gather information about the combination of work-life and private-life. Besides the exploration of rather objective factors, information about the subjective experiences of the different topics should be gained. In order to get a picture of the various requirements in the managers' life, demands and activities in work-life and private-life should be explored. Special attention was drawn to the aspects of temporal and spatial availability, support, and the importance of personal influence and control. Moreover conditions, strategies, and supporting factors which enable the combination of work-life and private-life should be addressed. It was aimed to explore mutual impacts between the two spheres regarding overspill and conflicts. Additionally the topic work-life balance should be looked at to get a picture in how far it is an issue at the workplace and in the managers' life. It was not aimed to refer to the managers' responsibility regarding work-life balance of employees.

The following preliminary research questions were developed to cover all relevant topics which should be addressed in the study. The primary research question served as an overall guide whereas secondary questions were used to specify different fields.

#### Primary research question – preliminary

What are the demands of work-life and private-life for managers in the retail sector and how do they deal with the various requirements?

#### Secondary research questions – preliminary

What are main activities and demands to fulfil work-life and private-life responsibilities?

How do managers experience their work-life and their private-life?

What are conditions and strategies for combining work-life and private-life?

How do work-life and private-life influence each other?

How do managers perceive their work-life balance?

These questions were used as an orientation to prepare the semi-structured interviews. Several pre-tests were conducted and the interview guide was continually adapted and refined before the interviews took place.

### **4.2.3 Conduction of the interviews**

The project owner initiated and organized the conduction of interviews with managers in the Bergvik Shopping Centre in Karlstad which is located in the Swedish province Värmland. Around 65 different shops belong to the shopping complex. Several interested managers were informed by the project owner about the overall project. Preliminary information about the studies' research topics and the execution of the interviews was given.

In October 2008 the semi-structured interviews took place with eight managers (sample n=8) during two days. Five female managers and three male managers were interviewed. They worked for five different companies in textiles, sports-equipment and hypermarket. Their position was either shop-manager or department-manager. The number of their subordinates varied between three and 140. Seven managers had children. The number of children ranged between two and four children in the age between two and eighteen years.

The interviews lasted between 35 and 55 minutes and were conducted in English by the two members of the project team. Alternately one of them had the leading function. Introductory information about ethical aspects and the purpose of the study were given. Due to different levels of English of the interviewees, the project owner from Karlstad University was present as well to translate when needed.

### **4.2.4 Evaluation of data**

After collecting the information in the interviews the data was evaluated. That included the processing and the documentation of data. The results are documented in the analysis chapter. The procedure of processing the data is described in the following.

Already during the conduction of the interviews first processing of information started as impressions were gained inevitably. Immediately after the interviews ideas and remarkable points were reflected and noted. In the following process the taped interviews were transcribed. While reading the transcriptions repeatedly, relevant statements regarding the preliminary research questions were extracted. Additionally statements referring to further interesting topics were drawn out. In a

next step the statements were collected and assigned to the preliminary research questions. Subsequently the statements were arranged in themes. For a more reader-friendly presentation of the data the preliminary research questions were re-arranged without changing the meaning. The modification resulted in these final research questions:

Primary research question – final

How do managers deal with the various demands of work-life and private-life?

Secondary research questions – final

What are the demands, attitudes, experiences, and conditions in work-life?

What are private-life demands, how do manager deal with it those, and how do they perceive them?

What are mutual impacts between the spheres and how do managers perceive them? What are consequences of combining work-life and private-life and what facilitates the compatibility?

How do managers perceive their work-life balance according to their definition and how important is work-life balance at the work-place?

On the basis of these final research questions the different themes were restructured and categories were constructed. The categories were built to address the most relevant topics and to answer the final research questions. In a further step aspects of the categories were linked to literature and studies.

The secondary questions were answered in a more concrete way whereas the conclusion regarding the primary question was responded on a more general level in order to draw out prevailing patterns and conclusions regarding the work-life balance topic. Finally some additional remarks from the perspective for the human resources management were made.

### **4.3 Analysis**

The secondary research questions are answered through the combination of the description of the interviews' results, citations, interpretations, and connections to literature and relevant former studies. The areas of the analysis go along with the secondary research questions and are namely work-life, private-life, the connection of work-life and private-life and work-life balance. Citations are sometimes used as illustrations to highlight what has been said in the interviews.

The original names were replaced to ensure anonymity. The new names are Albert, Benjamin, Paula, Carol, Claudia, James, Laura, and Rachel. Names are used to personalize the answers, but they do not serve to follow characteristics and patterns of individuals. On the basis of the analysis of the secondary questions the primary question is answered. The analysis ends with remarks regarding the human resources management perspective.

The editing of the analysis chapter was partially divided. Barbara Zeiselmeier edited 4.3.1 Work-life and 4.3.4 Work-life balance while Leonie Bartz edited 4.3.2 Private-life and 4.3.3 Work-life and private-life.

#### **4.3.1 Work-life** (Barbara Zeiselmeier)

This chapter addresses the secondary research question: What are demands, attitudes, experiences, and conditions in work-life? In this chapter relevant issues regarding work-life are described. The main areas cover topics of occupational demands of the interviewed managers, attitudes towards work, the importance of social relations, and self-determination at the workplace as well as the amount of hours spent at work.

##### **4.3.1.1 Meeting business needs' and employees' needs**

Several demands of the interviewed managers' work sphere were identified. A major demand is the responsibility for meeting business needs and the operation of their store respectively their division. Benjamin indicated that "the most important thing for me is to make good results and profit" and Laura said "everything [in the shop] has to be fixed". The managers' tasks include administrative, coordinative, and planning activities like budgeting and strategic work. A further important demand is executing leadership tasks. This refers to all issues regarding personnel and includes the organization of working schedules. Several interviewees stated that they saw it as their task to support and help employees. Claudia emphasized "I am a bit a social worker, too".

Availability for work is another demand. Besides the contracted working hours this includes occupational demands which exceed the usual working context such as work related travel, working home and contacts by phone. The interviewees were asked in how far this availability patterns existed and what impact they had. A need to be available for work outside the usual working context is reflected in

regular travels overnight by all employees. Travels overnight are often described as a source of stress in research.<sup>1</sup> In the interviews no hints to a negative experience of work related travel could be identified. Bringing work home is handled in varying ways by the interviewees. For some it is normal to bring work home, some try to avoid it but sometimes do it. Some indicated that they did not bring work home. This might reflect different attitudes in how far managers try to keep work at the workplace.<sup>2</sup> The disposition to be available for company issues by phone is shared by all interview partners. Most interviewees said that it was not formally required by their company to be reachable by phone and that it was their own choice. Benjamin indicated that it was not mandatory but he had the impression that it was a rather implicit expectation from the superior. His statement "They can reach me the whole day, 24 hours, but it does not happen so many times. It is no problem" describes an opinion and experience of availability which represents the attitude of all interviewees. Contrary to the results of a study<sup>3</sup>, contacts by phone during free time seem to be no stress factors for the interviewees. There is rather evidence that they want to be informed.<sup>4</sup> For Laura "It is ok [when they call me]. I have told them. It is ok to do that. I call them very often, too. [laughing] How much money have you?"

#### **4.3.1.2 Work as a positive part of life**

Rachel's and Paula's citations "I want to do it very good" and "I like my job, it's fun" represent a basic attitude and experience of work which could be identified in the interviews. Work is an elementary and important part in life, it is self-evident to work and a source of positive experiences. This shows parallels to a European Survey concerning the importance of work in life.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this underlines the critic made by several authors that it is a misleading assumption that work is a bad part of life.<sup>6</sup> Paula explained that she had chosen to work and that with this choice she had accepted the consequences of her work in retail, for example the extended need to work around Christmas time. Also Rachel mentioned that there were things, like being reachable by phone, which were accepted automatically

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<sup>1</sup> See Stock-Homburg (URL).

<sup>2</sup> See Toth (2005), p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> See Stock-Homburg (URL).

<sup>4</sup> Similar findings see Moore (2007), p. 390.

<sup>5</sup> See European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007a), p.66.

<sup>6</sup> See Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 325f.

when she had taken the job. The positive attitude towards work seems to facilitate positive experiences.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the dedication of time and effort in work is not perceived as stressful in a negative way. Carol described that she liked to be busy and when there was much to do at work. The ambition to perform best and to have success is enhancing the engagement in work and provides satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> The positive attitude towards work is evident in the answers of several interviewees when they were asked about negative factors of their work:

"I don't know any negative things. No." (Claudia)

"No, there is nothing I don't like." (Carol)

#### **4.3.1.3 Social factor at the workplace**

The quality of the interactions to colleagues, bosses or subordinates has a fundamental impact on the way how work is experienced.<sup>3</sup> In the interviews evidence could be found that contacts and personal relations contribute to the perception of work. Several interviewees referred to the social aspect as an essential part of their work. For Paula the colleagues in the shopping mall were "like a big family" and Rachel stated that one of the most positive factors of work was "to meet people every day. It's most...to help people every day". This supporting attitude is shared by other interviewees and represents a kind of caring responsibility for the employees.

Besides the personal contact and the provision of support the enhancement of employees' development is a positive factor of work-life. Albert liked to see his employees "growing with their tasks and to see the staff experience joy". This employee and development orientation shows correlation to the results of a study of leadership characteristics in Scandinavian countries.<sup>4</sup>

Social contacts are a positive factor of work but at the same time they can result in rather negative experiences. Paula described this kind of contacts with customers: "It's not often, but sometimes people are very rude and not so nice. Sometimes you get in a discussion." These types of experiences seem to have a minor effect

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<sup>1</sup> See Robbins (2001), p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> See Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 329.

<sup>4</sup> See Lindell and Arvonen (1996), p. 28.



on the interviewees than difficulties with or individual problems of employees. Examples were mentioned such as subordinates showing disloyalty or having financial problems. It appears that the closeness of personal relations define the strengths of concernment.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4.3.1.4 Free role in work-life**

One of the most positive factors mentioned in the interviews was the freedom to design the own work. Carol for example appreciated "the freedom to plan my own day". The influence on the personal working schedule and the possibility to allot the working time is an important condition of work-life. "I have a free role. I have assignments that need to be done. If I want to work home a day, I could do it. Or Saturday or Sunday, so it's up to me" said Benjamin. In the work-life balance debate the effects of flexible working arrangements are discussed varyingly.<sup>2</sup> The result shows that the combination of the possibility for temporal flexibility with personal control over time arrangements has a positive effect on the perception of work-life. That underlines the finding from different studies, for example the European Quality of Life Survey 2006.<sup>3</sup>

#### **4.3.1.5 Working hours**

The working hours were mentioned by several interviewees as a rather negative factor of work because they limit the time to be available for other activities such as time for the family.<sup>4</sup> One aspect mentioned by the interviewees was the long opening hours of the stores in the shopping mall which is open nearly every day of the year. Rachel described she did not like "the working hours in the store. If it gets to Christmas everyone else is free. We have the most to do....That's maybe the negative part". Further they referred to the amount of hours they spend at work. All interviewees stated that they were working overtime, nobody limited the working hours to the contracted number of hours. Especially in retail-high-seasons the workload is high. In the daily operation it might be the amount of activities which result in the need for working overtime. Benjamin explained that there "could be a lot of telephone calls, e-mail, or an employee wants to talk to me

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<sup>1</sup> See Pfeiffer (2003), p. 194ff. and Gilligan (1999).

<sup>2</sup> See Fleetwood (2007b), p. 388-390.

<sup>3</sup> See European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> See Lewis et al. (2003), p. 826.

and then I have to do the things after that". Rachel stated that rather personal reasons and ambition induced her to work overtime because she was "very free to choose my days. Mostly it is myself, that I want so much". This shows coherency to Hochschild<sup>1</sup> and Eikhurst et al.<sup>2</sup> who see ambition, satisfaction and positive experiences at the workplace as motives to work overtime. The widespread existence of working overtime seems to be influenced by the combination of the workplace demands, the autonomous role, the positive attitude towards work, and the social contacts. This could be an explanation for the apparently contradictory factor that the managers work overtime, seem to experience this in a negative way but do not make use of their existing measures to reduce the hours worked.

#### **4.3.1.6 Conclusion work-life**

The responsibilities to meet business needs' and employees' needs are the major demands of work-life for the interviewed managers. The perception of and the attitude towards work is predominantly positive. Work provides the chance for the experience of social contacts and success. Negative aspects are mentioned but their negative impact is not emphasized. The major negative aspect is the working hours. These could be influenced partially but this possibility is hardly taken. The self determined role is a work condition which contributes to a positive attitude towards work.

#### **4.3.2 Private-life (Leonie Bartz)**

This chapter addresses the secondary research question: What are private-life demands, how do managers deal with those, and how do they perceive them? This part of the analysis refers to the private-life of the interviewees. The family as primary factor in private-life where most activities are related to is outlined. The organizational needs and the division of tasks to fulfil the private-life requirements are a further point which is covered.

##### **4.3.2.1 Meeting family needs**

All interviewees referred to their family when they were asked about main activities in their private-life. Carol, as all other interviewees, experienced that the

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<sup>1</sup> See Hochschild (1997).

<sup>2</sup> See Eikhof et al. (2007), p. 327.

most important and most positive factor in her private-life was "to be with the family".

Much of the time outside work is orientated towards the children's needs, for example Benjamin stated that he followed their activities. To a great extent the parents' activities are related to the children's ones. James described Swedish parents as "curling parents" and illustrated that

"we go with the cars and drive our kids there, we carry their bags in there, we tie their shoelaces. We do everything for our kids. The only thing they have to is play [icehockey, soccer etcetera]."

Tendencies that home is becoming another stressful work-place how Hochschild<sup>1</sup> describes is not evident in this study. But the interviewees pointed out that a lot had to be organized and many tasks had to be fulfilled at home. The interviewees seem to be positive about the time with their family and indicated that they "can relax from work at home" (James). Some interviewees even highlighted that they spent every spare moment of their time with the family and they seemed to be confident with that.<sup>2</sup>

"I have a family. That's the thing what I do on my free time. I take care of my family....No golfing, no whatever, nothing like that....That's ok, no problem with that." (James)

Although all interviewees share James' feelings that the family is the most positive aspect in private-life, the attitude towards personal time and the experience of it differs between the interviewees. Some of them attend activities which they do actively to get time for themselves, such as golfing or reading. Few participants of the study aim to have more personal time while reasoning that they would be more in balance.

"I try to go to the gym. I have a goal to go 2 days a week. But I go only once. It is a goal....I am planning to have some personal time....I will be a better mum." (Laura)

Paula pointed out that there was only one convenient time for her to do something for her fitness. It seems that it is important for her but has no priority. She manages to create a time-slot during the day where she is free from all work and home responsibilities:

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<sup>1</sup> See Hochschild (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Similar findings see Toth (2003), p. 368.

"I have to go there [to the gym] in the mornings....Then [after work] I have the afternoon and we can do homework together and have dinner together and that's good and I don't have to go out to run or something. I have the night with the kids, that's good." (Paula)

As activities of the children are often at the same time the parents' activities, one interviewee indicated that social contacts and friends were often made in the context of the hobbies of the children.

"And you meet other parents there and you have your coffee and you are sitting in there and watching them train, that's good." (James)

It seems that the private-life is concentrated on childcare and hardly any activities outside family arrangements exist. Moreover it can be assumed that social activities, such as involvement in communities or churches, are barely integrated in the interviewees' life.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4.3.2.2 Home and family management**

All of the interviewees' partners are in the labour force, except two wives who are currently on maternal leave but will start to work soon. This finding goes along with other studies which found out that the dual-earner-model is adopted by Nordic Countries.<sup>2</sup> For Paula that topic seemed self-evident as she highlighted that it was normal that "today both parents work".

The division of caring responsibilities and domestic responsibilities between the dual-earner-families of the interviewees differs. In some cases the caring responsibilities are mainly up to the partner, either the husband or wife.

"It's my husband. He takes the responsibility for the kids." (Paula)

"Of course she takes a lot of the work at home. With the girls for the schools, homeworks, and everything else." (James)

In other cases it could be observed that responsibilities are allocated and shared between the parents. Carol, for example, shares all caring activities with her husband whereas Laura described that her husband was in charge of the hobbies of one of their daughters and she accompanied the activities of the younger ones.

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Lewis et al. (2003), p. 825f.

<sup>2</sup> See Crompton R. (1999). In: Straub (2007), p. 296.

The arrangements to deal with the household demands differ as well and are independent from the division of the caring responsibilities. One way is that the interviewees' partner is primarily in charge of the housekeeping. This was mentioned by two male interviewees whose wives took the main responsibility. Benjamin's wife, for instance, does the household but he helps as often as he can. Another method is sharing the household responsibilities. The various tasks of the household are not up to one of the partners.<sup>1</sup> Different approaches of involvement were described by Paula "We share a lot", Laura "I do inside and he does outside" and Rachel "I do the cooking and he does the rest". Although most interviewees described that they shared the various demands it transpired that the women were doing slightly more.<sup>2</sup> Claudia stated "We do it mostly together....It's about 70:30".

The aspect that women are in charge of managing the domestic demands can be seen in this research. They plan, organize, delegate, and control the various housework tasks.<sup>3</sup> It looks like women become household managers involuntarily. A female interviewee illustrated this finding explicitly:

"I think I have it in my hand....But I don't want to be the boss in my home."  
(Carol)

Although it seems self-evident for the interviewed men to take great part in domestic work, they are more likely to carry out some tasks than others.<sup>4</sup> To be involved in caring responsibilities seems to be an important issue whereas within the household activities they are rather reluctant.<sup>5</sup>

There are possibilities to outsource domestic responsibilities. Day-care centres and kindergartens provide caring services which are used by all interviewees with children. Household responsibilities could be delegated to an external service provider as well. All participants indicated that they did not make use of paid assistance in their household. At the same time some interviewees consider household responsibilities as a kind of weigh. Paula talked about hiring domestic servants:

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Dulk Den and Doorne-Huiskes Van (2007), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Similar findings see Coltrane (2000), p. 1226.

<sup>3</sup> Similar findings see Toth (2005), p. 367.

<sup>4</sup> Similar findings see Duyvendak and Stavenuiter (2004), p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Similar findings see Kitterød and Pettersen (2006), p. 476.

"But I would love to have a cleaning lady....Sometimes, when you are free for the weekend you have to do the laundry and you have to iron and you have to vacuum and do stuff like that. It would be nice to not have that on your shoulder all the time. And just be with your family."

It seems like professional household assistance is not seriously considered. Laura explained that she did not hire someone "because somebody else is in my house and not because it is my task. You don't know a person coming to my home and in my dirt". This might indicate a high value of privacy.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4.3.2.3 Conclusion private-life**

It appears that the managers' everyday private-life is orientated on the family needs and wishes. As a consequence the dedication for social contacts and the time for personal activities are reduced. Sharing the domestic responsibilities between the partners seems to be important for the individual to deal with work and private-life. However it transpires that caring responsibilities are more likely to be shared equally than household tasks.

#### **4.3.3 Work-life and private-life (Leonie Bartz)**

This chapter addresses the secondary research question: What are mutual impacts between work-life and private-life and how do managers perceive them? What are consequences of combining work-life and private-life and what facilitates the compatibility? It is looked at the interfaces and connections of work-life and private-life. Influences from one side to the other and attitudes towards the relation between the two domains are outlined. The lack of time as exacerbating factor to deal with the various requirements as well as the aspect of support, conditions and strategies to fulfil those are resumed.

##### **4.3.3.1 One person – two spheres**

As explored in the previous chapters, both, work and private-life have more or less explicitly defined and distinct demands. That underlines one assumption of the separate spheres model.<sup>2</sup> The borders between work and private-life are being blurred which enhances movements between the fields. Findings from earlier studies show that professional workers in particular have more permeable

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> See Barnett (1999), p. 146.

boundaries than blue-collar workers<sup>1</sup> and that overflows are more often from work to private-life.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to the separate spheres theory but along with the overflow theory all interviewees indicated that mutual impacts between the domains work and private-life existed because overflows were frequent and moods or thoughts were transferred between the fields. The extent of the mutual influences and frequency differs between the interviewees. Examples for moods and thoughts transferred from work-life to private-life exist to a large part on special occasions or in regard to the concern about employees.

"Of course if there is a problem at work you might feel depressed and bring it home, too." (Rachel)

"It could be that some co-workers don't like to work here anymore or they have something to do at their home-life that affects their working-life. That could be something like that. It could be a financial problem privately for my co-workers and so on. I think a lot about them." (James)

The finding that work is sometimes brought home or the managers receive calls during their free-time gives evidence that there is a tendency of greater transfer from work-life to private-life. The interviewees illustrated that they attempted to minimize impacts from both sides and tried not to transfer emotional states, thoughts or lower the overflows.<sup>3</sup>

"Well, but I try not to. When you are at work you are at work....When you go inside the door you...put on a good face and that is important." (Paula)

Various methods to circumvent especially influences from work to private-life were described by the interviewees. For instance activities such as commuting, jogging or speaking to someone were stated several times to be helpful to relax from work.<sup>4</sup> James added<sup>5</sup>

"I think I am very concentrated at what I do, when I am doing it....You don't have time to think about work [at home]. That's the very good thing to have a family. You don't have to think about work when you are home."

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<sup>1</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> See Villiers De and Kotze (2003), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Similar findings see Toth (2005), p. 368.

<sup>4</sup> Similar findings see Villiers De and Kotze (2003), p. 18 and Kastner (2004), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Similar findings see Villiers De and Kotze (2003), p. 19 and Collins (2007), p. 421.

In order to protect the private-life sphere from work, for example, precautions are taken to reduce incoming calls from employees. In that context good organization, trainings, and guidelines for employees were mentioned. Further factors are deputies who are empowered and enabled to make decisions.

Transfers of moods and thoughts from private-life to work-life occurred as well mainly on special occasions, for instance discussions with the children at home which sometimes lingered on at work, as Benjamin experienced. Further thoughts are transferred regarding concern for the children.

"For example today his mother is watching the kids and he is calling to check if everything is alright. Sometimes he calls the children from work to talk to them about their day because when he comes home the children will be at least ready for bed or sleeping."<sup>1</sup> (Albert)

Interviewees indicated as well methods to minimize the influences from private-life to work. All interviewees have the possibility to attend private matters during working time. This knowledge seems to have a calming effect and is highly appreciated. At the same time the possibility is consciously not exploited since doing private matters during work are seldom the case, except for special occasions. Rachel made clear that, despite her free-role, she tried to solve private issues in her spare time. That underlines the general attitude of the interviewees not to do private issues too often because "You are not there [at work] for doing private matters". In order to circumvent those at work some participants pointed out that they arranged backup from their relatives and friends in advance. Calling the grandparents is an example for a quick solution when the children are sick on short notice. Paula was glad that the grandma helped "So, if he [my husband] cannot be home, grandma takes the kids".

The results show that managers have control over the boundaries to a certain extent.<sup>2</sup> The usage of strategies to keep the influence on a low level indicates that the interviewees try to keep the spheres rather separate.<sup>3</sup> Despite the affinity to keep the spheres separate, Benjamin and Rachel explained why it was fairly difficult to maintain two spheres.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from Swedish.

<sup>2</sup> Similar findings see Lewis (2003), p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> Similar findings see Toth (2005), p. 368.

<sup>4</sup> Similar findings see Collins (2007), p. 417.



"When I am free I don't think so much about the work but it is somewhere in the back of the head." (Benjamin)

"I try not to [transfer feelings] but it's hard. You are only one person and you have the same feelings work and home." (Rachel)

#### 4.3.3.2 Limit of time

In order to fulfil the various demands of both spheres well and comfortably, time and energy need to be dedicated. This dedication in both fields can lead to conflicts if role expectations and requirements appear simultaneously.<sup>1</sup>

The participants were asked if they experienced a conflict between work-life and private-life demands. Laura described a tension between work and family-life that occurred predominantly during high seasons such as Christmas time when the demands of the work-life intensified. She explained that during that season higher workload created pressure and she devoted more time for work and less time for family as usual. Other participants described a permanent time-based conflict which occurred between the time they devoted to their job and their responsibility for children and family. This may result in feelings of guilt or bad conscious towards the family members.<sup>2</sup>

"But I know my kids want me to be home more and that's also a problem with the shopping mall. Bergvik is only closed 4 days a year.... You have to explain to your kids that you like your job and this is how it is.... You feel bad sometimes. Not being able to be home. Especially when they are free from school. Next week they are free from school. I have to work every day." (Paula)

"Of course sometimes I am away too often. And I can feel it too, that I am away too often.... When it's frosty at home you can feel it.... Sometimes when they say that their friends had their mums and paps there in school or wherever or his dad was there the whole day. That could hurt a bit. And I could do it. But then again I don't do it. I don't know." (James)

"Sometimes there can be a conflict. If there are many things here [in the shop] and you have to be with the children somewhere else... that could be frustrating." (Albert)

These quotes give evidence that the interviewees have, both, professional and family identities that rely on being competent and responsible in the two roles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Robbins (2001), p. 104f. and Kahn et al. (1964). In: Shumate and Fulk (2004), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Similar findings see Toth (2005), p. 367 and Elvin-Nowak (1999).

<sup>3</sup> Similar findings see Bird and Schnurmann (2005), p. 145.

Parallel to the strong commitment to family responsibilities there is a reluctance to reduce working hours. The interviewees often used statement like "I have always done it like that" or "It's my choice" as arguments for the dominance of work.<sup>1</sup> Personal choices are made to prioritize and divide the limited time, however choices are always embedded in social contexts.<sup>2</sup> For that reason working overtime may be constructed as personal choice but could imply high professional identity and therefore higher promotion opportunities.<sup>3</sup> This explanation appears not to be valid in the study. Interviewees stated that they believed a lower time commitment would have no negative impact on their career. Self-fulfilment appears to be a more appropriate argument to explain high professional identity.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4.3.3.3 Helping hands and tools**

All interviewees with children cherish support from the grandparents. In the used literature this aspect is not explicitly addressed. The interviewees explained that the grandparents often lived close by, picked-up the children and took care of them. If the grandparents do not live in a convenient distance to the family, the interviewees wish it or even moved in order to be close to them. Paula described that everything "works because we have grandma, too, and she can take the kids". Benjamin appreciated the support as well because "If that [something unexpected] happens I phone my parents and they take care of the children". James felt that he was not in the happily position to live close to the grandparents and envied those "who have the grandparents near by because it is so simple".

Another support factor is provided by the partner. In dual-earner-families the partners support each other in order to facilitate the work commitment of the other one.<sup>5</sup> Paula pointed out that her husband for example did not work on the weekends or during school holidays and in that time took care for the children. Laura illustrated that there were arrangements of taking turns with her partner to equalize her reduced commitment for the family during busy business periods such as Christmas. Besides sharing responsibilities the emotional support is an important factor for facilitating work. The interviewees described their partners'

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Lewis (2003), p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> See Lewis and Giullari (2005). In: Lewis et al. (2007), p. 366.

<sup>3</sup> See Lewis (2003), p. 352.

<sup>4</sup> See Diener (2000). In: Reiter (2007), p. 281.

<sup>5</sup> See Crouter and Manke (1997) and Bird and Schnurman-Crook (2005).

attitudes concerning availability for work. Some interviewees mentioned that a high temporal availability for work could be a topic of discussion. Most of them indicated that it was no problem for the partner when they received a phone call in their free time.

"He does the same. No it is not every day. [I receive] maybe 5 to 10 telephone calls a month. It is not much." (Claudia)

"I am sure she doesn't love it. But then again it is something I have always done." (James)

None of the interviewees' companies offer explicitly programmes to combine work and private-life. The interviewees considered the social aspect combined with the free-role as support factors. The agreement between Carol and her superior that as long as the business is running and the assignments fulfilled she is free in her role, suit her. Additionally her boss shows large understanding that she has caring responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> Albert assumed that because his superior had children, too, he/she had an understanding for his dual responsibilities. This acceptance is valid within a reasonable frame and should not be used too extensively.

"There is an understanding that things happen. But they don't want it on a regular basis." (Claudia)

Additionally the participants develop, adapt or use tools and behaviours to combine work and private-life. A few interviewees pointed out that they improved their arrangements for work-life and private-life demands through their experience.<sup>2</sup> They have the feeling they can cope better with the various demands because they gained knowledge about how things work and how to divide the day more appropriately. Setting priorities due to made experiences was mentioned several times in regard to the undertaken methods.<sup>3</sup> For example, domestic work and renovation activities in the house can also be finished at the next weekend in order to get more harmony and to reduce stress. Paula illustrated "I have to let the laundry be and I have to be with them [the children] when I am free". Another factor which contributed to the management of work and private-life was the creation of quality-time.<sup>4</sup> Some interviewees aim to compensate the lack of time

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Collins (2007), p. 421.

<sup>2</sup> Similar findings see Villiers De and Kotze (2003), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Similar findings see Villiers De and Kotze (2003), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> See Hochschild (1997).

on weekdays through extensive time with the family during the weekends. Most of the interviewees mentioned that the compatibility of work, caring responsibilities, household, and own time depended to a great part on the quality of planning.<sup>1</sup> Claudia, for instance, uses a family calendar in order to ensure a good planning. Paula made the consequences of a lack of planning clear:

"If you don't plan, I think you don't have any time at all [for the family]....You have to plan a lot and you have to have someone to help you."

#### **4.3.3.4 Conclusion work-life and private-life**

It seems that the responsibility for both spheres can not be laid aside completely because individuals can never be off duty, neither as a parent nor as a manager. Therefore inevitable influences between the spheres exist. It can be suggested that the aspects of high identification with both spheres and striving for self-fulfilment are actuators for conflicts experienced by the interviewees. However it appears that those are not overwhelming and the interviewees' usage of strategies and the accessibility of support, especially from the grandparents, enable them to facilitate, both, work and private-life. As long as tensions do not prevail, the interviewees feel that they can combine work and private-life comfortably and satisfyingly.

#### **4.3.4 Work-life balance (Barbara Zeiselmeier)**

This chapter addresses the secondary research question: How do managers perceive their work-life balance according to their definition and how important is work-life balance at the work-place? In the following the interviews are analysed regarding work-life balance. The prominence of the term, the interviewees' understanding of it, and the individual perception of their personal work-life balance are described. Further this part views the importance of the topic for companies and the consequences for the work-life of the managers.

##### **4.3.4.1 Finding the balance**

When the interviewees were asked about their understanding of work-life balance it emerged that the majority was not familiar with the expression. But they

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Toth (2005), p. 367.

developed intuitively a definition for themselves. Most of the interviewees paraphrased it in a similar way as Paula who referred to the "balance between work and private-life". James' understanding differed. He explained

"I have to consider both, the store and my family. I have to think about not only myself but on the rest, too. I am feeling better when I have everything else in balance".

As well Benjamin had another approach. He indicated that in order to have a work-life balance it is necessary "to separate work-life and private-life and that one side isn't too heavy".

"I found the balance." Albert's statement represents the work-life balance perception of the interviewees. Some made further comments when they were asked if they could maintain a work-life balance. Paula stated "If you ask me, yes" and then she added "But if you ask my husband, no". Benjamin felt in balance, too, but understated "I don't say that I succeed all the time". Several mentioned that a few years ago when the children were younger it was harder to maintain a work-life balance. It is easier now because the children are more independent and the interviewees themselves developed more relaxed behaviours and attitudes.

#### **4.3.4.2 Companies' issue**

Since the interviewees did not know the term work-life balance it can be assumed that the companies do not run programmes under the work-life balance term. However asked about what their companies do to help them to balance work-life and private-life, the interviewees mentioned lectures, social activities, part-time work, free gym membership or various allowances.

As there is no general valid concept<sup>1</sup> for work-life balance policies it is not possible to evaluate the companies' engagement in the work-life balance topic. In Swedish companies the health care system has a high significance which aims to maintain and enhance employees' well-being. It can be assumed that as well measures and conditions such as flexible working arrangements, part-time and parental leave are already integrated in the companies' structures and organizations. Therefore those measures are not related to the expression work-life balance.

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<sup>1</sup> See Metz-Göckel (2004), p. 118.

These interview findings show that the companies' policies which should enable employees to combine work and private-life do not necessarily need to run under the label work-life balance.

#### **4.3.4.3 Managers' concern and individuals' responsibility**

"Good employees, good work." Paula articulated a basic understanding of the relation between work-life and private-life which was expressed by several interviewees. They highlighted the importance of the wellbeing of employees for a good performance at work. Interferences occur when there are problems at home, at work or difficulties of combining the two spheres. Only when the different domains of life are in a balanced and positive state, the optimal outcome for work as well as for private-life can be achieved.<sup>1</sup>

The managers see it as part of their responsibility to enable the compatibility of work and private-life for their employees. This aspect was not addressed in the interviews but become evident as a relevant topic. It seems that the awareness of the importance, their responsibility for the economic results, and the personal contact to the employees are causes for their concern. Some interviewees mentioned that the company was not responsible to care for the work-life balance of the employees:

"At one level the company is not responsible for peoples' private-life. But as a manager she tries to do working schedules and things like that so it suits peoples' private-life."<sup>2</sup> (Carol)

"It is not a company issue as a whole. But as a store manager I try to make it work for people." (Albert)

The managers see it as well as part of their work to support their employees and to be a good example on their own. Frey et al. mention the importance of leadership responsibility regarding work-life balance issues. They emphasize the double task of managers. On the one hand it is up to them to handle and create the organizational and cultural conditions for their employees as a base for their

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings see Collins (2007), p. 421.

<sup>2</sup> Translation from Swedish.

work-life balance. On the other hand they have to take care of their own work-life balance.<sup>1</sup>

Finally it is predominantly seen as the responsibility of the individual and less of the company or superiors to care for one's own work-life balance. Rachel expressed this in the following way:

"But a lot of times it is up to the person to make the change. If they don't want it, it is hard for the company to make a change. We can help but the person also has to want it."

At the same time she reflected her own situation:

"Maybe I should work a little less....So it is more on myself to find a balance....I can sometimes feel that I am very tired and I have worked too much. And the body says no sometimes, too."

The emphasis of the individual's responsibility correlates to cultural characteristics of Sweden<sup>2</sup> and as well to the work-life balance stream which looks at the topic from the individual's side<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4.3.4.4 Conclusion work-life balance**

The importance of the topic "balance between work-life and private-life" was evident in the interviews although the expression "work-life balance" itself was hardly known and not visible in companies' programmes. This finding shows that the issue itself does not have to be embedded in the context of this term. The companies seem to provide the conditions that managers have the tools to enable themselves and their employees to combine work-life and private-life. Finally support can only be an offer but the individual has to take over the responsibility for herself/himself.

#### **4.3.5 Conclusion analysis**

This chapter addresses the primary research question: How do managers deal with the various demands of work-life and private-life? In order to answer the primary research question the secondary questions functioned as tools to cover the relevant topics on a concrete level. Five principle key elements were consistent throughout

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<sup>1</sup> See Frey et al. (2004), p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> See Lindell and Arvonen (1996), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> See Kasper et al. (2005), p. 442.

the different fields of the analysis, as well in the area of work-life as in private-life. These are responsibility, "do-it-good-principle", autonomy, social factor and "no-problem-principle". Those key elements refer to the primary research question on a rather generalizing level. The end of the chapter addresses consequences for work-life balance.

#### **4.3.5.1 Responsibility**

"It is always in the back of the head."

The different demands in work-life and private-life refer to various responsibilities: responsibility for the stores' operation, for the employees, for the children, for the household etcetera. This includes the demand for availability. As the responsibilities of one life-domain persist when a person resides in another domain, the need to be available continues. The manager is still liable for his/her store when he/she is at home. The parent is still liable for his/her child when he/she is at work. To create timeslots without the need to be available delegation is required and substitution has to be organized. But despite of all planning and coordination – the responsibilities remain.

#### **4.3.5.2 "Do-it-good-principle"**

"I want to do it good."

The ambition to do a good job, to be a good partner and/or good parent is a basic attitude which results in the dedication to the fulfilment of responsibilities. In order to satisfy the personal demand of doing things well, energy and time have to be invested and allocated. The dedication shall provide success and generate experiences of self-fulfilment. Actions and behaviours in different life spheres are determined by this value. The things should be done well but sometimes the temporal, physical or emotional resources are not sufficient. The experience of conflict can be the consequence.

#### **4.3.5.3 Social factor**

"Grandma helps, too."

Personal relations and contacts are primary factors for positive experiences. The social factor is the main enabler to combine work-life and private-life. The



personal attitude and disposition provides back up for others. At the same time back up from others can be received. Understanding bosses and employees at the workplace, supporting partners, friends, and grandparents help to fulfil the responsibilities in the different life-spheres.

#### **4.3.5.4 Autonomy**

"I am free to make my own day." – "We do everything together."

The role of the individual is embedded in a social context. The value of autonomy inside the work and private-life sphere varies. At the workplace a high degree of individual autonomy is appreciated. The possibility of influencing circumstances enhances the feeling of control over the own life. This free role facilitates the fulfilment of responsibilities in other life domains. In private-life a lower degree of the individual's autonomy is accepted. Tight bonds between the family members create a strong cohesion. Despite the individuals decreased autonomy in the family context the family is seen as an autonomous entity.

#### **4.3.5.5 "No-problem-principle"**

"It's no problem."

The interviewees' perception of their work-life and private-life were predominantly described in positive terms. They did not talk about problems, they rather mentioned difficulties and concerns. It seemed like they do not blame others or complain, instead they emphasized their individual responsibility. Their general attitudes appeared quite relaxed and positive. This was underlined by their friendly and humorous manner and by using frequently the words "No problem".

#### **4.3.5.6 Consequences for work-life balance**

The described elements refer to conditions and determinants found in the study which have great influence on the combination of work-life and private-life. Possible mutual impacts are described and reasonable consequences regarding work-life balance are outlined subsequently.

Different responsibilities set different expectations towards an individual, who needs to fulfil these demands. In combination with the ambition to do things good pressure is created. If the individual fails to achieve the desired quality, negative

effects on the individual such as feelings of guilt and bad conscience arise. If responsibilities can be fulfilled in a satisfying way, success and positive feelings are experienced. By providing emotional and instrumental support, personal relations at work and in private-life contribute to the fulfilment of different requirements. The social factor is a main provider of positive experiences but might be a source of negative feelings as well. Autonomy in work-life can enable the individual to handle different responsibilities. To smooth negative experiences and to highlight the positive ones, the "no problem" attitude and humour serve as equalizing factor. This personal attitude is helpful to lighten the pressure of demands and as well to handle non compatible or seemingly conflicting patterns and experiences in different spheres of life.

In conclusion the elements responsibility, autonomy, "Do-it-good-principle", support, and "No-problem-principle" are closely connected to the work-life balance of the individual. They are main determinants with a strong impact on the personal perception of the compatibility of work and private-life which should be taken into consideration when thinking and discussing about the topic work-life balance.

#### **4.3.6 Human resources discussion**

In the following a collection of remarks for the human resources management are drawn out of the results of the analysis and various questions are raised.

##### **4.3.6.1 Responsibility – Who is in charge?**

In the interviews the responsibility of the individual was pointed out. The foundations of the work-life balance topic were built by legislation, organizations, and managers. Those make it possible to approach and reflect the topic from the individual's perspective. However the individual is embedded in social systems, needs to fulfil expected roles and to follow norms and rules. Therefore outside circumstances influence the individual's conditions. There is the danger that the responsibility is shifted completely to the individual and away from the institutional level. The following questions are raised: In how far can work-life balance be situated in the responsibility of the individual? At what level the influence of institutions is exhausted and it is in the responsibility of the individual to handle the issue?

The middle management is often seen in an essential position to implement and forward corporate policies in companies. This aspect was obvious in the interviews. The interviewed managers emphasized their responsibility to enhance compatibility of work and private-life for their employees. They feel empowered, have appropriate tools, and are close to the employees. But this responsibility bears a potential risk of arbitrariness as long as no standards for quality assurance exist. Further it can be a burden if the available tools are not sufficient or if the manager is not accepted as the person of contact by the employees. The following questions are raised: Is it a risk to assign managers with the responsibility of facilitating the combination of work-life and private-life? In how far is it necessary to provide concepts to standardize the treatment of the theme?

The high importance of the grandparents to facilitate the combination of work and private-life was a rather astonishing factor in the interviews. This might indicate that the provision of childcare by public institutions is not sufficient or not used sufficiently. Additionally no involvement of companies in childcare was evident. The following questions are raised: In how far is the existing childcare system suitable to enable people with caring responsibilities to gain their own livings and to maintain an appropriate standard of living and work-life balance? In how far is it in companies' interest to compensate gaps of insufficient provision of public support?

#### **4.3.6.2 Autonomy – How much control can and should be executed?**

Interviewees dedicated much energy and time in their job which included working longer than contracted. Reasons for working overtime do not only result from the demands but as well from personal attitudes. The free role and autonomy are factors which enhance the compatibility of work and private-life. At the same time those factors bear the risk that values and attitudes tempt to expand working hours. Consequences can occur in conflicts at home or effects on health and wellbeing. The followings questions are raised: To what extent companies should admit and promote autonomy at the work-place? In how far companies can control or limit the work-involvement and autonomy to avoid self-exploitation?

Even when the awareness of the relation between work and private-life exists, it seems to be less common to talk about private-life at work. It was evident that the

interviewees tried to keep the two spheres of work and private-life rather separate. Interviewees mentioned that they prefer if the companies do not know too much about their private-life. Companies and the workplace seem to be perceived as a factor which should not be involved too much in someone's life. This could imply that the employer is perceived as instance which might execute unwanted control and therefore has too much power over the employee, who tries to keep his independence in private-life. This bears the risk that important problems of employees are hidden and appropriate measures to help cannot be offered and initiated. A task of human resources departments is to be in close contact to employees and to monitor factors which indicate problems and disturbances. The following questions are raised: In how far is it justifiable that companies interfere in the employees' life to ensure their ability to work? In how far is it necessary that a company is perceived as provider of individual support and help?

#### **4.3.6.3 Work-life balance – Where is the balance?**

The interviewees were not familiar with the expression work-life balance, but they could understand it intuitively. The awareness of the theme compatibility of work and private-life existed and was estimated as important. This reflects the public interest and concern in researches, discussions and programmes. The term work-life balance is often used for the theme. But about the selection of the word pattern is much discussion. The following questions are raised: In how far is it necessary to promote the topic compatibility of work- and private-life no matter what name is used? In how far is it necessary that the expression work-life balance is promoted in companies?

The interviewees stated that a good atmosphere at the work-place and good relations to colleagues, superiors and subordinates are essential for positive working experiences. At the same time a "nice and pleasant" workplace can be a reason to spend more time there than required. This reduces the time available for private-life and can create a competition between work-life and private-life. The following questions are raised: In how far should companies promote good working climates and take measure to enhance them? In how far do they create new obstacles to reach a work-life balance while doing so?

Reflecting the involvement and responsibility of human resources departments in the issue of work-life balance it seems to be a tightrope walk since it is notable that the appropriate level of engagement is hard to find. The extent of involvement always can be criticised. A high level of engagement in work-life balance can lead to the accusation of misuse, interference, and control. A low level of engagement can be criticised, too. The critic is that responsibility towards employees is not taken and companies are accused for only striving for financial results. The outlined remarks indicate that human resources management deals with omnipresent dilemmas and contradictory themes. Both, employers and employees have interests in work-life balance and human resources management is expected to deal with both needs. Therefore continuous observation is necessary to adopt appropriate programmes.

## 5 Reflexion

In the reflexion part aspects in regard to the thesis are reviewed. The first part is written from the viewpoint of the project team while the second part is a personal and individual reflection of each team member.

### 5.1 Project team reflexion

#### *Project owner and our supervisor*

Members of the Working Life Science department of the Karlstad University were the project owners and at the same time our supervisors. Several meetings throughout the conduction of the thesis assured on the one hand that we were supervised. On the other hand the meetings made sure that our results would be of use in the frame of the overall project. We felt that we had the freedom to conduct our project and could realize our own ideas. We experienced the cooperation with the project owner in combination with the supervising function as very supporting, friendly and productive.

#### *Swedish-German cooperation*

The partnership between the universities in Karlstad and Pforzheim gave us the chance to conduct our thesis in another country and to gain precious experiences. It was very interesting for us to get to know some of the Swedish academic traditions such as the opposition procedure. In order to perform the thesis in another country organizational and structural arrangements had to be dealt with. Especially in the initial phase we needed to get an understanding of the requirements and customs of both universities. We think that the combination of German students writing about work-life balance in the retail sector in Sweden gave the study a special twist.

#### *Framing the theme*

Reflecting our initial phase we experienced that it was important to clarify the situation, the interests of the different project actors and the purpose of the study. This phase was very precious for us as it set the framework the further process. In meetings with the project owner questions such as the following were addressed

to understand the project context: What interest groups exist? What is their interest? What are the connections between the groups?

Simultaneously the framing of our theme and target group was considered. The interest in managers arose but it was discussed if or how the target group should be more narrowed down. In discussion were aspects of gender and parenthood. The project owner made the decision to look at managers in general, regardless of gender or family situation.

#### *Processing theoretical data*

When researching in libraries and databases it became clear that there has been done a huge amount of research of the overall topic work-life balance which point out, discuss and reflect different assumptions and approaches. Our aim was to get the same understanding and to develop our direction of processing. Therefore we collected information, read and discussed it continuously. When we realized that we could not follow reading and discussing and simply could not handle more information we decided to limit further collection of information. We aimed to process data in reference to the purpose of the thesis and looked at the different sub themes in that context. Sometimes it felt kind of unsatisfying as it was necessary to focus on specific aspects according to our purpose. Unfortunately it was not possible to get in-depth knowledge about theories and themes.

#### *Sample number*

The lack of experience with qualitative research and unclearness about expectations and formal requirements we need to follow created difficulties to estimate how many interviews needed to be conducted to collect enough information. Further it was difficult to imagine how many interviews we can process in the limited time. The project owner advised and arranged eight interviews. Reflecting the amount of interviews we gained enough information. In the further processing it became clear to us that a few more interviews would not have provided further relevant material. This was approved by the project owner as well.

*Preparation interview guide*

Since our experience on that kind of interviews was limited, questions such as the following turned up when we started to prepare the interview guide:

- How to make sure to get relevant and useful data?
- What if we do not get information we could use?
- How to gain data without directly addressing it in the question?
- How deep and personal can we go?
- What are side effects of our questions?
- What is a suitable sequence of questions to avoid implications?
- How to structure the guide: What are main, what are sub questions?

We used a project risk analysis to address the questions and to be aware of what could happen. In the further process different questions were developed, discussed and revised repeatedly. For every question a connection to theory and the research questions was drawn. In that way we wanted to ensure the purpose orientation of the interview guide. By conducting several test interviews the interview guide was adopted and improved through revising the questions over and over again. That procedure gave us as well confidence and prepared us for the conduction.

When developing the interview guide we needed to decide to what extent the guide should be structured and formulated. We saw the risk that a too structured interview would tempt us to stick too close to the guide and to diminish the flow of the interviews. Nevertheless it was important for us to cover certain topics. A too little structured interview guide would have beard the risk that we are getting too far from the information we are aiming for. Additionally we had limited experience in interviewing and therefore the interview guide should give us back up. For those reasons we decided on a rather structured interview guide where the main question were formulated in a general way and sub questions should ensure that all topics are covered. In the conduction of the interviews it turned out that the structured interview guide was very useful.

*Conduction of the interviews*

It was noticeable that the language affected the interviews to some extend. It was agreed to use English as we do not speak Swedish. The project owner was present



to translate when needed. Some interviewees were fluent in English and the conversation was possible without difficulties. In several interviews however translation was needed to different extents. We recognized that the answers were more extended when those interviewees spoke Swedish. Further we assume that through translation and communication between translator, interviewee and us some information shortened. We think that without language barrier more information could have been gained and profounder answers had been possible. Despite of this we experienced that the final outcome gave plenty information to evaluate.

The atmosphere in the interviews was relaxed, a lot of laughing and jokes contributed to a pleasant setting. The interviewees were very friendly and their positive attitudes were consistent throughout the interviews.

Since it was an arranged situation the answers might have been influenced by several aspects. For example it is possible that answers were given which were believed to be "correct" or expected. We were aware of this aspect but decided that it would not be possible for us to evaluate it. Therefore we did not pay attention to it in the analysis of the interviews.

#### *Data evaluation*

Our previous knowledge about empirical research methods was limited and the timeframe was too tight to get deeper involved in different methods. Basic previous understanding and a seminar about grounded theory at the Karlstad University inspired us for the data evaluation. Moreover literature gave us a few further ideas but they were only partially practicable for us. Sometimes it was difficult to decide the further procedure as we were not sure in how far we have to follow any standards or in how far we are free to deal with the data. Through discussion, reflexion and additional supervision we found an approach which was appropriate and satisfying for us. In order to deal with the huge amount of data constant orientation on the research questions guided us. In the process of data evaluation we saw a lot of different possible approaches and had many ideas. We needed to make decisions what meant at the same time to abandon ideas. In the words of our supervisor we had to "kill our darlings". It was very interesting to see how our decisions determined the final result. We had the choice either to

emphasize an aspect or to leave it out. In the latter case it did not appear anymore but might have been interesting.

### *Family and private-life*

In the preparation of the study we planned to look at private-life in general without the focus on family. The interviews were prepared for that group but it turned out by short notice that except one all interviewees had children. Therefore the study got a touch of a family study which was not aimed because we were interested in private-life which does not equal family as it is in many other studies.

### *Framework*

When we were approaching the topic work-life balance in our understanding of compatibility of work and private-life we were looking for a concept which could have served as a basis for our study. We noticed that a lot of different approaches exist which focus on specific perspectives. There are for instance different theories looking at the relation between work and private-life while others focus on measurable factors and conditions such as working hours or others refer to the personal experiences. Furthermore there are different factors mentioned which are considered to have an impact on the compatibility of work-life and private-life. For us a concept would have been useful which would have addressed objective, subjective as well as situational factors. According to our understanding these different perspectives are important and should be considered when exploring the compatibility of work and private-life.

### *Results*

Since a lot of research has been done on work-life balance it was a thought about if there is something we could add. It was helpful for us to draw our attention to the fact that our project is unique because at that time, at that place, with this target group and so forth there is nothing comparable.

We think that our thesis includes different aspects which can be of use for different interest groups. The motto "Look into the situation" was formulated by the project owner. According to our estimation the reader can get an insight of the situation of managers in the retail sector.

The results were generated by looking at a specific group and a limited number of interviews. We think that that they can be generalized in an analytical and theoretical way as they reveal patterns which may be applicable for other groups.

## **5.2 Individual reflexion** (Leonie Bartz)

I would like to start my personal reflection by highlighting that I experienced the cooperation between Barbara and me as outstandingly good. There are some factors that I think facilitated our good cooperation and that I consider as most important:

### *Work attitude*

In my opinion we both put the same high amount of energy, time and proportion in the process of our thesis. I think that led to the fact that I did not feel any inequalities in our commitment. In the beginning of the cooperation we clarified very openly personal goals more in a "formal way" because we thought it should be done. Team rules were never explicitly written down but, in my opinion, it was not necessary. We had the same work attitude from the start and for me it was a mixture of experiences from former team work with her, mutual trust and our perfect appreciation what made it unnecessary to write formal team rules. Moreover I think our communication was open enough to address the topic if someone felt uncomfortable. Additionally we both started with an interest in the topic and how I estimate it, it grew constantly a long the way.

### *Communication*

Since we lived really close in Karlstad and free-time was to a great extent spent together constant and immediate exchange of thoughts, ideas, and concerns as well as mutual feedback was possible. In a theoretical way: boundaries between work and private-life did not exist – which was perfectly fine for me in this period of writing the thesis because I felt constant exchange is important and necessary. From my point of view we had great, interesting, and exiting discussions which helped us to move on and to explore the topic. I felt very comfortable discussing with Barbara and I think we both enjoyed it very much. However we realized that we need to limit the discussions at one point and to make decisions. That meant that we needed to leave out ideas but since it was always done in mutual

agreement we managed that we both stand behind the decision. Additionally we made use of visualisation tools especially when we developed ideas and structures. By using, for instance, the metaplan technique we made sure that we both can follow the conversation and discussion. That contributed, in my opinion, as well to the establishment of some understandings what I consider as very important when working on a rather "soft theme" such as work-life balance. Sometimes we even made internal definitions when our own understanding differed.

### *Planning and reflecting*

From the beginning to the end we planned and reflected our process a lot. In the initial phase we set a rough time frame for the next three months and general milestones as well as deadlines were added. Each step was planned roughly which included the general planning week by week and scheduling precisely day by day. Questions for the daily preparation were for instance: What is our aim for today? What needs to be done tomorrow? In that way we ensured that we both know what is next, where the priorities and responsibilities for each of us were. The planning was always done in agreement and changes were discussed. Further we reflected constantly our procedure and process by asking questions such as: What are the requirements? Is that according to the purpose? What do we want to focus on? Why did we result in that? What needs to be done? How can we improve the process? In conclusion I think that the planning and reflecting processes were very important to image the tasks and to align our results with the purpose and general requirements.

In conclusion I would like to point out three aspects which I think helped us in our cooperation in general. First, it was important for us to frame the topic, to orientate us by the purpose and the interest groups even if it meant to "kill darlings" – simply because we could not capture everything. I found it very helpful to constantly define what is in scope and what is out of scope. Second, when making decisions or when dealing with no-right or no-wrong situations, we always gave reasons for our decisions. It was very useful to get direct feedback for applied arguments and discuss those immediately. And third, being ready for change I consider as an important attitude to deal with different demands, different approaches and ideas.

In the following I would like to highlight some personal aspects that were constantly affirmed and tightened in the process of the thesis.

### *Critics*

While researching I realized that there is always critics on theories, concepts, expressions, and so forth. On the one hand that can be kind of frustrating or even annoying but on the other hand it is important to forward topics and to improve ideas. Personally I hope that I never get discouraged by critics because if there is no starting point, there is no topic to discuss and there will be no room for change and improvement.

### *Lagom*

A further aspect which was affirmed more than once is that it is the dose-rate that counts. Especially human resources management, which might be my future profession, deals with many tightrope walk topics and may be criticised in either way – for doing too little or too much. One Swedish culture principle that I would like to keep in mind is called "lagom" which means moderate, adequate, appropriate, and proportionable.

### *Personal attitude*

I think a further aspect which is important is the personal attitude. Especially in the interviews and when communicating with Swedish people in general I got the feeling that they express a very positive but realistic attitude – this is as well an aspect which I would like keep in mind.

### *Complexity*

Complexity accompanied us throughout the whole process of writing the thesis. In my opinion that fits perfectly and absolutely to the sentence "Soft sciences solve hard problems". It was once again affirmed that it is important and necessary to speak and discuss as well as to approach complex topics. There might neither be a right or wrong nor a solution that fits everyone. But in order to improve situations and circumstances dealing with complexity, reflecting situations, and adapting processes is significant.

### **5.3 Individual reflexion** (Barbara Zeiselmeier)

#### *Sweden*

The image of Sweden as country with a high standard of living, a very good education system and advanced gender equality is quite common in Germany. On the background of this image it was interesting to get a personal impression of Sweden. As symbol for the education system I considered the Karlstad University with an impressive architecture and equipment. As well the high proportion of female professors at the university was remarkable. I appreciated the relation between professors and students as hierarchies are not emphasized. Unusual was the irrelevance of educational and professional background in the cooperation with the Working Life Science department. It is common for me to be asked about my former studies or my professional experience. I liked that this was not important here and that the focus laid on the present situation and the thesis' purpose. A difficulty resulted from the difference of formalities, customs and procedures of the universities in Karlstad and Pforzheim as the German requirements had to be fulfilled while conducting the thesis in Sweden.

#### *Cooperation in the project team*

The decision to write this thesis together with Leonie was influenced by the fact we had a very good cooperation in some smaller assignments before. It was essential for the conduction of the thesis that we were keeping and even improving this good teamwork throughout the whole process.

The cooperation between us consisted of alternating phases of discussions and exchanges, phases of individual writing and joint reflexion, coordination, and refinement. The discussions usually were quite extensive and time consuming. Ideas and arguments were generated, questioned and adapted. Often it took several loops until both of us were content and decisions were made. This process was sometimes quite exhausting but more important was the fun we had. Regarding the results as well as the cooperation we handled discussions in a satisfying and productive way. In the process of the thesis we improved our abilities to shorten discussions and come to a decision. I think this was a rather difficult task for us as we wanted to do it right. But decisions had to be made on the basis of arguments as in this "soft" topic no right and wrong exists.

Humour, patience, and mutual acceptance created an atmosphere in which both of us could question issues and discuss them without offending the other one. Furthermore the good cooperation enhanced our creativity. We produced a lot of ideas but could incorporate only some of those in the thesis.

The distribution of tasks and involvement I perceived as very even. It was an advantage that both of us had similar working attitudes what avoided the occurrence of discrepancies. As my working speed is slower than Leonie's I assume that sometimes she had to be quite patient when we needed to coordinate our papers. Through the extent of discussions our general working speed was rather slow but we kept proceeding continuously throughout the time of the thesis and maintained all milestones. Additionally I think we both enjoyed that we utilized the available time.

It contributed to our coordination that we were living in close distance. Additionally we attended private activities together. Reflecting this in regard of our thesis themes' there were hardly any boundaries between work-life and private-life and continuous spillover existed.

### *The language*

Writing the thesis in English was a big challenge and the limitations were often notable for me. Sometimes it was hard for me to get the details in literature or to express my thoughts and ideas. In order to get accustomed to vocabulary and language we spoke English in exchanges and discussions concerning the thesis. Leonie's English is more advanced than mine what helped me to improve my language knowledge.

### *Empirical Reality*

One important experience for me was the involvement in an empirical research. Before the conduction of this study I was aware that every research should be seen from a critical view as it is never possible to draw an exact and correct picture of what is assumed to be reality. The conduction of this study showed me how many filters in the design, the conduction and the evaluation exist and therefore determine the outcome. I was involved in the process of making decisions what is highlighted and what is left out, what is emphasized and what is neglected. The

result became what we made out of it, but it could have been completely different as well. Even if I knew before that no research can be really objective and gives "only" a possible view, I think I will be even more attentive and critical in the future.

*The topic work-life balance*

As the decision needed to be made to take part in a study about work-life balance I was very sceptical. Since I perceived the topic work-life balance as soft, I considered it might be hard to handle. However I was curious as well how this could be done. Additionally I appreciated the possibility to write my thesis in Sweden. The topic turned out to be as "slippery" as I expected it and it was difficult to deal with its complexity and variety.

The outcomes were interesting for me as some results of the interviews were rather unexpected. I like the five principles as they describe something complex in a simplifying way. For me the findings as well as the remarks from the human resources management perspective will be useful in my professional future. I guess that my awareness for the issue itself and for the use of the expression work-life balance will be more attentive. Additionally I am sure that I can draw something out for my own life and my "work-life balance" or however I might call it.



## **6 Final conclusion**

Work-life balance can be approached by dealing with figures, statistics, and forecasts. It can as well be addressed by looking into the individuals' situation. In this thesis the focus laid on the illustration of work-life balance by picturing experiences and perceptions of interviewed managers.

The topic work-life balance is complex and rather slippery. Three measures were used to approach it in this thesis. In order to get an overview of the theme definitions and critical aspects from the current literature and research were extracted and outlined. Further the understanding of work-life balance in the context of this thesis was given to frame the further use. Additionally in the empirical study it was aimed that the participants express their understanding of work-life balance. With this understanding it was possible to explore significant aspects of the theme.

The importance of the topic regardless of the name was evident in the study's findings. The expression itself is said to be widespread and commonly known. In the empirical study it was surprisingly not the case. The interviewed managers were not familiar with the term. However the theme turned out to be important for the participants regardless of the name because all had to deal with the demands from work-life and private-life. Five general elements which are of significance for both spheres could be identified. Those are responsibility, "do-it-good-principle", social factor, autonomy, and "no-problem principle".

Professional conclusions regarding human resources management were given by raising questions. Those are possible aspects which can be drawn into attention when dealing with the topic. The fact that every employee regardless of gender, age, nationality or family situation has a private-life makes the topic inevitable for human resources management.

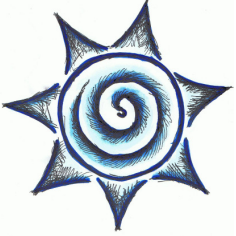
Since this study is based on a qualitative research with a limited number of participants, it can not be generalized empirically but the results are representative in an analytical and theoretical way. They capture situations people deal with in their everyday lives: the compatibility of work-life and private-life.

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## Appendix

<b>Interview guide</b>	
<b>Data</b>	Date Time Company name Name of Interviewee Age estimation
<b>Introduction</b>	Recording + confidentiality About the project and the interview About us Duration Roles in interview – Leonie & Barbara



<b>general</b>	
What is the main business of your company?	main business company
What is your position?	work title
Where is your working place?	work place

<b>work-life</b>	
<i>We would like to get an image about your work-life.</i>	
	tasks time arrangements
Would you describe your main tasks at work in a few sentences, please.	brief job description characteristics demands / requirements
Please describe a usual working schedule.	working schedule
How many hours do you usually work per week?	average hours per week
Do you regularly work overtime?	workload
How often do you work in the evening?	evenings working
How often do you work at the weekend (Saturday, Sunday)?	weekend working
In how far can you influence your working schedule?	influence work schedule
<i>We would like to talk about availability now. Availability means to be accessible in time and space</i>	
In how far does your work require that you are available outside your usual working context?	requirement
How often does your company or team members contact you outside your working hours by phone, email, blackberry...?	number of contacts
How often do you bring work home?	work home
How often do you travel overnight?	travel overnight
if available	How much time in advance do you know, when you have to be available?
	in advance
if available	Are there certain times when you are not available?
	not available
if available	Do you have influence on the time when you are available?
	influence on avail. time
if available	In how far is it your choice to be available?
	choice
<i>We were talking about your tasks and availability for work. Now we would like to know how you experience your work-life.</i>	
What do you consider as the most positive factors of your work-life?	positive factors
What are the most negative factors of your work-life?	negative factors

private-life		
<i>We were talking about different aspects of work-life. Now we have some questions concerning your private-life.</i>		
What are the main activities and tasks in your private-life?		main activities + tasks
Are there caring responsibilities in your private-life?		caring responsibilities
if caring resp.	children (age) – or elderly / disabled	who
if caring resp.	To what extent are you involved?	how much
if caring resp.	To what extent is your partner involved?	partner
Who is responsible for your household?		household
To what extent are you involved?		how much
To what extent your partner is involved?		partner
Are there further important and / or time-consuming activities or demands from other people?		other activities interests / obligations
Now we would like to know your general view of your private-life.		experience PL
What are the most positive factors in your private-life?		positive factors
Are there things that you would describe as negative?		negative factors

work-life and private-life		
<i>We would like to know how you manage to combine work-life and private-life.</i>		
If caring responsibilities or high availability	What arrangements or methods do you use to combine work-life and private-life?	arrangements
How does your company support you to combine work-life and private-life?		support policies
What supports you in your private-life?		partner, relatives, friends, circumstances...
Do you use offers from institutions or paid services?		institutions paid services
What are challenges for combining work-life and private-life?		difficulties / challenges
Do you have the feeling, that you can fulfil all requirements in a way that you are satisfied?		feeling fulfil requirements
Do you experience a conflict between work-life and private-life?		conflict
<i>Now we would like refer to the connection between your private-life and work-life.</i>		
Can you describe how your work and your private-life are linked?		link / influences
Do you transfer thoughts or moods from work to private-life and the other way around?		transfer thoughts / moods
<i>We would like to know, what the consequences are when you are available for private-life.</i>		consequences availability PL → WL
Does it sometimes happen that you have to attend private matters in your working time?		private (not only calls)
Do your working conditions allow you to be available for private-life issues during working-time? Would your working conditions allow you to be available for private-life issues during working-time?		suitable working conditions
How is the attitude in your team at work towards combining work-life and private-life? How would your team react when you deal with private matters during working time?		attitude colleagues / boss

<b>Do you think it has a negative impact on your career if you are available for private-life during work?</b> Do you think it would have a negative impact on your career if you are available for private-life during work?	impact career
<b><i>Now we will talk about the consequences for your private-life when you are available for work.</i></b>	consequences availability WL → PL
<b>How do you experience the need to be available for work?</b>	experience availability contacts, work home, travel
<b>What does your partner / your family think about it?</b>	attitudes family / friends

<b>'work-life-balance'</b>		
<b><i>In the context of work-life and private-life we would like to refer to the expression work-life balance.</i></b>		WLB expression
<b>Do you know the expression work-life balance?</b>		knowledge / familiarity
<b>What does the expression work-life balance mean to you?</b>		meaning WLB
<b>Is 'work-life-balance' a corporate issue in your company?</b>		WLB-company issue
<b>Is your company offering 'work-life-balance' related policies?</b>		WLB policies offers
<b>if yes</b>	<b>What 'work-life-balance' policies do you use?</b>	WLB policies use
<b>if yes</b>	<b>Do they support you?</b>	suitable
<b>if no</b>	<b>Do you think it is an important topic?</b>	importance in company
<b>Where do you see possibilities in your working life for improving your work-life balance?</b>		improvement work- life
<b>Where do you see possibilities in your private life for improving your work-life balance?</b>		improvement private-life
<b>To sum up: Do you think you can maintain a work-life-balance according to your definition?</b>		
<b><i>We have covered all questions. Is there something you would like to add, which we haven't covered yet?</i></b>		<i>further information?</i>
<b><i>Thank you for giving us a insight in your work and private life</i></b>		<i>thank you - CARD</i>

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