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Work-Life Balance and the Individuals' Labour Supply

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Abstract

Theoretical background: In the turbulent conditions of today's world, individuals seek stability and harmony, making the problem of work-life balance particularly vital. The issue of work-life balance is at the intersection of economic behaviour and the emotional state of the individual. Each component of the work-life system is fundamentally important for individuals, but the desire for a high level of consumption and ensuring financial security may push them to skew the balance in favour of work. However, a higher level of wages could provide sufficient levels of consumption for individuals and return to the desired work-life balance through the choice of free time for non-work activities.

Purpose of the article: The purpose of this article is to investigate the labour supply of individuals that seek to maintain a life-work balance.

Research methods: A model was constructed and analyzed in order to find the optimal labor supply of an individual, taking into account time free from work. As part of the study, a survey was also conducted among 200 individuals in Poland in 2024, which revealed some personal and psychological aspects regarding work-life balance among the respondents.

Main findings: The analysis of the constructed model, as well as the survey conducted among individuals, proves that the higher the wage level, the more individuals are willing to supply their labour. With the need to maintain individuals' work-life balance, the motivational function of wages remains crucial. The results also show that individuals with alternative sources of income have more opportunities to maintain a work-life balance.

Introduction

Today's realities are inherently unstable and unclear in many aspects. Constant changes are taking place in the socio-economic, legal, technological, environmental and other spheres. This has both advantages and new opportunities for humanity, as well as disadvantages and increased risks. In this precarious environment, people feel insecure and seek balance. It is important to distinguish between internal and external factors that create stability, factors that people can influence and factors that are beyond their control.

Considering a person as a basic economic entity of the economic system it is necessary to distinguish such functions as labour activity, consumption, adoption of various economic decisions peculiar to individuals. Historical retrospective shows that over time people have more and more rights and opportunities to influence the economic system. At the same time, sciences such as sociology and psychology are increasingly penetrating economic theory, giving economists a broader view of the nature of human decision-making. For instance, along with the traditional theory of rational choice, the theory of emotional choice is popular in economists' research (Ghalehdar, 2018; Yan et al., 2024; Khan & Mohsin, 2017; Chen et al., 2019; Ma & Liu, 2023, Rutkowska & Kozłowski, 2023), gender inequality as a phenomenon is an important issue in the research of economic discrimination (Goldin, 1990; Bernas & Major, 2000; Storm & Muhr, 2023), the theory of generations has become a subject of economic discussions (Wu et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2021; Cesarina Mason et al., 2022; Altaf & Jan, 2023).

The role of family, psychological state and mood become important factors in understanding individual's economic choices. One of the most important decisions that individuals make is the supply of their labour. It is also important that in today's environment individuals are increasingly able to choose between different work schedule options. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to investigate the labour supply of individuals that seek to maintain a life-work balance.

Literature review

The problematics of labour supply has always been a relevant topic of research and despite the many works in this area, as well as due to the already disclosed issues in these works, there are new issues and aspects that need to be studied.

Senney and Dunn (2019) studying the labour supply problem, found that workers reduce their effective labour supply depending on which shift they work. The authors argue that by working irregular hours workers are more susceptible to work stress, justified by the loss of synchronisation with normal family life. According to the study, workers adjust through changes in labour effort the effective labour supply to achieve a leisure-income equilibrium.

Although in the scale of human history not so long ago workers managed to defend the right to an 8-hour working day, in today's reality workers have opportunities to have different working schedules (Ward, 2017). Much of the spread of flexible working hours, as well as remote working, was influenced by the coronavirus pandemic, which was a unique phenomenon and required new solutions to emerge. Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022) note that after COVID-19 not all employees want to return to the offices, which largely depends not only on the conditions in the office, the comfort of the working space, the commute time, but also on the nature of the work itself and the gender of the employee. The results obtained by Deole et al. (2023) support the thesis that the experience of working from home during the pandemic has led to an increased desire among employees to work from home in the future. At the same time, a study by the Bukowska et al. (2021) showed that remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, which transformed personal home space into workspace, was both a serious nuisance and a benefit for employees. The situation differed in many ways between workers who are parents and those who are not. Workers whose children were home-schooled during the lockdown had to simultaneously work from home and supervise the learning process and the children's leisure time. Thus, the productivity of such workers decreased and the discomfort of the disruption of the balance between work and parental responsibilities increased.

Times of pandemic COVID-19 have revealed particular problems among certain categories of workers as well as populations. While some groups of workers were able to work remotely, others were at high risk of losing their jobs or, conversely, were forced to work increased overtime (Farber et al., 2023; Mukhopadhyay, 2023, Soga et al., 2022). Hasegawa et al. (2022), analysing the characteristics and labour supply behaviour of couriers at Uber Eats who took up employment during COVID-19, found that in the recession, a significant proportion of gig workers agreed to work at hourly wages below the minimum wage, also expressing a willingness to work overtime and under poor working conditions. This is mainly due to the fact that they lost job in other sectors of economy. The authors conclude that in modern conditions there is a trend of increasing popularity and demand for gig workers, while in times of recession the opportunities of the gig economy can alleviate the problem of finding income for the low-wage workers and unemployed. The authors also note the need for a systematic analysis of the possibility of protecting the rights of gig workers, which at the same time will not deprive their employers of motivation to create such jobs. It should be noted that, to some extent, the phenomenon of gig work emerged as a result of workers' desire to be independent and to manage their own time and income while supporting the ideas of Fairwork (Li et al., 2023). At the same time, there are many aspects and nuances, and even contradictions in the field of gig work, for example, Uber drivers working 10 hours a day and various freelancers working 3–5 hours a day. A non rigid approach to the form of labour organisation and working hours helped family firms to take a proactive stance in getting through the crisis in times of pandemic (Zajkowski & Żukowska, 2020;

Żukowska et al., 2019). Migrants and refugees are also a special group in the labour market, whose supply of labour and coping with job loss depends on many factors, but the importance of personal resources and emotional balance has recently received more attention (Dudek, 2021; Stepanok et al., 2023).

Results obtained by Caliendo et al. (2014) confirm the significant role of the influence of personal character and personal traits on decision-making regarding household employment. When making decisions regarding labor supply, households take into account individual factors such as family happiness, emotional comfort, mental health and various cognitive and behavioral aspects (Aoyagi & Munro, 2024; Antonides & de Groot, 2022; Hasan et al., 2020; Booth & van Ours, 2008; Chiappori & Mazzocco, 2017; Fedor & Toldi, 2017; Kawka & Borovac Zekan, 2023; Sato et al., 2020; Raja & Stein, 2014). While burnout and anxiety have become a serious problem for the contemporary worker (Cates et al., 2024; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2018), Bernas and Major (2000) observed that emotional support and hardiness can reduce stress and conflict between work and family. According to this, the issues of work-life balance have become in demand and are considered in many studies.

Initially, the issue of life-work balance arose in connection with the need for women to combine work and parental responsibilities, which contributed to the popularization of research on this topic from a gender perspective until modern times (Cardenas et al., 2024; Rothausen, 1994; Storm & Muhr, 2023; Yadav & Dabhade, 2014). Clark (2001) offers an approach to studying the matter of life-work balance from the perspective of work cultures, and Darcy et al. (2012) from the point of view of position on the career stage. ILO (2022, p.149) concluded that “paid work is about more than just meeting workers’ material needs; they also need to have the opportunity for fulfilling personal lives; that is, they need to be able to achieve a healthy work-life balance”.

The issue of work-life balance has brought a psychological dimension to the study of employee behaviour, but despite the extensive coverage of these issues in the literature, not enough attention has been paid specifically to the labour supply of individuals that seek to maintain a life-work balance.

Research methods

The aim of this article is to examine the labour supply of individuals that seek to maintain a life-work balance. The issue of work-life balance is at the intersection of economic behaviour and the emotional state of the individual. Each component of the work-life system is fundamentally important for individuals, but the desire for a high level of consumption and ensuring financial security may push them to skew the balance in favour of work. However, a higher level of wages could provide sufficient levels of consumption for individuals and return to the desired work-life balance through the choice of free time for non-work activities.

Considering the research problem, the following hypothesis was put forward:

H: The higher the wage, the less an individual has to work to meet his consumption and thus labour supply will decrease, tending to spend more time on non-work activities.

To test the hypothesis, a model was constructed and analyzed in order to find the optimal labor supply of an individual, taking into account time free from work. However, the mathematical methods used do not fully capture some of the subtleties of the issue, for example, the psychological components. As part of the study, a survey was also conducted among 200 individuals in Poland in 2024, which revealed some personal and psychological aspects regarding work-life balance among the respondents.

Results

The need for consumption and the desire to provide for various needs is the main reason for the labor supply of individuals. Motivation to work shapes a model of individual behaviour, the economic meaning of which can be mathematically represented in the form of an individuals' utility function. The utility function of individuals should include not only satisfaction with a given set of material goods, but should also reflect their free time from work, which in itself has a fundamental value. Adding free time to the utility function for individuals is an adequate reflection of the reality due to the spread of various forms of organization of the labor process and flexible work schedules (Burdin & Pérotin, 2019; Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Meeke & Hassink, 2022, Mishra & Bharti, 2024). Results obtained by Berkery et al. (2020, p. 597) show that flexi-time have a significant positive relationship with organizational profitability, which also contributes to its adoption. According to Future Forum Pulse research, workers with flexible schedule has 64% greater ability to focus on work and 39% higher productivity than workers with rigid work schedules (Constantz, 2022). In contemporary realities, free time from work is one of the key factors affecting the economic activity of individuals and their decisions. In a situation where individuals have high incomes but lack time off, the work-life balance is disrupted. In this case, the importance of labor time and the significance of income decrease, because there is no time and possibility to spend it on consumption. Accordingly, individuals need a harmonious balance of a certain level of consumption and free time from work to create a comfortable life. Thus, from the economic perspective there is a need to optimise the individuals utility function, which includes these components. Let us represent the individuals' utility function according to these two components in a form similar to the Cobb–Douglas function:

$$U = a_0 \cdot C^{a_1} \cdot l^{a_2} \quad (1)$$

where: U stands for individuals' utility function, C is household consumption, l represents individuals' free time from work, a_0 is an adjustment factor, a_1 stands for a coefficient of utility elasticity by income criterion, a_2 is a coefficient of elasticity of utility by the criterion of free time.

The multiplicative form of the individuals' utility function emphasises the equal importance of both components to individuals, as the absence of either component would reduce all utility to zero. At the same time, this form of the function adequately represents the need to balance the choice between the level of consumption (which depends on income) as well as free time.

Individuals' consumption depends on their income and purchasing power, hence the price level:

$$C = \frac{D}{P} \quad (2)$$

where: D stands for individuals' income, P is the price level.

For most individuals, the main source of income is wages and salaries, which depend on labour activity:

$$D = W \cdot L \quad (3)$$

where: W is individuals' wages, L is the working hours of individuals.

Also, individuals can receive such receipts, as various state benefits, social scholarships, and pensions (Barembuch & Bielawska, 2023; Bielawska & Kozłowski, 2022; Wajnbrener et al., 2022). Among other sources of individuals income can be the return on their investments, including dividends from bonds, interest on assets, rent from land or real estate, etc. Thus, let us present the income of individuals taking into account the above-mentioned state transfers and return on investments:

$$D = W \cdot L + B + i \cdot A \quad (4)$$

where: B are state benefit transfers, A are assets owned by the individuals, i is a percentage of income from individuals' assets.

A significant part of individuals' consumption is covered by public goods, which, although appearing to be free, are in fact provided by the state through income redistribution and the state tax system. Tax systems vary from country to country and have their own differences, however, most tax systems have various types of income tax and indirect taxes that reduce individuals' income (Binder & Haupt, 2022; Dada, 2024). Therefore, when presenting individuals' consumption and income, it is important to take into account the impact of state taxes on them:

$$D = ((W - T_W) \cdot L + B + i \cdot A) \cdot (1 - T_i) \quad (5)$$

where: T_W is a specific income tax levied by the state, T_i is the rate of indirect tax levied by the state. Thus, applying the above-mentioned refinements (2) can be represented as:

$$C = \frac{((W - T_W) \cdot L + B + i \cdot A) \cdot (1 - T_i)}{P} \quad (4)$$

The free time from work of individuals is the difference between the total available time H and the working hours of individuals. Given this dependence and all the above factors affecting consumption, we can represent the utility function of the individuals (1) as a function of a single variable L and find its maximum by this parameter:

$$U = a_0 \cdot \left(\frac{((W - T_W) \cdot L + B + i \cdot A) \cdot (1 - T_i)}{P} \right)^{a_1} \cdot (H - L)^{a_2} \xrightarrow{L > 0} \max \quad (7)$$

$$U'_L = \frac{a_0}{P^{a_1}} \cdot \left(a_1 \left(((W - T_W) \cdot L + B + i \cdot A) \cdot (1 - T_i) \right)^{a_1 - 1} \cdot (W - T_W) \cdot (1 - T_i) \cdot (H - L)^{a_2} + \left(((W - T_W) \cdot L + B + i \cdot A) \cdot (1 - T_i) \right)^{a_1} \cdot a_2 (H - L)^{a_2 - 1} \cdot (-1) \right) = 0 \quad (8)$$

$$U''_L = -W(a_1 + a_2) < 0 \quad (9)$$

The second derivative of the function is negative, so at point (8) the maximum of the function is reached. So, we find the optimal amount of working time of the individuals:

$$L^* = H \cdot \frac{a_1}{a_1 + a_2} - \frac{a_2(B + i \cdot A)}{(a_1 + a_2)(W - T_W)} = \frac{1}{a_1 + a_2} \left(a_1 H - \frac{a_2(B + i \cdot A)}{W - T_W} \right) \quad (10)$$

Based on the result (10), among the economic factors that affect the increase in the individuals' optimal labour supply are wage growth and income tax reduction. The results show that the hypothesis is not confirmed. With the need to maintain individuals' work-life balance, the motivational function of wages remains crucial. The higher the wages, the more individuals supply their labour.

In turn, receiving state benefit transfers leads to a decrease in labor supply, however, it should be borne in mind that state benefit transfers are usually received by certain groups of the population whose labor activity is limited due to various reasons.

Despite this, the obtained result should be taken into account when implementing excessive social policy to the detriment of the rational fiscal policy of the state. The optimal labor supply of individuals wishing to maintain a work-life balance also declines as investment returns on their assets increase, highlighting the need for them to save and invest. Thus, in an economic sense, individuals with alternative sources of income have more opportunities to maintain a work-life balance. By analysing the constructed model of labour supply optimisation by individuals seeking to maintain a work-life balance, we can conclude that financial literacy, which allows them to save and invest wisely, is of serious importance.

To determine the personal and psychological aspects of attitudes and aspirations to maintain work-life balance, a survey was conducted among 200 individuals. The survey was conducted on a voluntary, anonymous basis via online questionnaires in Poland. The survey was designed to identify individuals' attitudes towards the amount of time they devote to work and personal life, and to identify their willingness to offer their labour according to different levels of income. The questions in the survey concerned personal attitudes to working conditions, the amount of effort and time spent on the work performed, satisfaction with the level of remuneration, and the availability of alternative sources of income.

Table 1 presents the demographic and employment characteristics of the surveyed respondents. The majority of respondents can be described as middle-aged and older individuals with a good level of education and stable work.

Table 1. Demographic and employment characteristics

Characteristics	Items	%
Gender	Female	58
	Male	42
Age	18–25	11
	26–35	17
	36–45	30
	46–55	26
	56 and older	16
Marital status	Married	42
	Partnered	20
	Divorced	17
	Single	18
	Widowed	3
Education	Secondary	9
	Upper secondary	28
	High and Higher Education	63
Type of employment	Full-time employment	57
	Part-time employment	19
	Internship	8
	Casual employment	16

Source: Author's own study.

Table 2 presents the results regarding respondents' personal perceptions of maintaining work-life balance. The analysis of answers has shown that among the respondents, individuals who are dissatisfied with their work-life balance are more prevalent than those who are satisfied. Only 36% of respondents do not work overtime and do not take work home very often. The majority of the surveyed individuals give priority to work over their personal lives.

Table 2. Personal perception of maintaining an individual's work-life balance

Question	Opinion	%
On a scale of 1 to 5 (from <i>strongly disagree</i> to <i>strongly agree</i>) please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:		
I have a harmonious work-life balance	1	23
	2	18
	3	34
	4	14
	5	11
I have a great emotional frame of mind when I think about my work	1	14
	2	20
	3	37
	4	14
	5	15
I prioritize my work over my personal life	1	5
	2	13
	3	27
	4	29
	5	26
I often work overtime or take work home	1	17
	2	19
	3	28
	4	15
	5	21
I am satisfied with my current working schedule	1	11
	2	8
	3	35
	4	16
	5	30

Source: Author's own study.

According to the results in Table 3, the majority of respondents do not consider the level of their remuneration to be high enough and appropriate for their labour. The majority of the surveyed individuals would be willing to work more hours and be more productive if their pay increased. However, 23% of the respondents value comfortable working conditions at their jobs, despite not very high remuneration. 26% of the surveyed individuals give their best at work because of the threat of being fined or fired, while 17% are motivated to achieve the best result by the emotional satisfaction they get from it. 31% of respondents work more than 40 hours per week

due to low hourly wage rates. 15% of the interviewed individuals are in search of a new job, while others do not want to change jobs because they value the work schedule and the atmosphere at work.

Table 3. The role of financial aspects in maintaining work-life balance among individuals

Question	Opinion	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
I am satisfied with the level of remuneration for my labour	29	71
I would put in more effort at work if the pay was higher	78	22
I would work more hours if I got more remuneration for it	53	47
I give my best at work. Financial incentives are not as important to me as the emotional satisfaction of a job well done	17	83
I give my best at work. If I deviate from the standard of work, I can be fined/fired	26	74
I don't have to give my best at work. I value my job for its easy-going nature, even though the remuneration is not very high	23	77
I could find a better paying job and I am currently in search of a new job	15	85
I could find a higher paying job, but I don't want to change my work schedule	36	64
I could find a higher paying job, but I appreciate the friendly atmosphere at my current job	27	73
I could find a better paying job, but I am afraid of changes in my life	8	92
I work 40+ hours a week because my pay rate is not much above/at the minimum hourly wage	31	69
I have additional sources of income besides my salary. This gives me a feeling of independence from my job	2	98
I have additional sources of income besides my salary. This encourages me to work even harder to multiply my income even more	38	62
I have additional sources of income besides my salary. They provide me with a sense of financial security, but do not allow me to give up my job	32	68

Source: Author's own study.

Thus, the survey conducted also disproved the hypothesis among the respondents. According to the answers, the majority of respondents would be willing to work more with higher remuneration. The financial component is an important motivating component of the labour process of individuals.

Discussion and conclusions

The study demonstrates that the problem of work-life balance is multifaceted and ambiguous. The scientific literature on work-life balance indicates the importance and complexity of this phenomenon for individuals. The conducted survey has shown that for the respondents the issue of balance is not just familiar, but for the majority it is a topical issue.

The analysis of the constructed model, as well as the survey conducted among individuals, proves that the higher the wage level, the more individuals are willing to supply their labour. With the need to maintain individuals' work-life balance, the motivational function of wages remains crucial.

The analysis of the model reveals the importance of financial literacy for individuals. The optimal labor supply of individuals wishing to maintain a work-life balance declines as investment returns on their assets increase, highlighting the need for them to save and invest. Thus, in an economic sense, individuals with alternative sources of income have more opportunities to maintain a work-life balance. The results also highlight the need for balanced government social and fiscal policies to create the necessary incentives and conditions for optimal labour supply among individuals.

There are certain limitations to the study, including the fact that the survey was conducted among 200 individuals. In the future, the author plans to expand the study to broader groups on the criteria of different professions and financial literacy, as well as to deepen the aspects of psychological perception of work-life balance. The limitation of the constructed mathematical model is the impossibility, typical for this method, to take into account all factors influencing the phenomenon under study. However, in the constructed model the most significant ones are selected in the author's opinion, and even the psychological aspect, although not directly, but to some extent is reflected in the elasticity coefficients by income criterion and by the criterion of free time. In the future, the author plans to deepen the research in the direction of studying the problems of formation of elasticity coefficients depending on various components of economic and emotional behaviour of individuals.

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