WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

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Work life balance is a 'fit' between multiple responsibilities in an individual's life both at home and workplace. The concept of Work-Life balance is not entirely new in the construction lexicon, it has advanced over time. The idea of work-life balance developed from the fact that an individual have varying roles which often places mutually exclusive demands on one another; for instance, wife versus worker. However, striking a balance between work and personal life among female construction employees has been a herculean task confronted by women due to the nature of roles being played at home and the overflow of personal life over work life. This paper presents a literature review of past studies relating to work-life balance with specific focus on the construction industry. An extensive review of existing literature assist in identifying constructs such as work life balance of women employees, organisational commitment, organisational strategies for improving work-life balance and their influence on organisational performance. Findings from the literature on the links between these constructs provided the basis for the development of a conceptual approach used in demonstrating the hypothesized interaction among the constructs and their influence on organisational performance. The developed conceptual model forms the basis for further empirical study aimed at quantitatively demonstrating the nature of relationship that exists among the constructs and their joint influence on organisational performance in the context of the Nigerian construction industry.

Keywords: Work-life balance, women workers, construction industry, organisational performance

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Introduction

Construction industry globally is characterised by traditional work patterns which are often founded on gendered conjectures regarding the type of work and the continuous availability of workers (Dainty and Lingard, 2006; Lingard *et al.,* 2007). The construction industry is gender sensitive based on the perceptions that construction is "men's job" and sometimes discourages the participation of women. Streams of evidence that suggests that women who chose to pursue career in the industry often leave from it prematurely abounds in literature (e.g. Amaratunga et al., 2007; Lingards et al., 2007). The causes of this early turnover stems from the employment conditions, long working hours and the inability of the industry to adjust and accommodate family demands of female workers (Byrne et al. 2005; Fielden et al. 2000).Construction jobs in Nigeria however, falls under the categories of economic activities where women have been underscored not to have the privilege to make a successful career. However, Dlamini *et al.* (2013) argued that these traditional challenges and stereotypes confronting women with respect to their success in the industry are being broken globally, as plethora numbers of women are entering into the construction industry. More women than ever before are entering into the construction workforce, reflecting rising educational attainments, changing societal attitudes and increasing need to meet family socio-economic demands. In fact, as shown in Table 1, the total number of persons engaged in construction's formal sector increased by 3.21% in 2011 and 4.42% in 2012. Male employees constituted a very large portion of the total number of persons employed in the sector with a percentage share of 91.38% in 2010, 91.61% in 2011 and 91.52% in 2012. While there was a steady increase in the number Nigerian male employees for all three years, the females saw a decline in their numbers by 0.45% between 2010 and 2011, but an increase by 6.10% for 2012.

Table 1: Nigerian Construction Industry Workforce by Gender 2010-2012

NATIONALITY	GENDER	2010	2011	2012
Nigerian	Male	5,861,845	6,065,033	6,327,377
Nigerian	Female	398,403	396,602	420,779
NonNigerian	Male	147,633	150,719	157,664
NonNigerian	Female	7,202	8,488	7,716
TOTAL		**6,415,082**	**6,620,842**	**6,913,536**

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, (2015)

Thus, one of the main challenges confronting women in any sector construction inclusive today is maintaining a fit between work responsibilities and life most especially amongst women employees who are interested in the quality of working life and its interaction to broader quality of life (Guest, 2002). According to Kamenou (2008), women do struggle to manage concurrently the complex demands of life to a greater degree relative to their male

counterpart. This is as a result of numerous household responsibilities been undertaken by women and sacrifices being made with respect to child bearing (Broadbridge, 2009). In spite of the fact that the contributions of women workforce is being recognised in the construction industry as major contributor to economic wealth of nations and the associated growing population of women participation in the industry, globally and in Nigeria, the issues relating to work-life balance which has been a major drawback influencing the performance of many construction organisations has not been given adequate attention (Francis, 2003; Lingard et al., 2007).

However, no any known study has been undertaken to specifically consider the pressures that work exert on family as well as life of female construction workers (e.g. Devi and Kiran, 2013; 2014) and explore the impact of work-life balance on the performance of the construction industry generally in Nigeria. Nonetheless, inferences could be drawn from studies undertaken in different countries (e.g. Francis & Lingard, 2004; Lingard et al., 2007; Devi and Kiran, 2013; 2014). Many of these studies were undertaken in the context of developed countries mainly in Europe and Asia and some of the findings are country specific.

Therefore, it is considered imperative that research be undertaken to explores the extent to which work-life balance influence the performance work systems in the context of the Nigerian construction industry. However, the main aim of this paper is to develop and present a conceptual model that is empirically testable to depict the nature of relationships that exist between the demographic characteristics of respondents, organisational commitment, work-life, strategies for improving work-life balance and their joint effects on the performance of organisations within the context of the Nigerian construction industry. Precisely, this paper explains the stages of the development of the conceptual model and present the hypothesised statements based on an extensive review of relevant literature. The next section presents the conceptual framework and the hypotheses.

Theoretical perspectives of work-life balance and hypotheses

Theory has been described as a scientific approach of explaining pragmatic observations relating to a natural occurrence to give an understanding, which can be employed in the prediction of likely future behaviour of the experience being considered (Oyewobi, 2014). In explain the concept of work-life balance, quite a number of theories have been propounded by scholars such as Zedeck and Mosier (1990) and O'Driscoll (1996). This theorist postulated that there are five models that can be employed in explaining the relationship between work and life beyond work. These theories include the *segmentation* theory which suggests that non-work and work are two separate sphere of life that are lived distinctively and exhibit no influence on each other. Guest (2001) argued that the model only provide hypothetical possibility than empirical support. A *spill over* theory in contrast to segmentation theorises that work and non-work life can influence the other in either positively or negatively. This assertion has been supported by ample study; however, Guest (2001) contended that the proposition generic in nature, hence more detailed propositions regarding the nature, causes and consequences of spill over is required. The third theory is referred to as *compensation* theory which suggests that what may be lacking in one domain,

with respect to satisfactions or demands can be compensated for in the other domain. The fourth theory is an *instrumental* theory through which activities in one domain assists in achieving success in the other. Finally, the last theory as explained by Zedeck and Mosier (1990) and O'Driscoll (1996) is a *conflict* theory which proposes that with increased levels of demand in all domains of life, some hard decisions have to be made; some of these choice may conflict and possibly some significant overload on an individual may occur. However, Guest (2001) considered the five theories discussed above to be basically descriptive in nature and stressed further that for the theories to add values, there is need to integrate an assessment of their causes and consequences. Guest (2001) suggested that *border theory* propounded by Clark (2000) is another approach that can assist in the analysis of the boundary between work and the rest of life. The theory hypothesised that individuals are daily border-crossers by moving between home and work, thus with respect to the analysis of work-life *balance*, the theory can assist in clarifying how far individuals are in charge of issues that determine balance. This study is hinged on a fusion of *border, spill over* and *conflict* theories by supporting the argument that if individuals do not sense they have a 'good' mix and integration of work and non-work responsibilities, they may experience negative or conflicting outcomes, which means that a bi-directional relationship exists between the two domains; whereby work can influence non-work responsibilities (work/life conflict) and vice versa (life/work conflict) (Frone, Russell & Barnes, 1996; Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997;Frone& Carlson, 1999).

Work-Life Balance and organisational performance

Work-life balance has been defined variously in literature. For instance, Greenhaus *et al.*, (2003) defined work-life balance as the degree to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role. This definition re-echoed the assertion of Clark (2000) who defined work-life balance as the satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. As seen in the definitions above, the terms work-life balance have been used by researchers in explaining the extent to which people are equally engaged in work and non-work responsibilities. According to, Fu and Shaffer (2001) work-life can be categorised into two distinct dimensions based on role interference; family–to work and work-to-family interference. The determinants of these interferences have been identified in literature. However, in this research, the work-life balance of all employees (female) who are single, married and/or child-free, including older employees whose children have left home is the focus. This is because most of the work-life policies are considered to be more beneficial only to female employees most especially in a male dominated industry such as construction. The fragmented nature of the construction industry which allows multiple stakeholders to come together on *ad hoc* basis requires employees balancing the possibility of role conflict within the job (Francis & Lingard, 2002). The construction industry is traditionally characterised with argumentative ethos in which conflicts and disputes are unexptional, and these features often give rise to conflict between employees' work and personal lives (Francis & Lingard, 2004). Maintaining balance between work and personal lives led to the concept of work-life balance which stems from recognising the fact that a person's work-life and personal/family life may bring to bear conflicting demands on each other. Hence, the need to balance the work and non-work sphere of lives of construction employees has led to an increase in interest in work-life

balance related studies amongst construction management researchers in order to examine how maintaining balance influence their work-family relationship. Lingard *et al.*, (2007) argued that high quality work is a characteristic of high-performance work systems. However, Lingard *et al.* (2007) reported that the factors impacting on the quality of work consist of the degree to which workers enjoy job decision latitude and autonomy, as these two components are consistently linked to positive work attitudes, psychological comfort, and worker performance. Also, Lyness and Judiesch (2008) reported that a positive relationship exist between work- life balance and work performance while, Cunha and Rego (2008) stressed that a successful achievement of life responsibilities (family or parental responsibilities) results in better work performance. Moreover, a study of civil engineers and work-family conflict by Francis (2003) provide evidence that work-life balance initiatives are linked to organizational performance. Based on the foregoing this study hypothesised thus;

Hypothesis 1: work-life balance is positively related to organisational performance.

Work-life balance and work-life policies/strategies

In today's business world, employers of workforce most especially in construction business can no longer afford to ignore the importance of Work-Life balance in achieving organisational effectiveness. The work tradition within the construction industry is characterised with long hours of work as well as weekend work (Lingard *et al.*, 2007), this culture has made project staff to suffer from significantly higher levels of work-family conflict and burnout than their counterpart in either the head or regional office (Lingard and Francis 2004). This was revealed in a survey conducted in the Australian construction industry, where average working hours of site-based project staff is 62.5, office-based staff 56.1 hours and 49.0 hours among staff based in regional or head office per week. Considering the impact of this long working hours on employees performance, it could be said that introduction of an effective Work-Life balance strategy will be a major distinguishing factor that can promote talent retention and attractiveness. Although, many work-life balance strategies have been developed such as flexible work arrangements which can give support, ensure business continuity and permit workers to have work autonomy and efficiency, however, how the implementation of this will yield better outcome in the construction context remain unexplored. Yasbek (2004) contended that introduction of work-life balance policies can influence business performance in a variety of ways. Yasbek (2004) stressed further that an effective work-life strategies can assist organisations in a competitive labour market in attracting better recruits by providing effective work-life balance policies vis-à-vis competitive remuneration packages. It was also, posited that work-life balance policies is capable of reducing costs through improved rates of staff retention, this invariably will can enhance productivity (Yasbek, 2004). These arguments is well entrenched by proponents of work-life models (Zedeck& Mosier, 1990; O'Driscoll, 1996). Some according to Yasbek (2004) contended that work-life policies will reduce negative spill-overs from workers' personal life to work life, leading to productivity gains and effective strategies can also reduce extended work hours and fatigue, which have a negative effect on productivity. Other researchers (e.g. (Hunt, 1993; Konrad &Mangel, 2000; Russell, 1993; McCampbell, 1996; Baltes, et al., 1999) also provided evidence to support that the

presence of effective work-life policies can be linked to increased organisational productivity, higher levels of organisational performance and high morale of workers.

This study hence proposed that:

Hypothesis 2: Work-life balance policies and strategies will positively relate to organisational performance

Organisational commitment, work-life balance and performance

Organizational commitment is viewed as the strength of a person's identification and involvement in a particular organization which is characterized by a strong belief in accepting the organization's goals and values (value commitment) as well as readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and to remain a member (commitment to stay) (Zeinabadi, 2010). Various attempts have been made by many researchers in examining the relationship between work-life balance and organisational commitment and the results have been inconclusive. For example, Vloeberghs (2000) explore the relationship between the direct and indirect influences of work life balance (WLB) practices on hospital's stakeholders; the result revealed that greater use of work-life balance among multiple employees in hospital leads to an improved outcome. In a similar research conducted by Choudhry (2011), examination of the relationship between work-life balance and organizational commitment indicated significant positive relationship between work life balance and employee performance. Sakthivel and Jayakrishnan (2013) investigated the relationship between work life balance and organisational commitment among nurses from public and private hospitals, the findings suggest that nurses performed better and more committed to their organisation when they experience better work life balance. This affirmed the argument of Mathieu and Zajac (1990), who posited that employees satisfaction is directly proportional to their organisational or work performance, which invariably means high levels of organizational commitment may positively influence both the organization and the workers. All these findings were in consonance to the findings reported by Meyer and Allen's (1991), who reported that positive relationship exists between work-life policies and organizational commitment. However, Norton (2009) who examined examines the relationship between work-life balance and Meyer and Allen's (1991) three components of organisational commitment found that no significant relationship exists between continuance or normative commitment and perceived work-life balance while a positive correlation exists between affective commitment and perceived work-life balance. Research efforts has shown that presence of work-life balance practices, often yield positive results with regards to work-related attitudes (e.g. Nelson et al., 1990; Scandura & Lankau, 1997). For example, Beauregard and Lesley (2009) reported that readiness of organizational resources inclusive of flexibility in work hours, has been linked to effective organizational commitment and job satisfaction for all employees especially women with family responsibilities, irrespective of whether or not these resources are being put into used.

The study therefore suggests that:

Hypothesis 3: there is a positive relationship between organisational commitment, work-life balance and policies

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The focus of this section is to give details of the concepts used in this study and to present the position of the researcher regarding the current discuss on the influence of work-life balance literature in general and construction specifically. The findings from the review of literature form the basis for the development of a conceptual framework. The proposed framework is as indicated in figure 1 will be used to examine and illustrates the hypothesized relationship amongst the constructs discussed above and their impact on performance. The study will use hierarchical multiple regression to examine the nature of the relationships amongst the constructs in the framework as shown below. The proposed framework will offer primary support and form the basis for further empirical research that will focus on explaining the nature of association and joint effects of these constructs on the performance of both employ and organisation within the context of the Nigerian construction industry.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Conclusion

The issue of work-life balance and its impact as supported by many researchers hinges on ability to attract better recruits and lessening work-life conflict amongst the current employees in an organisation so as to improve organizational performance. The reviewed literature showed that work–life balance is hypothesised as a constant but non-objective subjective evaluation of job satisfaction derived by employees from multiple roles being played with respect to the significance attached by an individual at a given point in time. However, the review also indicates that there is a limited stream of evidence to corroborate the concept that work-life practices enhance performance through a reduced work-life conflict. From the review it is observed that most the studies were either undertaken in the context of Europe, America or Asia. It is believed that there is a lessons to be learned from these research efforts and pertinence of the study to our society will be examined quantitatively and qualitatively amongst people within the Nigerian construction industry especially Abuja.

The next stage of the research would involve refining the conceptual framework to achieve the main objective of the research whereby the targeted population will be encouraged to verify the existence of the proposed links and influence direction among the constructs. Findings from this study will offer an invaluable managerial data to assist organisations in applying suitable strategies that can enhance the work–life balance experience of their employees which will invariably lead to improved wellbeing of employees, their job satisfaction and commitment. Finally, it contributes to the emerging body of knowledge with respect to work–life balance with experience from Nigeria and provides a unique context-specific perspective to the conceptual understanding of the construct.

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