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Work-life Balance by Area, Actual Situation and Expectations – the Overlapping Opinions of Employers and Employees in Slovenia

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Background: The question of work-life balance (WLB) is an area where increasing attention is being paid nowadays. States, organisations and employees all have responsibility and a role to play in WLB. This article presents the important areas of the WLB by key players in this field.

Purpose: The purpose of the research was to compare and analyse the differences between the actual situation and the expectations of employers and employees with regard to specific areas of WLB in Slovenia.

Methodology: Data was gathered using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. In the first part of the research project, employers across all sectors of the economy in Slovenia were questioned and in second part focussed on employees. In order to verify the areas in which employers and employees agree and those in which there are differences in perception, multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used.

Results: The results of our research show that Slovenian organisations must pay more attention to flexible working time, the employees' ability to take time off to care for family members, time and stress management workshops and paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school.

Conclusion: A significant role in WLB is played by organisations. The incorporation of WLB strategies into the strategic and financial planning of an organisation can, in fact, have positive business, economic and social effects. Employees have to express their expectations and needs, which is the only way that employers can be made aware of their problems and help with WLB. State responsibility is to encourage all social partners to shape the living environment in which employees' can achieve a good WLB with an emphasis on gender equality.

Keywords: work-life balance, the state, employer, employee, multidimensional scaling (MDS)

1 Introduction

Finding a balance between different spheres of life or work-life balance (WLB) requires a variety of measures and good cooperation between employees, organisations, schools, nursery schools, trade unions, local communities and the state. All the stakeholders need to be aware of the existence of the problem of WLB and of their responsibilities for addressing it.

The purpose of the research presented in this article was to compare and analyse the differences between the actual situation and the expectations of employers and employees with regard to specific areas of WLB in Slovenia. It was part of the research project entitled Improving the Working Environment with Innovative Solutions (INODEL), which was part-financed by the European Union from the European Social Fund (ESF). Data was gathered using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. The INODEL

research project was carried out in two parts. In the first part of the research, a link to an online questionnaire was e-mailed to random selected organisations across all the sectors of the economy in Slovenia that had a published e-mail address either in business directories or on a company website. In the second part of the research, private and public sector employees were invited to complete the online questionnaire. A link to the online questionnaire was e-mailed to random selected organisational personnel departments across all the sectors of the economy in Slovenia. We asked them to forward our e-mail to their employees. The questions related to WLB that employees answered were identical to the employers' questions.

The research examined the following research questions:

- Do employers perceive that the WLB of employees is poor in some areas of working life?
- Do employees perceive that their WLB is poor in some areas of working life?
- Is there a discrepancy in the perception of employees' WLB in the investigated areas of working life between employers and employees?
- In order to verify the areas where employers and employees agree and those where there are differences in perception, multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used.

The first part of this article represents important areas by key players (state, organizations and employers) in the field of WLB. In the second part the results of a comparison and the differences between the actual situation and the expectations of employers and employees with regard to individual areas of WLB in Slovenia are shown.

2 Important areas and measures by key players in the field of WLB

WLB is about seeking the most effective possible combination of working life and private obligations or aspirations (Littig, 2008). WLB, situated within a capabilities framework, is a lens through which to view WLB alternatives, quality of life and wellbeing. It is a framework for analysing access to rights and policies for WLB and the possibilities of making claims for them (Hobson, 2014).

Given the increased participation of women in the labour force and in the number of dual-earner families, work-life concerns have become an important public policy issue (Bonet et al., 2013). Den Dulk et al. (2014) write that individual capabilities to find a satisfactory WLB are shaped at various levels of society: the state, the workplace and the household. Fahlen (2014) states that institutional factors (rights and laws) and societal factors (gender norms) are two key components for understanding an individual's capabilities for WLB.

Significant differences are developing between countries in terms of WLB. Vandell and Shumow (1999), OECD (2007), Hong (2009), Fernández Cordón (2009), Den Dulk and Doorne-Huiskes (2010) and Den Dulk et al. (2014) describe the following main policy instruments in WLB: childcare, working time, tax/financial aid and parental leave policies, public services, allowances to cover childcare costs, work and family incentives and broad social support for children and parents. Research by the OECD (2008), COFACE (2008), Fernández Cordón (2009), Thévenon (2008), Wharton (2012) and Hobson (2014) point out that the importance of WLB has proved significant in family planning, the temporary or permanent exit of parents from the labour market, childcare (for pre-school children, in the case of illness, the lack of synchronisation of working and school hours, during school holidays), caring for elderly members and quality of life.

Fagnani (2010) performed a comparative analysis of fertility levels in six countries (France, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the UK) and found out that where family-friendly public policy has had a positive impact on fertility levels, the common denominator has been the availability of affordable, high quality childcare, along with legal provisions regulating work leave and work schedules related to children. Begall and Mills (2011) examine the link between employment and fertility using data from 23 countries from the 2004/5 European Social Survey (ESS) for women. They found out that labour force experience, working hours, the educational attainment of a woman and her partner, the prevalence of part-time work, etc. are strong predictors of the intention to become a mother.

Hobson (2014) writes that distinctions between work and non-work have become less clear in the case of care. According to Fagan and Walthery (2014), in most countries the main reason women take part-time employment is that it is one way to balance the time demands of employment with the responsibilities of housework and providing care for children and elders. Warren et al. (2009) researched innovative social policies drawn from the European arena (universal systems of childcare, a shorter working week and shared parental leave) asking about their relevance to the WLB of low-waged coupled mothers in England. They found out that key problems persist concerning access to affordable, reliable childcare. Poorly qualified women are more likely to stop paid work when they have children, and return to marginalized, low paid jobs with short part-time hours. Fox et al. (2009) researched how fathers in the EU managed their WLB, and how alternative social policy strategies would fit with their practices and ideals. He found out that social policies supporting men's care (particularly parental leave dedicated to fathers) are needed to enhance gender equality and work family balance for men and women.

Albanese and Farr (2012) researched the complex task of finding and managing formal and informal non-parental child care in rural and semi-rural communities in two policy

jurisdictions (Ontario and Quebec) in the Ottawa Valley and discovered that finding and managing child care has a lot to do with gendered perceptions of control and powerlessness over social circumstances related to geography and government policies, as well as the changing and at times precarious economic/labour market circumstances. Vandell and Shumow (1999) state that families in America must continue to arrange care for their school-age children, because the school day is considerably shorter than an adult's full-time workday. Child care is important between school holidays, teacher in-service days and summer vacations as well. Some parents are able to fill this time with formal after-school programs; others patch together care by shifting work schedules, hiring sitters, relatives or neighbours, and setting up activities such as piano lessons and scouts on different days; some children take care of themselves.

The European Economic and Social Committee (2007) encourages social partners to launch regional-level and local-level initiatives, bringing together committed players (businesses, works councils, parents' groups, faith-based communities, sports clubs and local representatives) in order to shape the living environment in such a way as to secure the best possible WLB. COFACE (2008) and Hinkin and Tracy (2010) also emphasise that:

- leave schemes (encompassing security aspects and flexibility) meeting the wide variety of family needs must be enshrined in legislation,
- part-time work must be upgraded (payment, social rights, status on the labour market),
- flexible working time arrangements must be further promoted,
- the times of public services must be coordinated (pre-school childcare provision, out-of-school childcare provision (including during school holidays and while a child is sick), school meals, home care services, offices),
- gender equality must be taken into account (the changing roles of men and women).

The findings of the OECD (2008) indicate that a significant role in the WLB is played by organisations (employers). According to Den Dulk et al. (2014), organisations can influence the capabilities and freedom of employees to balance work/life arrangements. They write that work/life policy needs to be integrated into an organizational culture that is concerned with the responsibilities of employees outside of work. Wharton (2012) writes that organizations play a critical role in shaping employees' work-family experiences. Changing the workplace is central to improving the quality of people's work-family experience. Working conditions and workplace policies can ease or exacerbate people's efforts to handle their home and work responsibilities. According to Hobson (2014), organisations have become a mediator in granting or denying claims, an actor initiating new policies in flexible working schemes, and

even a place where information is disseminated or withheld. Working time policies can lead to enhanced capabilities for WLB. The possibility of organizing one's working time (flexibility) can be a capability for participating in earning and caring as well.

Wharton (2012) states that in general, larger organizations are more likely to have the resources to offer work-family policies than those with fewer employees. Offering family-friendly policies helps these companies signal their concern for employees and their families, and these signals are good for recruiting top employees. Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar (2014) researched the capabilities for WLB in the service sector and the IT industry in Slovenia and found out that the interconnectedness of the structural, firm level and individual characteristics (gender, skills, education, professional or nonprofessional status, support networks (family, parents and colleagues)) describe the employees' capabilities to make claims for WLB.

ILO (2004a), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007), the European Economic and Social Committee (2007) and Hong (2009) list the following family-friendly organisational policy measures:

- the legal security of an employment contract,
- long-term and non-discriminatory career plans,
- the introduction of working time arrangements (e.g. employees plan their working day, part-time work, flexible start and end times, shorter working hours/days, tele-working, a compressed working week, job sharing, time-banking),
- schemes giving staff the opportunity to keep in touch with work during parental leave,
- assistance in the organisation of childcare (e.g. assistance in finding and paying for childcare, the organisation of childcare),
- special leave (e.g. paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school),
- support in caring for elderly relatives or other relatives who need care.

Hinkin and Tracy (2010) and Arbon et al. (2012) write that proactive scheduling appears to be popular with employees. Their primary approaches to workplace flexibility are job sharing, a compressed work week, and flexitime. Hashiguchi (2010), Buehler and O'Brien (2011) mention working at home and switching full-time to part-time hours. Den Dulk et al. (2014) write that flexible working arrangements allow employees to adapt working hours or place of work to responsibilities outside work, for instance to work from home in the case of a sick child or other family member. Galea et al. (2013) researched how employees experience the influence of flexible working hours on their WLB. The main finding is that working with flexible working hours, if supported by the management and fitting in with the working culture, is highly appreciated for both private

and work-related reasons. The more family responsibilities the respondents have, the more they tend to perceive flexible working hours as a necessity rather than an extra benefit.

Kelly et al. (2011) studied a schedule flexibility initiative at Best Buy Co. Inc. and discovered that white-collar workers who participated in the initiative reported lower levels of work-life conflict and higher levels of WLB than comparable employees, which lends support to those who believe that changes in working conditions (including those made possible by an employee's use of a workplace policy) can be effective in improving employees' work and family lives.

Bonet et al. (2013) used data on women's work and fertility histories from the Spanish Continuous Sample of Working Histories and analysed whether more women changed temporary contracts to self-employment upon motherhood than those with permanent contracts. They found out that women employed with a temporary contract are much more likely to switch to self-employment upon motherhood than women with a permanent contract. They interpret the result as evidence that temporary working women have a greater need than permanent ones to look for an alternative employment that allows them better WLB.

The ILO (2004) underlines the fact that WLB strategies incorporate into the strategic and financial planning of an organisation have positive effects on business, economic and social areas. Kelly et al. (2008) write that an understanding of how organizations respond to work-family issues is also important due to the impact of these responses on employees' work attitudes and behaviour and family life, as well as their impact on the organization's own reputation and success. Helpert (2005), Davis and Kalleberg (2006),

Van Dyne et al. (2007), Kelly et al. (2008) and Kossek and Michel (2010) write that flexibility has a positive impact on WLB, motivation, job satisfaction, productivity and retaining the best employees, as well as better quality services and products, increased commitment to the organization and lower costs; all of which have a positive impact on efficiency.

3 Methodology

Research into WLB in Slovenia was performed by the Faculty of Administration, University of Ljubljana. It was part of the research project entitled Improving the Working Environment with Innovative Solutions (INODEL), which was part-financed by the European Union from the European Social Fund (ESF). The purpose of this research was to compare and analyse differences between the actual situation and the expectations of employers and employees with regard to individual areas of WLB in Slovenia.

Data was gathered using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. The INODEL research project was carried out in two parts. In the first part of the research (February 2011), a questionnaire was e-mailed to n = 18,175 randomly selected organisations across all sectors of the economy in Slovenia with a published e-mail address either in business directories or on a company website. The response rate was 5.6%; a total of n = 1,009 organisations responded. The representatives of the organisations were, in the largest number of cases, human resources officers (34.9%), followed by directors and/or CEOs (25.3%), human resources managers (17.4%) and secretaries/assis-

Table 1: First research - sample characteristics and population comparison (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS), 2009)

Organization	Population	Sample	χ^2	p
Type				
Limited liability and public	247037 (91.6%)	920 (91.3%)	0.14	0.709
Other	22521 (8.4%)	88 (8.7%)		
Size				
≤ 250	486804 (76.6%)	975 (96.8%)	227.96	< 0.001
> 250	148446 (23.4%)	32 (3.2%)		
Region				
Central	46599 (34%)	360 (35.7%)	4.06	0.255
Podravska	19042 (13.9%)	138 (13.7%)		
Savinjska	14784 (10.8%)	121 (12%)		
Other	56618 (41.3%)	389 (38.6%)		

Table 2: Second research - sample characteristics and population comparison (Labour force, SORS, 2011)

Characteristic	Population	Sample	χ^2	p
Gender				
Male	456823 (55.8%)	412 (53.2%)	1.94	0.16
Female	362152 (44.2%)	362 (46.8%)		
Education				
Primary	123631 (15.2%)	3 (0.4%)	804.1	<0.001
Secondary	477356 (58.6%)	225 (29.1%)		
Postsecondary or higher	213789 (26.2%)	546 (70.5%)		
Age				
< 25	35307 (4.3%)	10 (1.3%)	96.53	<0.001
26 do 30	97176 (11.9%)	47 (6.1%)		
31 do 35	128876 (15.7%)	107 (13.8%)		
36 do 40	126973 (15.5%)	99 (12.8%)		
41 do 45	126625 (15.5%)	180 (23.3%)		
46 do 50	129007 (15.8%)	173 (22.4%)		
51 do 55	109204 (13.3%)	104 (13.4%)		
> 55	65807 (8%)	54 (7%)		

tants (13.1%). The sample included 91.3 % limited liability and public companies, 96.8 % companies with 250 or fewer employees and 35.7% companies from the Central Slovenia region. Among the companies in the sample, the share of large companies, i.e. companies with more than 250 employees, was too small compared to the population. The structure of the organisations by region and legal status was similar to the structure of the statistical population (Table 1).

In the second part of the research (June 2011), employers were invited to complete an online questionnaire. A link to the online questionnaire was e-mailed to random selected organisational personnel departments across all sectors of the economy in Slovenia. We asked them to forward our e-mail to their employees. The questions related to WLB that the employees answered were identical to employers' questions. A total of $n = 774$ respondents completed the questionnaire. The sample included 53.2 % women, 29.4 % respondents with secondary education and 27 % respondents with post-secondary education or higher. 21.2 % of the respondents were under 36 years old. In comparison to the economically active population of Slovenia, the sample included too many people with at least a post-secondary qualification and too few people under the age of 36 (Table 2).

The research examined the following research questions:

- Research question 1: Do employers perceive that the WLB of employees is poor in some areas of working life?

- Research question 2: Do employees perceive that their WLB is poor in some areas of working life?
- Research question 3: Is there a discrepancy in the perception of employees' WLB in the investigated areas of working life between employers and employees?

The WLB of employees in the following areas of working life was measured on a 5-point scale (1 = very poor; 5 = excellent):

- flexible working time,
- compressed working week,
- half- or part-time work,
- working from home,
- non-discrimination against women, pregnant women, parents and other groups of employees with greater needs for a better WLB,
- childcare provision for pre-school children and out-of-school care for school-age children (e.g. school holidays, national holidays),
- paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school,
- outings or social gatherings for employees' families,
- the ability to take time off to care for other/elderly family members or a partner,
- child supervision to and from school (e.g. escort on the bus),
- workshops on time management and stress management (to manage employers' and employees' time and stress).

The WLB of each area of working life was assessed and the mean (median; standard deviation) assessment was calculated. As the distribution of answers for each area was non-normal, the differences in the assessment between areas with a similar mean (median) assessment were examined using the Wilcoxon signed-ranked test. Where the difference was statistically significant, a different rank was assigned to each area otherwise areas were given the same rank. Ranks were assigned in such a way that the area with the highest mean and median assessment of WLB was given a rank of 1. Low ranks thus indicated a good situation in the area, while high ranks indicated a poor situation. The same procedure was used in the *assessment of expectations* by areas.

In the assessment of working areas, gender differences and differences between respondents with or without pre-school or school age children were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test, while differences between age groups were tested using the Kruskal-Wallis test. All the tests were carried out at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level.

A direct comparison of employees' and employers' answers was not straightforward because sampling was done independently for the first and second part of the research and the sample did not include employees and employers from the same companies. Still, comparison of the answers should be possible if the two groups were comparable regarding the control variable. The control variable was a general assessment of the WLB of employees. The answers from companies with a poor general WLB for their employees were compared to the answers of employees who assessed their general WLB as poor. In order to determine the working areas in which employers and employees agree regarding WLB and those in which there are differences in

perception, multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used. The items in the research included areas of work-life balance in terms of both actual situation and expectations. The difference between them was calculated in terms of the similarity of the assessment given by employers and employees. A good aspect of MDS is the reduction of a multidimensional space into a manageable number of dimensions, which throws the clearest light on the variance of variables.

4 Results of the research

The left-hand side of Table 3 outlines the mean (median; standard deviation) WLB of employees as perceived by employers in each of the investigated working areas, the tested pair of areas with a similar mean assessment, the result of the Wilcoxon signed-ranked test and assigned rank. The right-hand side of the table gives a similar outline for expectations.

In the opinion of *employers*, WLB is best in the area of non-discrimination against groups of employees. This area is followed by flexible working time, a compressed working week and outings/social gatherings for employees' families. In their opinion, the poorest WLB is to be observed in the provision of childcare facilities for pre-school children and out-of-school childcare facilities for school-age children (e.g. during holidays), but employees' expectations of balance in this area are lower in the opinion of the employers as well.

Areas by assigned ranks regarding the situation and expectations as observed by employers are showed in Fig. 1. The upper right quadrant shows areas where, in the opin-

Table 3: Average assessments (median; standard deviation) of the situation and expectations by areas and attributed rank (R), arranged by R for expectations – employers

AREAS	SITUATION	Pair	Z	R	EXPECTATIONS	Pair	Z	R
1 Flexible WT	3.45 (4; 1.2)	1;5	-2.1*	3	3.94 (4; 0.77)	1;2	-2.3*	1
2 Non-discrimination	3.64 (3; 0.92)	2;6	-2.7**	1	3.86 (4; 0.79)	2;3	-3.0**	2
3 Compressed WW	3.46 (4; 1.24)	3;1	-0.3	3	3.73 (4; 0.93)	3;4	-0.8	4.5
4 Child supervision TFS	2.51 (3; 0.82)	4;7	-5.3*	6	3.71 (3; 0.88)	4;5	-0.6	4.5
5 Part-time work	3.31 (4; 1.4)	5;4	-12.6**	5	3.68 (3; 0.89)	5;6	-0.04	4.5
6 Family gatherings	3.49 (4; 1.13)	6;3	-0.5	3	3.69 (4; 0.7)	6;7	-3.6**	4.5
7 Working from home	2.36 (2; 0.77)	7;11	-6.9**	7	3.49 (3; 1.14)	7;8	-2.4*	7
8 Paid leave FTS	1.48 (1; 0.67)	8;9	-5.4**	10	3.4 (3; 0.51)	8;9	-15.4**	8
9 Childcare during work	1.34 (1; 0.48)			11	3.08 (3; 0.27)	9;10	-1.7	10
10 SM workshops	1.86 (2; 0.94)	10;8	-9.9**	9	3.03 (3; 0.87)	10;11	-1.3	10
11 Help to take care of FM	2.09 (2; 0.86)	11;10	-5.9**	8	2.98 (3; 0.83)			10

Notes: WT = working time; WW = working week; FTS = first day of school; FM = family members; SM = stress management; TFS = to and from school; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

ion of employers, the situation is good and expectations are high, while the lower left quadrant shows areas where the situation is poor and expectations are low. The areas in the upper left and lower right quadrant are areas where there is a greater discrepancy between the actual situation and expectations.

Areas where, in employers' opinion, the situation is good and expectations are high are flexible working time, non-discrimination against groups of employees with a greater need for WLB, outings and social gatherings for employees' families, and half-time or part-time work. The situation is poor regarding paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school, working from home, workshops on time management and stress management, the ability to take time off to care for family members, and the provision of childcare facilities for pre-school and school-age children, but these are areas where, in the employers' opinion, the expectations of employees are also poor. In all the listed working areas form the upper right and lower left quadrant, in the opinion of employers, the situation reflects the expectations of employees and therefore no special attention or time investment in improvement in these areas is needed. The only discrepancy between the situation and the expectations, in the opinion of employers, exists regarding child

supervision to and from school. This is the only area where the situation is poor while expectations are high.

In the opinion of *employees*, WLB is best in the area of non-discrimination against groups of employees. This area is followed by half-time or part-time work. The following areas received equally high assessments: flexible working time, working from home, and outings/social gatherings for employees. The worst situation, in the opinion of employees, is paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school. The provision of child supervision to and from school is also very poor. Employees' expectations are highest regarding the organisation of childcare for pre-school children and out-of-school childcare for school-age children during school holidays. This is followed by a whole group of areas where expectations regarding balance are equally strong or high. These are the areas of non-discrimination against groups of employees, paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school, outings/social gatherings for employees' families, the ability to take time off to care for other family members, child supervision to and from school and workshops on time management and stress management. Expectations are lowest regarding flexible working time and working from home. These are also areas that, in the opinion of employees, are relatively well regulated. The discrepancy

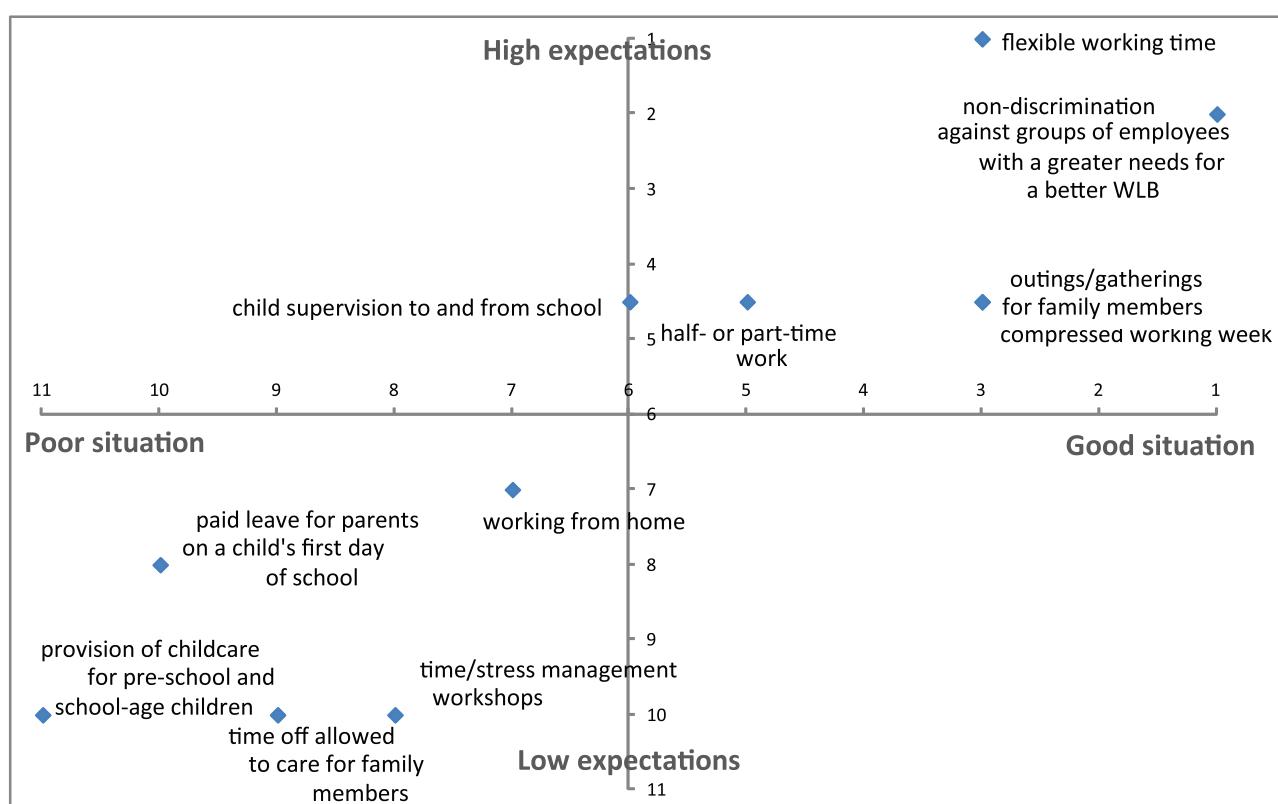


Fig. 1: Ranks of areas in terms of the median assessment of the actual situation and expectations – employers

Table 4: Average assessments (median; standard deviation) of the situation and expectations by areas and attributed rank (R), arranged by R for expectations – employees

AREAS	SITUATION	Pair	Z	R	EXPECTATIONS	Pair	Z	R
1 Childcare	2.5 (3; 0.81)	1;7	-3.8**	6.5	4.50 (5; 0.5)	1;2	-11.5**	1
2 Family gatherings	2.89 (3; 0.88)	2;10	-1.9	4	4.04 (4; 0.82)	2;3	-0.9	4.5
3 Non-discrimination	3.69 (4; 0.59)	3;9	-13.8**	1	4.02 (4; 0.83)	3;4	-0.2	4.5
4 SM workshops	2.05 (2; 1.19)	4;5	-7.6**	9	4.01 (4; 0.83)	4;5	-1.3	4.5
5 Child supervision TFS	1.52 (1; 0.83)	5;6	-3.7**	10	3.96 (4; 0.82)	5;6	-0.04	4.5
6 Paid leave FTS	1.44 (1; 0.62)			11	3.95 (4; 0.79)	6;7	-0.2	4.5
7 Help to take care of FM	2.44 (2; 0.89)	7;4	-9.1**	8	3.94 (4; 0.82)	7;8	-14.7**	4.5
8 Compressed WW	2.57 (2; 1.2)	8;1	-0.4	6.5	2.93 (3; 1.27)	8;9	-2.2*	8
9 Part-time work	3.07 (3; 0.96)	9;2	-3.5**	2	2.77 (3; 1.25)	9;10	-3.6**	9
10 Flexible working time	2.79 (3; 0.95)	10;11	-1.7	4	2.55 (3; 1.2)	10;11	-0.7	10.5
11 Working from home	2.68 (3; 1.07)	11;8	-2.1*	4	2.47 (2; 1.21)			10.5

Notes: WT = working time; WW = working week; FTS = first day of school; FM = family members; SM = stress management; TFS = to and from school; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

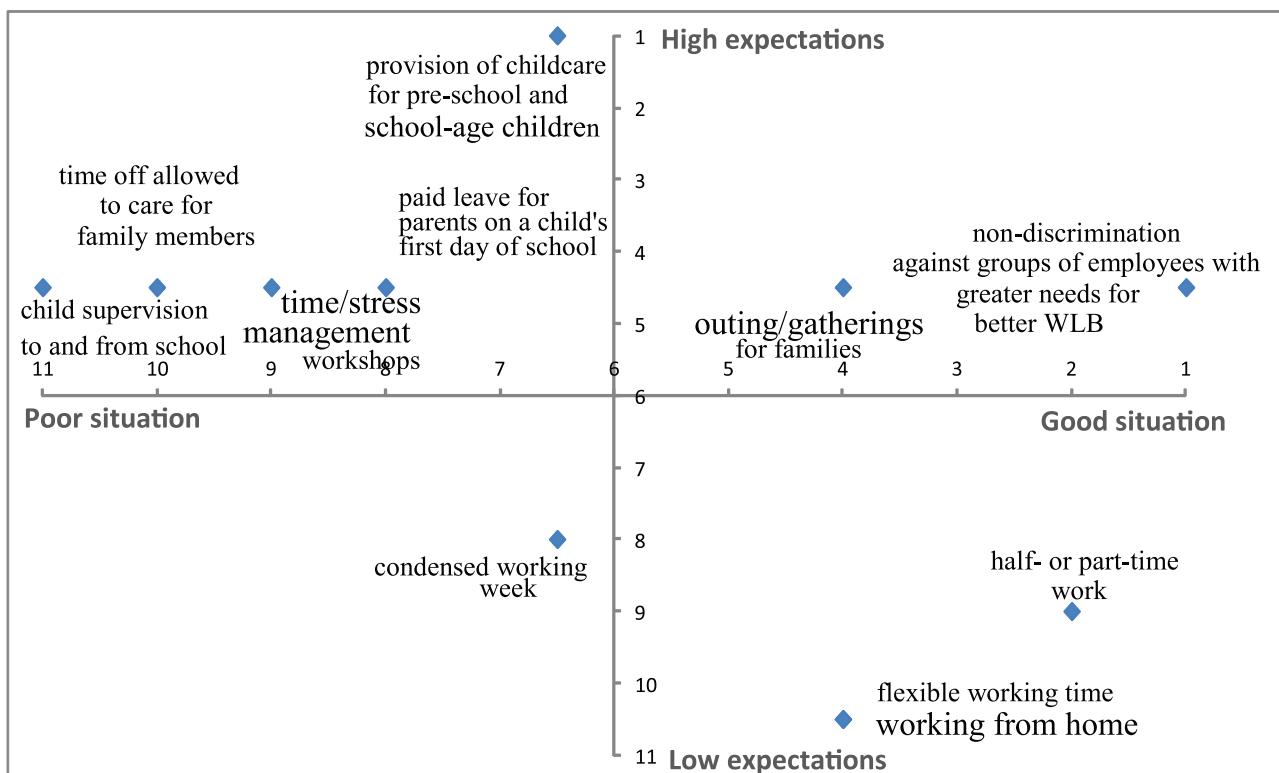


Fig. 2: Ranks of areas in terms of the median assessment of the actual situation and expectations – employees

between the current situation and employee expectations is shown in Fig. 2.

In the opinion of employees, the discrepancy between the situation and expectation exists in several working areas. The balance is poor but the expectation of balance is high in the following areas:

- the ability to take time off to care for elderly parents, a partner and other family members,
- child supervision to and from school,
- paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school,
- the provision of childcare for pre-school children and out-of-school childcare for school-age children during holidays, and
- workshops on time management and stress management.

Gender differences are present in the area of child supervision to and from school ($U = 56038$; $p = 0.037$), paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school ($U = 49430.5$; $p = 0.026$) and stress management workshops (58227; $p = 0.01$). Men perceive their WLB regarding child supervision to and from school and paid absence on a child's first day of school as poorer than women, while

expectations of balance in these two areas are equally high in both genders. In the current situation, women perceive that companies organize stress management workshops to a less satisfactory extent than men, while expectations are high in both genders. Expectations regarding stress management workshops are higher for employees without children or with older children in comparison to employees with preschool and primary school age children ($U = 54423.5$; $p = 0.03$). No age differences were found.

The actual situation is better, in comparison to expectations, in the field of flexible working time, working from home and the possibility of half-time or part-time work. If the situation in these fields was worse, expectations would perhaps be different as well. It is expected that in areas that are well regulated, employees cannot sense a discrepancy and consequently have no expectations for improvement.

To be able to compare the answers of employers and employees, only those employers who considered the general WLB of their employees to be poor and only employees who stated that their WLB is poor were selected for analysis. It is reasonable to expect employers and employees with a poor WLB to have a similar perception of the situation in

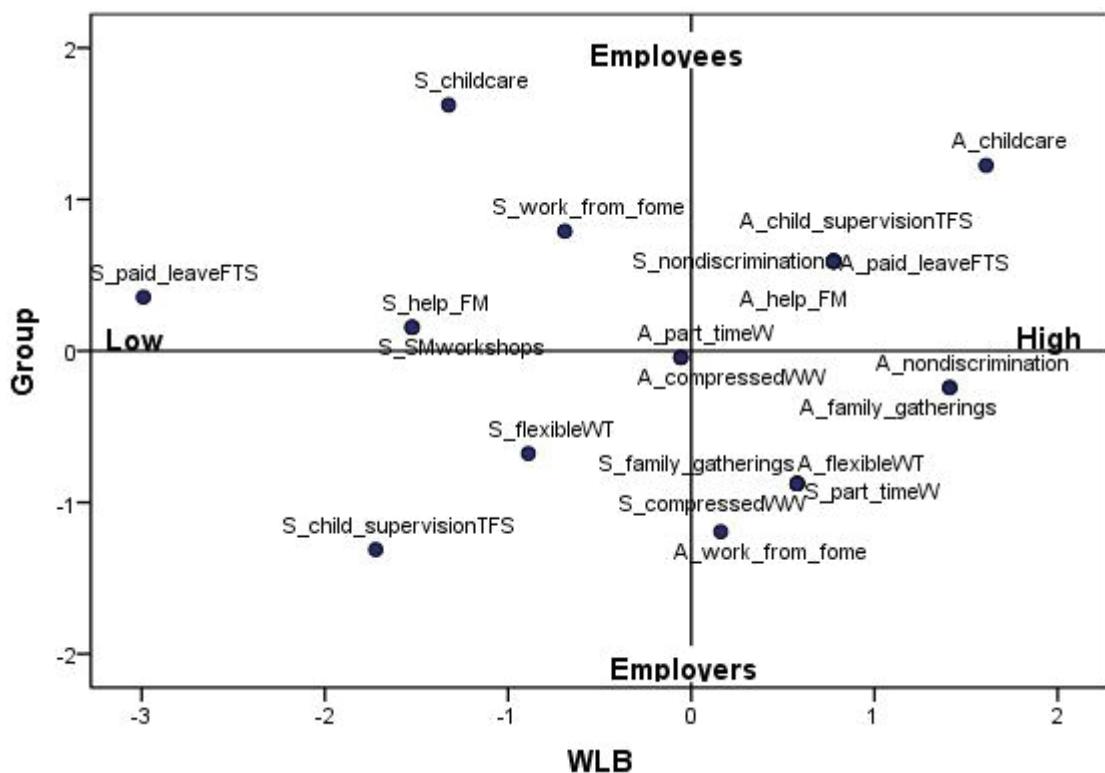


Fig. 3: The similarity between assessments of situations and expectations by areas

Notes: S – situation; A – expectations; WT = working time; WW = working week; FTS = first day of school; FM = family members; SM = stress management; TFS = to and from school; W = work.

different areas, and therefore that any differences are the consequence of poor communication between them.

Using MDS, all the variability was fully clarified in two dimensions. The first dimension (the *x* axis in Fig. 3) relates to the assessment of work-life balance. The areas, situations and expectations that received lower scores are on the left-hand side of Fig. 3, while those with better scores are on the right-hand side. The second dimension (the *y* axis) divides the two groups studied, i.e. employers and employees. Areas in the upper half of the figure are rated higher by employees, while those in the lower half are rated higher by employers. This means that although an area may be generally poorly rated and in the left half of Fig. 3, one group might still rate it higher than the other.

The actual situation in the various areas is for the most part rated lower than expectations, with a few exceptions. The latter include non-discrimination against groups of employees, social gatherings for employees' families, a compressed working week and half-time work. The last three areas were given a higher rating by employers, while the first was rated higher by employees. Expectations for a compressed working week and half-time work are generally less strongly expressed by the two groups, while expectations in terms of non-discrimination against groups of employees with a greater need for WLB and the desire for social gatherings for employees' families are high. The perception of the areas mentioned is sufficiently well-balanced both between the two groups and from the point of view of the overlap of assessments of the situation and expectations. These areas are therefore unproblematic and do not require significant attention.

Areas where the perception of the two groups is broadly consistent but that require more attention are: the ability to take time off to care for family members, time and stress management workshops and paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school. The situation in all these areas is poor, while expectations are high, with both employers and employees aware of this to a similar extent.

A significant discrepancy between the views of employers and employees can be observed in the case of child supervision to and from school, working from home, the provision of childcare for pre-school children and school-age children, and flexible working time. Employers consider child supervision to and from school to be better regulated than employees do. At the same time, employees' expectations of balance in this area are high. It should therefore be pointed out to employers that more attention could be devoted to this area.

Working from home is an area that employers consider to be poorly regulated and deserving of their attention, since they believe that employees have specific expectations with regard to the regulation of this area. In fact, however, this area is less important from the point of view of employees.

Employers believe that the provision of childcare for pre-school children and out-of-school care for school-age

children during school holidays is more problematic than employees do. At the same time, however, balance in this area appears more important to employees than it does to employers. Employers are therefore unaware of the expectations of employees in this area to a considerable extent.

Flexible working time is an area for which the assessment of the situation on the part of employees is lower than the assessment of employers. At the same time, employers believe the expectations of balance in this area are higher than that expressed by employees. This is actually an area that does not require particular attention from employers.

5 Discussion and conclusion

WLB demands various measures and the cooperation of all stakeholders – employees, organisations, schools, nursery schools, trade unions, local communities and the state. To this end, developed countries have developed various models of solutions. These countries place gender equality in childcare and caring for the elderly in the foreground, while at the same time implementing a range of policies tied to public services, parental leave, childcare, flexible work and working time arrangements, taxation and financial support.

Research to date in the field of WLB (e.g. Albertsen (2007); Joyce et al. (2010); Kossek, Michel (2010); Hobson (2014)), has shown that organisations are devoting particular attention to the introduction of innovative working time models, employee participation in decisions on the quantity and location of work, support in the organisation of childcare, support in the provision of care for elderly relatives or relatives in need of care and quality of life.

Employees must express their expectations and needs, since otherwise they cannot expect employers or the state to resolve matters for them on their own initiative.

The research this article draws on compared and identified differences between the actual situation and the expectations of employers and employees for individual areas of WLB in Slovenia. A direct comparison of the employees' and employers' answers was not straightforward because sampling was performed independently for the first and second part of the research and the sample did not include employees and employers of the same companies. Still, comparison of answers should be possible if the two groups were comparable regarding the control variable. The control variable was a general assessment of the WLB of employees. The answers from companies with a poor general WLB of their employees were compared to the answers of employees who assessed their general WLB as poor.

It was found that, in the opinion of the employers, WLB is best in the area of non-discrimination against groups of employees. This area is followed by flexible working time, a compressed working week and outings/social gatherings for employees' families. In their opinion, the poorest WLB is to be observed in the provision of childcare facilities for

pre-school children and out-of-school childcare facilities for school-age children (e.g. during holidays).

Areas where, in the employers' opinion, the situation is good and expectations are high are:

- flexible working time,
- non-discrimination against groups of employees with a greater need for WLB,
- outings and social gatherings for employees' families,
- half-time or part-time work.

The situation is poor regarding:

- paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school,
- working from home,
- workshops on time management and stress management,
- the ability to take time off to care for family members,
- the provision of childcare facilities for pre-school children and school-age children.

These are the areas regarding which where, in the employers' opinion, the expectations of employees are poor as well, so therefore no special attention or time investment in improvement in these areas is needed. The only discrepancy between the situation and expectations in the opinion of the employers is in the area of child supervision to and from school. This is the only area where the situation is poor while the expectations are high.

In the opinion of the employees, WLB is best in the area of non-discrimination against groups of employees. This area is followed by half-time or part-time work. The following areas received equally high assessments:

- flexible working time,
- working from home,
- outings/social gatherings for employees.

The worst situation, in the opinion of the employees, involves paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school. The provision of child supervision to and from school is also very poor. Employees' expectations are the highest regarding the organisation of childcare for pre-school children and out-of-school childcare for school-age children during school holidays.

Areas where expectations regarding balance are equally strong or high are:

- non-discrimination against groups of employees,
- paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school,
- outings/social gatherings for employees' families,
- the ability to take time off to care for other family members,
- child supervision to and from school,
- workshops on time management and stress management.

The expectations are lowest regarding flexible working time and working from home. These are also areas which, in the opinion of employees, are relatively well regulated.

In the opinion of employees, the discrepancy between the situation and the expectation exists in several working areas. The balance is poor but the expectation of balance is high in the following areas:

- the ability to take time off to care for elderly parents, a partner and other family members,
- child supervision to and from school,
- paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school,
- the provision of childcare for pre-school children and out-of-school childcare for school-age children during holidays, and
- workshops on time management and stress management.

Gender differences are present in the area of child supervision to and from school, paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school and stress management workshops. Men perceive their WLB regarding child supervision to and from school and paid absence on child's first day of school as poorer than for women, while expectations of balance in these two areas are equally high in both genders. In the current situation, women perceive that companies organize stress management workshops to less satisfactory extent than men, while expectations are high in both genders. Expectations regarding stress management workshops are higher for employees without children or with older children in comparison to employees with preschool and primary school age children. No age differences were found.

The actual situation is better, in comparison to expectations, in the field of:

- flexible working time,
- working from home,
- the possibility of half-time or part-time work.

If the situation in these fields was worse, expectations would maybe also be different. It is expected that employees cannot sense a discrepancy in areas that are well regulated, and consequently have no expectations of improvement.

In order to verify the areas in which employers and employees agree and those in which there are differences in perception, multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used. A comparison between employers who considered the general WLB of their employees to be poor and employees who stated that their WLB is poor was made.

The actual situation in the areas in question is for the most part rated lower than expectations, with a few exceptions. The latter include:

- non-discrimination against groups of employees,
- social gatherings for employees' families,
- a compressed working week,
- half-time work.

The last three areas were given a higher rating by employers, while the first was rated higher by employees. These areas are unproblematic and do not require signifi-

cant attention, because the perception of these areas is sufficiently well-balanced.

Areas where the perception of the two groups is broadly consistent but that require more attention are:

- the ability to take time off to care for family members,
- time and stress management workshops,
- paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school.

The situation in all these areas is poor, while expectations are high, with both employers and employees aware of this to a similar extent.

A significant discrepancy between the views of employers and employees can be observed in the case of:

- child supervision to and from school,
- working from home,
- the provision of childcare for pre-school children and school-age children,
- flexible working time.

Employers consider child supervision to and from school to be better regulated than employees do. At the same time, employees' expectations of balance in this area are high. It should therefore be pointed out to employers that more attention could be devoted to this area.

Working from home is an area that employers consider to be poorly regulated and deserving of their attention, since they believe that employees have specific expectations with regard to the regulation of this area. In fact, however, from the point of view of employees, this area is less important.

Employers believe that the provision of childcare for pre-school children and out-of-school care for school-age children during school holidays is more problematic than employees do. At the same time, however, balance in this area appears more important to employees than it does to employers.

Flexible working time is an area where the assessment of the situation on the part of employees is lower than the assessment of employers. At the same time, employers believe expectations of balance in this area to be higher than expressed by employees. This is actually an area that does not require particular attention from employers.

Organisations play a significant role in WLB. The incorporation of WLB strategies into the strategic and financial planning of an organisation can, in fact, have positive business, economic and social effects. The results of our research show that more attention has to be paid to flexible working time, the employees' ability to take time off to care for family members, time and stress management workshops and paid leave for parents on a child's first day of school. In this respect, it is also important to be aware of the responsibility of employees, since they are the only ones able to express their expectations and needs and only in this way can employers be made aware of their problems and help them address the problem of work-life imbalance.

It needs to be mentioned that the state has the impact on employees' WLB as well. The state's responsibility is to encourage all social partners to shape the living environment in which employees' can balance their work and private life with an emphasis on gender equality. This includes e.g. enshrining into legislation leave schemes that implicate the wide variety of family needs, the promotion of flexible working time arrangements, time coordination of public service offices (pre-school childcare provision, out-of-school childcare provision (including in school holidays and while a child is sick), school meals and home care services).

The research does not actually give a satisfactory explanation of the factors that influence the assessment of WLB on the part of the two groups of participants. It should also be emphasised that the conclusions regarding the general assessment of balance relate to two different populations, and therefore the shares expressed are not mutually comparable. It is also necessary to be aware of the fact that, in the case of organisations, the response rate was low, while in the case of employees, partly as a result of the survey method used (online questionnaire), the sample included a large proportion of highly educated personnel, which may also be reflected in the results. The conclusions are thus limited to the part of the population included in the sample.

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Appendix 1: Normal distribution of variables – employers

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Flexible working time	.899	982	.000
Compressed working week	.891	982	.000
Half- or part-time work	.854	982	.000
Working from home	.482	982	.000
Non-discrimination against employees	.843	982	.000
Provision of childcare	.613	982	.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school	.684	982	.000
Gatherings for employees' families	.866	982	.000
Time off allowed to care for family members	.839	982	.000
Child supervision to and from school.	.590	982	.000
Stress-management workshops	.803	982	.000
Flexible working time	.804	982	.000
Compressed working week	.844	982	.000
Half- or part-time work	.811	982	.000
Working from home	.857	982	.000
Non-discrimination against employees	.790	982	.000
Provision of childcare	.299	982	.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school	.651	982	.000
Gatherings for employees' families	.775	982	.000
Time off allowed to care for family members	.804	982	.000
Child supervision to and from school.	.815	982	.000
Stress-management workshops	.828	982	.000
WLB	.877	982	.000

Appendix 2: Normal distribution of variables – employees

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Flexible working time	.828	595	.000
Compressed working week	.857	595	.000
Half- or part-time work	.798	595	.000
Working from home	.873	595	.000
Non-discrimination against employees	.613	595	.000
Provision of childcare	.587	595	.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school	.693	595	.000
Gatherings for employees' families	.832	595	.000
Time off allowed to care for family members	.676	595	.000
Child supervision to and from school.	.682	595	.000
Stress-management workshops	.786	595	.000
Flexible working time	.886	595	.000

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Compressed working week	.903	595	.000
Half- or part-time work	.902	595	.000
Working from home	.878	595	.000
Non-discrimination against employees	.786	595	.000
Provision of childcare	.637	595	.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school	.798	595	.000
Gatherings for employees' families	.794	595	.000
Time off allowed to care for family members	.792	595	.000
Child supervision to and from school.	.795	595	.000
Stress-management workshops	.787	595	.000
WLB	.874	595	.000

Appendix 3: Testing consecutive pairs of variables – employers

	Z	value p
SITUATION		
Half- or part-time work – compressed working week	-10.112	0.000
Time off allowed to care for family members – compressed working week	-3.778	0.000
Time off allowed to care for family members – non-discrimination against women...	-20.306	0.000
Non-discrimination against women... – flexible working time	-16.817	0.000
Outings/gatherings for family members – flexible working time	-1.860	0.063
Child supervision to and from school – outings/gatherings for family members	-18.540	0.000
Time/stress-management workshops – child supervision to and from school	-7.618	0.000
Time/stress-management workshops – provision of childcare	-7.272	0.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school – provision of childcare	-20.313	0.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school – working from home	-18.376	0.000
EXPECTATIONS		
Non-discrimination of employees – flexible working time	-2.322	0.020
Non-discrimination of employees – compressed working week	-3.021	0.003
Child supervision to and from school – compressed working week	-.810	0.418
Child supervision to and from school – outings/gatherings for family members	-.625	0.532
Outings/gatherings for family members – half- or part-time work	-.041	0.967
Working from home – half- or part-time work	-3.620	0.000
Paid leave on a child's first day of school – working from home	-2.453	0.014
Paid leave on a child's first day of school – provision of childcare	-15.442	0.000
Time/stress-management workshops – provision of childcare	-1.659	0.097
Time/stress-management workshops – time off allowed to care for family members	-1.344	0.179

Appendix 4: Testing consecutive pairs of variables – employees

	Z	Value p
SITUATION		
Non-discrimination against employees – half- or part-time work	-13.818	.000
Outings/gatherings for family members – half- or part-time work	-3.509	.000
Outings/gatherings for family members – flexible working time	-1.860	.063
Working from home – flexible working time	-1.673	.094
Working from home – compressed working week	-2.141	.032
Provision of childcare – compressed working week	-.360	.719
Time off allowed to care for family members – provision of childcare	-3.801	.000
Time/stress-management workshops – time off allowed to care for family members	-9.118	.000
Time/stress-management workshops – child supervision to and from school	-7.618	.000
Child supervision to and from school – paid leave on a child's first day of school	-3.744	.000
EXPECTATIONS		
Child supervision to and from school – outings/gatherings for family members	-1.592	.111
Outings/gatherings for family members – non-discrimination of employees	-.948	.343
Time/stress-management workshops – non-discrimination of employees	-.230	.818
Time/stress-management workshops – child supervision to and from school	-1.336	.182
Child supervision to and from school – paid leave on a child's first day of school	-.044	.965
Time off allowed to care for family members – paid leave on a child's first day of school	-.217	.828
Time off allowed to care for family members – compressed working week	-14.675	.000
Half- or part-time work – compressed working week	-2.186	.029
Half- or part-time work – flexible working time	-3.561	.000
Working from home – flexible working time	-.728	.467