A Conceptual Framework Linking Work-Life Balance Practices, Psychological Wellbeing and Employee Engagement among Academic Staff at Private Universities in Uganda

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Abstract: *This study presents a conceptual framework illustrating the causal relationship between work-life balance practices (WLBPs), psychological well-being, and employee engagement among academic staff in private universities in Uganda's Central Region. Grounded in Ryff's (1995) multidimensional model of psychological well-being and contemporary WLBP literature, the framework identifies three core dimensions of work-life balance: flexible work arrangements, leave programmes, and wellness initiatives, including employee assistance and health programmes. These practices are theorized to enhance autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. In turn, these well-being dimensions reinforce vigor, dedication, and absorption, which constitute employee engagement. The framework extends prior models by incorporating demographic variables such as gender, marital status, and institutional position as intermediaries influencing the strength of these relationships. Overall, the framework highlights the complex, interdependent pathways through which WLBPs shape psychological well-being and engagement, offering a robust foundation for empirical inquiry within higher education institutions.*

Keywords: Work-life balance practices; Psychological well-being; Employee engagement; Private universities; Conceptual Framework; Uganda

INTRODUCTION

When using an illustrative representation to show the causal relationships between independent and dependent variables, a conceptual framework is an essential tool. (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This conceptual framework may be adopted in studies linking the variable of Work-life balance Practices (WLBPs) as the independent variable and employee engagement as a dependent variable. WLBPs are assumed as the practices that facilitate the state of being in which one can balance and prioritize different aspects of one's life to meet one's needs for well-being and self-realization while managing potential imbalances or challenges at work and away from work (Saraswati & Lie, 2020). Psychological well-being as the mediator variable, aims to ensure the fulfilment of relationships with people, environmental mastery, autonomy, a sense of purpose in life, and self-acceptance. When there is an imbalance in the time used to carry out various organizational goals and personal obligations, it is envisaged that the mental and physical state of the person performing the task will be impacted, thus poor employee engagement. Employee Engagement is identified as the dependent variable. The assumed relationships are demonstrated in Figure 1, which was the suggested conceptual framework based on the extant literature.

EXPLANATION OF ATTRIBUTES IN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Work-Life Balance Practices

Flexible Work Arrangements: Refers to institutional practices that allow academic staff to adjust when, where, and how they perform their duties. Flexibility helps lecturers to manage teaching, research, administrative roles, and family responsibilities more effectively. It enhances their sense of freedom and contributes to stronger purpose in life and higher engagement levels.

Leave Programmes: These are lawful rights given to academic staff to take time away from work for rest, personal matters, or recovery. In the study, leave supports psychological well-being by providing staff with the space to regain control of their daily lives, improve self-acceptance, and maintain personal meaning, which ultimately boosts engagement.

Wellness Programmes: These include employee assistance programmes like mediation, counselling and family-centered programmes and health-related programmes such as vaccination drives, medical camps, nutrition education, fitness initiatives, and health insurance; both aimed at promoting physical and emotional wellbeing.

Psychological Well-Being Dimensions

Autonomy: This refers to the extent to which academic staff feel independent, self-directed, and able to make decisions regarding their teaching, research, and personal responsibilities. A higher level of autonomy could foster confidence and self-management.

Environmental Mastery: This is the employee's perceived ability to manage work demands, navigate institutional systems, and balance competing responsibilities. Staff who feel capable of organizing their work and personal lives may turn out more energetic, focused, and committed.

Purpose in Life: Purpose in life reflects the extent to which staff feel guided by meaningful goals, long-term direction, and a sense of significance in their academic and personal lives.

Positive Relations: Positive relations capture staff members' ability to form warm, trusting, and supportive interpersonal connections with colleagues, supervisors, and students.

Personal Growth: This is the perception that individuals develop, learn, and become better versions of themselves through academic work, research, and professional responsibilities.

Self-Acceptance: Self-acceptance indicates the staff's overall positive attitude toward themselves, their strengths, limitations, and accomplishments.

Employee Engagement Dimensions

Vigor: Vigor captures the staff's levels of energy, mental resilience, and enthusiasm during their work activities. It represents how energized and motivated academic staff feel in fulfilling teaching, research, and administrative duties.

Dedication: Dedication refers to the degree to which academic staff feel a sense of significance, pride, enthusiasm, and commitment toward their work. It represents their emotional investment in their roles.

Absorption: Absorption describes the level of concentration, immersion, and full involvement staff experience in their work. Highly absorbed staff could for instance lose track of time when teaching, supervising, or performing academic tasks.

Direct Effect of Variables

Work-Life Balance Practices → Employee Engagement

Work-life balance practices directly influence how engaged academic staff feel. When universities provide flexible work arrangements, adequate and structured leave, and health and wellness support. A positive effect means that employees experience reduced work stress, greater autonomy, and improved control over their time. This directly increases the three dimensions of engagement; vigor, dedication, and absorption. The framework also proposes that work-life balance practices enhance employee engagement indirectly through psychological well-being.

Indirect (Mediating) Effect

Work-Life Balance Practices → Psychological Well-being → Employee Engagement
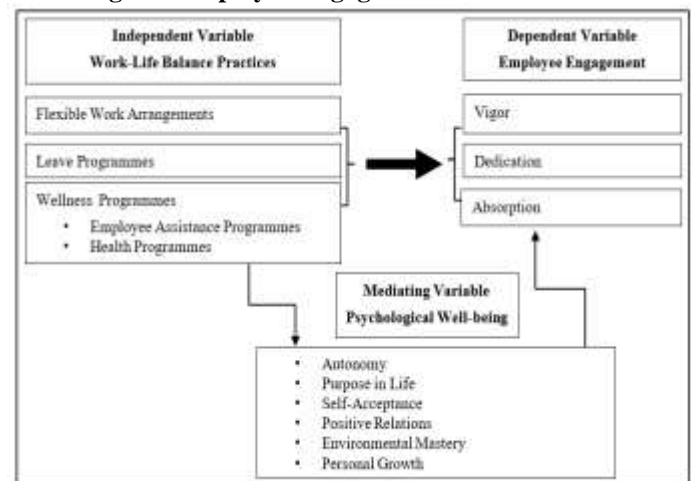
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Overall Interpretation of the Framework

This conceptual framework illustrates a dual-pathway model with a Direct; Work-Life Balance Practices → Employee Engagement (Organizational support directly boosts engagement.) and Indirect / Mediated relationship Work-Life Balance Practices → Psychological Well-being → Employee Engagement (Work-life balance enhances well-being, which

in turn drives engagement) Together, these attributes highlight that Employee Engagement of academic staff is shaped both by work-life balance practices and employee's psychological well-being. Universities must invest in supportive practices and the psychological health of staff to achieve sustainable employee engagement.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework showing the relationship between Work-Life Balance Practices, Psychological Wellbeing and Employee Engagement

Source: *Adopted from Ryff (1995); Venkateshwara & Suganya (2020); Khateeb (2021) Kirby et al. (2022); Novianti & Fuadiputra (2021) Saraswati & Lie (2020); Ssali et al., (2020), (Joseph, 2016) and modified by the researcher.*

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

From the conceptual framework, it is assumed that work-life balance practices are associated with employee engagement. It was hypothesized that work-life balance practices such as the presence of flexible work arrangements, leave programmes and wellness programmes, sub-attributed into employee assistance programmes, and health and wellness programmes had a causal effect on employee engagement, considering psychological well-being to be a catalyst with a presence of well-being features such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, good relations with others, self-acceptance and purpose in life.

The framework's logic was that when the workplace has the suggested practices, the assumed well-being indicators would be observed among the staff in the private universities. However, the researcher presumed that the association between the two and its direction and strength would be moderated by demographic factors like one's position in the institution, gender, and marital status. These factors were assumed to likely strengthen or weaken the relationship between work-life balance practices, psychological well-being, and employee engagement among academic staff at the universities studied.

According to the conceptual framework, work-life balance practices were linked to the employee engagement of academic staff at private universities. The presence of well-

being elements like mental health *thought patterns*; emotional health: *feelings*; social health: *interactions with others*; and spiritual health: *connection to something greater than oneself* were thought to relate to work-life balance practices like the presence of flexible working arrangements, leave programs, employee assistance programs, and health and wellness programmes. According to this conceptual framework, staff members at the chosen institutions would exhibit presumptive wellness indicators when the workplace follows the advised work-life balance practices.

The researcher hypothesized that psychological well-being may mediate the relationship between the independent variable of Work-life balance Practices and dependent variable of Employee Engagement and its direction and strength.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, this study contributes to knowledge by developing an integrative conceptual framework that explains how work-life balance practices influence employee engagement through the mediating role of psychological well-being. While existing literature has examined these constructs separately, this study brings them together into a single model. The study also contributes context-specific insights by tailoring the framework to private universities in Uganda, a sector where empirical evidence on work-life balance and psychological well-being remains limited. This contextualization fills a significant gap in global and regional scholarship.

Future research can employ longitudinal designs to capture both immediate and long-term effects of work-life balance initiatives on employee outcomes. Comparative studies between private and public universities would provide deeper insights into sector-specific differences in policy implementation and staff experiences. Further research should also examine additional mediating variables such as leadership style, organizational culture, digitalization of work, and institutional governance as these factors may influence employees' access to and perception of work-life balance practices. Finally, future studies could explore how emerging societal changes, including remote work trends, demographic shifts, and economic pressures, reshape the nature of work-life balance and its implications for psychological well-being and engagement in higher education institutions

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