



WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES AND JOB SATISFACTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EMPLOYEES IN NIGERIA AND AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Makama, Lawrence Linus¹

Pepple, Grace Jamie²

Fajulugbe Adeshola Temitayo³

Ene Okpo Ene-ita⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Department of Business Management, University of Calabar, Nigeria

*Email: gpepple123@gmail.com [For correspondence]

ABSTRACT

This research critically investigated work-life balance and job satisfaction among operational staff in a Nigerian telecommunication firm, while comparing international best practices in order to provide recommendations for enhancing work-life-balance policies in Nigeria. The study was conducted to fill the gap left by prior quantitative studies by offering deeper, qualitative insights and comparisons with global practices. The theoretical underpinning of the study was the work-life border theory. A qualitative case study design was adopted. The sampling process involved the use of purposive and snowball methods, which enabled the collection of primary data from 10 operational staff of MTN Nigeria Plc in Calabar, through a semi-structured interview method. The data obtained were analysed using reflexive thematic method. With respect to the perceptions of operational staff regarding how work-life balance initiatives affect their job satisfaction, three sub-themes were identified: enhanced well-being and reduced stress, improved flexibility and control over work schedules, and feeling valued and supported by the organisation. In comparing the work-life balance initiatives at the Nigerian organization with international best practices, four major sub-themes were identified: inconsistent implementation, lack of organisational support and cultural reinforcement, presence of some work-life balance elements in principle, and perceived benefits undermined by poor communication and follow-through. Based on these findings, the study recommended that the management of MTN Nigeria should ensure that all work-life balance (WLB) initiatives, such as hybrid work arrangements, maternity leave, and wellness programmes, are applied consistently across departments. It was also recommended that it is crucial for the management of MTN to establish clear communication channels to regularly inform employees about available WLB programmes and how to access them. Suggestions for further studies were also made based on the observed limitations of the study.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Job satisfaction, Work-life conflict, Human resources management



Introduction

Achieving work-life balance (WLB) entails maintaining a stable relationship between one's career obligations and personal pursuits, so that neither aspect adversely affects the other (Bataineh, 2019). It refers to the ability to handle job-related tasks alongside preserving physical health, fulfilling family duties, engaging in leisure, and supporting overall personal wellness. This notion emerged as industrialisation and urbanisation led to longer working hours, prompting labour movements and policymakers to advocate for regulated work schedules and employee well-being (Ayar et al., 2022). Globally, factors such as economic shifts, technological advancements, changing social norms, and international labour standards encouraged its emergence, as societies recognised the importance of mental health, productivity, and quality of life (Kelliher et al., 2019). To this end, global companies have applied several WLB practices to enhance employee productivity, reduce burnout, improve job satisfaction, attract and retain top talent, foster a positive organisational culture, and comply with evolving labour regulations (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). In this pursuit, practices such as flexible work arrangements, wellness programmes, and paid parental leave have become widely adopted by global organisations. Flexible work arrangements, including remote work and flexible hours, allow employees to balance personal and professional responsibilities efficiently (Aruldoss et al., 2022). Wellness programmes, encompassing mental health support, gym memberships, and stress management initiatives, promote overall well-being and workplace engagement (Kasbuntoro et al., 2020). Also, paid parental leave ensures employees can manage family commitments without compromising job security, fostering a supportive and

inclusive work environment (Aruldoss et al., 2021).

Considering the proven potentials of these practices to enhance employee productivity, corporate organisations in developing countries like Nigeria are increasingly moving toward the implementation of WLB initiatives (Ihwughwavwe & Shewakramani, 2024). In Nigerian data management companies, practices such as flexible work schedules, remote work options, health and wellness initiatives, paid leave policies, and employee assistance programmes are applied to enhance work-life balance for employees (Akanji et al., 2020). Although these practices are imitated and modelled after what is obtainable in global organisations, their actual implementation in Nigerian organisations is constrained by several organisational, and cultural constraints, which undermine their robust adoption and effectiveness. In particular, the lack of long-term organisational commitment to WLB implementation undermines its effectiveness, as many companies prioritise short-term profitability over employee well-being (Oludayo & Omonijo, 2020). Additionally, cultural expectations that equate long working hours with dedication discourage employees from fully utilising WLB policies, fearing career stagnation or job insecurity (Oyewobi et al., 2022). Furthermore, inadequate regulatory enforcement and weak labour policies allow organisations to implement WLB practices inconsistently, limiting their impact on employee satisfaction and productivity (Adisa et al., 2017). This study addressed this stalemate by examining WLB and job satisfaction among operational staff in MTN Nigeria, while comparing international best practices.



Research Rationale

Work-life balance is a critical concern for corporate organisations in Nigeria, where the demanding nature of digital service roles often necessitates long working hours, rapid responses to technical issues, and continuous availability to sustain reliable digital infrastructure (Nwagbara, 2020). These pressures, coupled with the rising cost of living and cultural expectations surrounding caregiving, particularly for women, create significant obstacles for employees striving to balance professional and personal responsibilities (Ganiyu et al., 2020; Okeke et al., 2022). Organisational shortcomings, including limited flexible work arrangements, inadequate support resources, and a profit-oriented culture that prioritises financial outcomes over employee well-being, further intensify stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion (Akanji et al., 2020; Ngozi & Chinelo, 2020). As a result, workers in major urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt frequently experience persistent fatigue, psychological distress, and declining job satisfaction (Adeyemi et al., 2024). Although previous studies have largely employed quantitative approaches to confirm associations between work-life balance practices and employee satisfaction (Ogunola, 2022; Inegbedion, 2024), they have not sufficiently explored employees' perceptions and lived experiences of these practices or how they compare to international standards. Given these limitations, adopting a qualitative approach is essential to gain deeper insight into how work-life balance strategies affect job satisfaction in Nigeria, and to understand how these experiences align with global best practices. Therefore, the following specific research objectives were pursued:

- i. To investigate the perceptions of operational staff regarding how

work-life balance initiatives affect their job satisfaction.

- ii. To critically compare the work-life balance initiatives implemented by MTN Nigeria with international best practices of global organisations.
- iii. To thematically analyse and triangulate findings from literature, staff perceptions, and international best practices to identify gaps and areas for improvement in work-life balance initiatives at MTN Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

This research draws upon the theoretical foundation of the work-life border theory introduced by Clark (2000). At its core, the theory asserts that people actively regulate the divide between their professional responsibilities and private lives by coordinating transitions and harmonising their roles, with the aim of maintaining equilibrium and minimising tensions (Clark, 2000). The theory's credibility has been confirmed by several relevant studies, such as Sarker et al. (2018) and Bulger et al. (2007), which revealed that work-life conflict arises when individuals struggle to manage the boundaries between work and personal life, particularly in high-demand professions. These studies emphasise that border permeability and flexibility significantly impact individuals' ability to balance responsibilities, with implications for job satisfaction, retention, and overall well-being. In relation to this research, work-life border theory is significant as it offers a systematic lens through which one can comprehend how workers balance their occupational and personal responsibilities, especially within digitally driven work settings where the distinction between these spheres is becoming progressively indistinct. According to Clark (2000), the theory suggests that people handle the shift between work and



home life by establishing and adjusting boundaries, which may vary in their rigidity or adaptability based on company guidelines and personal strategies for coping. In the context of a digital work environment, where employees often engage in remote or hybrid work models, the permeability of these borders is heightened, often leading to role conflict, stress, and eventual dissatisfaction if not effectively managed (Adisa et al., 2017; Kailasapathy et al., 2024). As such, the presence of well-structured WLB initiatives can help operational staff in the digital work environment mitigate work-life conflicts and maintain psychological well-being. Consequently, when employees experience greater autonomy and support in managing these boundaries, they are more likely to feel valued, motivated, and satisfied in their jobs (Özdemir, 2023).

Work-life balance: Global perspectives and international best practices

Work-life balance (WLB) refers to achieving equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life, enabling employees to manage work demands while maintaining their well-being (Oludayo & Omonijo, 2020). Its core dimensions include work flexibility, family support, workload reduction, job autonomy, employee well-being programmes, and supportive organisational culture (Akanji et al., 2020). These factors collectively help employees sustain fulfilling personal lives while enhancing job satisfaction, reducing stress, and improving productivity (Akinlade & Nwaodike, 2021). For example, flexible scheduling, remote work, and hybrid models enable employees to accommodate personal responsibilities, reducing burnout and strengthening engagement (Ayar et al., 2022). Likewise, family support measures—such as paid parental leave and childcare assistance—can improve

organisational commitment (Bataineh, 2019; Ganiyu et al., 2020).

The implementation of WLB practices differs across regions. In developed areas such as Europe, North America, and parts of Asia, policies are often well-structured and legally mandated, covering flexible work options, paid leave, and employee wellness initiatives (Stoilova et al., 2020). Many organisations also adopt practices like four-day workweeks, generous vacation allowances, and mental health services to promote employee well-being and productivity (Brown et al., 2021). Conversely, in much of Africa, WLB policies remain less formalised, with employees facing long hours, limited leave, and minimal organisational support (Akanji et al., 2020). While multinationals may introduce flexible options, most local firms maintain rigid structures with little emphasis on mental health or flexibility (Ihwughwavwe & Shewakramani, 2024). The key distinction between developed and developing regions lies in regulation and organisational culture. Developed nations enforce stronger labour protections prioritising employee well-being, whereas developing countries often lack comprehensive frameworks, leaving WLB largely to employers' discretion (Stoilova et al., 2020). Economic constraints and cultural expectations around long working hours further discourage flexible arrangements (Inegbedion, 2024). However, globalisation and digital transformation are driving gradual improvements, especially among multinational and technology-oriented firms (Kelliher et al., 2019). Exposure to global best practices, such as flexible scheduling, paid parental leave, wellness initiatives, workload management policies, compressed workweeks, and family-friendly measures, supports healthier integration of work and personal life, helping reduce stress, prevent burnout, and enhance job satisfaction and productivity



(Gautam & Jain, 2018; Kossek & Lautsch, 2018).

Work-life balance and job satisfaction: A review of empirical studies

Aruldoss et al. (2022) conducted a study in a southern Indian transportation firm, exploring how work-life balance (WLB) correlates with job satisfaction, job stress, and employee commitment, based on survey responses from 331 staff members. The analysis indicated that WLB substantially enhanced both job satisfaction and commitment, while concurrently reducing levels of job-related stress. These results suggest that cultivating a work culture that supports employee wellbeing, alongside strategic investment in workforce training and development, can significantly amplify the positive outcomes of WLB strategies, particularly by boosting satisfaction and reinforcing organisational loyalty. Similarly, Kasbuntoro et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between WLB and job satisfaction within Jakarta's banking industry, employing primary data for their assessment. Their findings revealed that WLB had a strong and positive influence on job satisfaction. The study further reported that an increase in WLB would lead to a corresponding increase in job satisfaction. This finding implies that implementing effective WLB initiatives can enhance employee satisfaction, thereby improving retention and performance in the banking sector. Also, Malik et al. (2019) examined the relationship between WLB and job satisfaction among healthcare professionals in Pakistan using a descriptive cross-sectional study design. Their findings revealed that WLB and job satisfaction varied significantly across different demographic and professional categories, including gender, age, profession, salary, experience, sector of practice, and marital status. The study

found that male healthcare professionals and physicians managed WLB more effectively, while experienced professionals with higher salaries reported better WLB and greater job satisfaction. This finding implies that organisational policies should be tailored to address demographic disparities in WLB and job satisfaction, ensuring equitable support across all professional groups in the healthcare sector.

Paudel et al. (2024) examined the relationship between work-life equilibrium and job satisfaction among employees in a private travel agency using a quantitative research approach. Their findings revealed a statistically significant positive association between work-life equilibrium and job satisfaction. Notably, the study found no significant differences in how gender, age, or job role influenced employees' perceptions of work-life equilibrium and job satisfaction. This finding implies that organisations and policymakers should prioritise work-life equilibrium initiatives to enhance employee satisfaction, regardless of demographic differences, thereby fostering a more stable and productive workforce. Similarly, Susanto et al. (2022) examined the effect of work-life balance (WLB) on job satisfaction and job performance among SME employees. Their findings revealed that WLB had a significant positive impact on both job satisfaction and job performance. This finding implies that SMEs can enhance employee satisfaction and performance by promoting work-life balance initiatives and fostering supportive supervisory practices, ultimately contributing to a more engaged and productive workforce.

Moreover, Bocean et al. (2023) examined the impact of work-life balance (WLB) on employee satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic through an analysis of primary data from 452 employees in



Romania. Their findings revealed that WLB significantly influenced both professional and personal satisfaction, which in turn affected employee motivation and turnover intention. The study demonstrated that a well-maintained balance between professional and personal life led to higher job satisfaction, increased motivation, improved performance, and lower employee turnover. This finding implies that organisations should prioritise work-life balance strategies, especially during crises, to enhance employee well-being, retention, and overall productivity. In a similar study, Putra et al. (2020) examined the impact of flexible working hours (FWH), remote working (RW), and work-life balance (WLB) on employee job satisfaction in the Indonesian banking sector during the COVID-19 pandemic using primary data from 160 respondents. Their findings revealed that achieving WLB had a significant positive impact on job satisfaction, while remote working contributed positively to WLB. However, flexible working hours did not have a similar effect on WLB. This finding implies that remote working policies can enhance work-life balance and job satisfaction, whereas flexible working hours may require additional structural support to yield similar benefits in the banking sector.

Furthermore, Chana et al. (2022) examined the influence of work-life balance (WLB) and family-life balance (FLB) on job performance and job satisfaction among Business Studies teachers in Bauchi State, Nigeria, using a survey research design. Their findings revealed that both WLB and FLB had a significant impact on teachers' job satisfaction and performance. This finding implies that reducing teachers' workloads and providing additional incentives for those with extra responsibilities could enhance job satisfaction and performance, ultimately improving educational outcomes in Bauchi

State. Also, Ajirowo et al. (2022) examined the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and employee performance among health workers in Kwara State, Nigeria, using a quantitative research approach with a sample of 306 respondents. Their findings revealed that a positive WLB significantly enhanced employee performance, with flexible work time and a supportive work environment emerging as key factors. Findings also revealed that employees with better WLB reported increased job satisfaction, higher engagement, and greater commitment to their organisations. This finding implies that implementing WLB initiatives, such as flexible work arrangements and improved workplace conditions, can enhance employee performance, support talent retention, and strengthen organisational competitiveness.

Gap in literature

From relevant studies reviewed, it was observed that most extant relevant studies on this subject were quantitative in nature and only confirmed the causality between WLB and job satisfaction in a local context (Ogunola, 2022; Akinlade & Nwaodike, 2021; Inegbedion, 2024; Uchenna et al., 2024; Nnani et al., 2024). Consequently, the reliance on quantitative methods limited the depth of insight into employees' viewpoints regarding the influence of work-life balance initiatives on job satisfaction, especially within Nigeria's data management sector, and how it compares in an international context. It is therefore necessary to carry out primary research utilising a qualitative approach to identify employees' subjective perceptions regarding the effect of WLB on job satisfaction in Nigeria while comparing it to an international context.

METHOD

Research Design



This study adopted a single-case study design, which is a research design that focuses on an in-depth exploration of a specific organisation (like MTN Nigeria), group, or phenomenon within its real-life context (Cresswell, 2003). This research design is suitable for this study because it allows for a detailed and in-depth exploration of work-life balance and job satisfaction within MTN Nigeria (Queirós et al., 2017). By focusing on a single organisation, the study can gather rich and specific insights from operational staff, providing a clear understanding of how work-life balance initiatives affect their job satisfaction (Gregar, 2023). Additionally, a single-case study design was useful for capturing real-life experiences within the organisational setting, making the findings more relevant and meaningful for developing practical recommendations (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Sample Criteria

In this study, primary data were obtained from a sample of 10 operational staff members of MTN Nigeria in Calabar, Cross River State. These were employees (such as engineers, IT specialists, system administrators, database administrators, administrative officers and executives) responsible for the daily operations of the company, whose responsibilities expose them to significant workload and stress. In single-case qualitative studies, such as this one, a sample size of 10 participants was suitable because it allowed for detailed exploration of their experiences and challenges (Mezmir, 2020). This was so because qualitative research focuses on depth rather than numbers; hence a smaller sample helped gather rich and meaningful data (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). Also, with 10 participants, the study could reach data saturation, meaning no new information or themes were likely to emerge (Queirós et al., 2017).

In selecting participants for the study, purposive and snowball sampling strategies were utilised to identify individuals whose experiences and insights were directly pertinent to the research focus. These non-probability approaches prioritised the intentional recruitment of respondents based on their specific knowledge and relevance to the subject matter. This ensured the collection of in-depth, purposeful data that aligned closely with the study's objectives (Etikan & Bala, 2017). To this end, the study targeted operational staff members (such as engineers, IT specialists, system administrators, database administrators, administrative officers and executives) relying on recommendations or referrals by the management.

Data collection method

A semi-structured interview method was used to obtain primary data from participants in this study. Considering the objectives of this study and its qualitative nature, this data collection method was suitable for the study because semi-structured interviews allow participants to share their experiences and opinions in detail while giving the researcher the flexibility to ask follow-up questions for deeper understanding (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). As such, this approach was ideal for exploring how operational staff of MTN perceive work-life balance initiatives and their effect on job satisfaction. It also helped compare their views with international best practices, making it easier to identify gaps and areas for improvement (Karatsareas, 2022). Also, the interview administration was executed both physically and virtually through voice call conversations with participants. To enable participants to better prepare for the interview and respond appropriately, the researcher sent a copy of the interview guide to participants along with a consent letter. This ensured that participants were



well informed beforehand to engage in in-depth discussions relevant to the research objectives, thereby enhancing the reliability of interview data (Olson, 2016; Knott et al., 2022).

Analysis methods

At the end of the interviews, the qualitative data obtained from participants were transcribed from audio to text. After transcription, the researcher applied the Braun and Clarke reflexive thematic analysis to qualitatively analyse the data. This method helped to make sense of the data in a structured way while allowing flexibility for new insights to emerge (Byrne, 2022). This analytical approach was applied in this study because it provided a clear and organised way to understand the data while allowing new ideas to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2024). The Braun and Clarke reflexive thematic analysis helped us to carefully examine qualitative data, find common patterns, and explain them in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It was flexible, making it suitable for exploring different views and experiences of staff regarding work-life balance. By following this method, we were able to ensure that the findings were well-structured, easy to understand, and supported by real examples from the data.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Themes and discussion

This section presents the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. The themes reflect participants' experiences and perceptions regarding work-life balance initiatives and how these initiatives compare with international best practices. Table 1 provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes generated. The first theme, "Effect of Work-life Balance Initiatives on Job Satisfaction," highlights positive

outcomes such as enhanced well-being, reduced stress, improved flexibility and control over work schedules, and feelings of being valued and supported by the organisation. The second theme, "Work-life Balance Initiatives of MTN vs International Best Practices," reveals gaps in implementation, such as inconsistent practices, lack of organisational support, the superficial presence of initiatives, and perceived benefits undermined by poor communication and lack of follow-through. These findings underscore both the strengths and weaknesses in the company's approach to work-life balance.

Table 1
Overview of Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Effect of Work-life Balance Initiatives on Job Satisfaction	1. Enhanced Well-being; 2. Reduced Stress; 3. Improved Flexibility and Control Over Work Schedules; and 4. Feeling Valued and Supported by the Organisation
Theme 2: Work-life Balance Initiatives of MTN Vs International Best Practices	1. Inconsistent Implementation of Work-Life Balance Initiatives; 2. Lack of Organisational Support and Cultural Reinforcement; 3. Presence of Some Work-Life Balance Elements in Principle; and 4. Perceived Benefits



Undermined by
Poor
Communication and Follow-
through.

Source: Authors' Interview Data (2025)

Theme 1: Effect of Work-Life Balance Initiatives on Job Satisfaction

From the analysis of the interview data, it became clear that WLB initiatives at MTN Nigeria affect job satisfaction in three significant ways, summarised under the following sub-themes: enhanced well-being and reduced stress, improved flexibility and control over work Schedules, and feeling valued and supported by the organisation. These sub-themes reflect employees' lived experiences and perceptions of how WLB initiatives influence their workplace satisfaction, aligning closely with existing literature (Aruldoss et al., 2022; Kasbuntoro et al., 2020; Susanto et al., 2022). This analysis can also be interpreted through Clark's (2000) Work-Life Border Theory, which explains that individuals constantly navigate the borders between work and personal life. When organisations act as supportive "border-keepers," they facilitate smoother transitions between these domains, enhancing employee well-being and satisfaction. The findings presented below illustrate how such support, when consistent, positively affects employees' experiences.

Subtheme 1: Enhanced Well-being and Reduced Stress

A major finding was that work-life balance initiatives significantly enhanced employees' emotional well-being and helped reduce stress levels. Several participants (Participant 1; Participant 5; Participant 9; Participant 10) mentioned how wellness programmes, maternity leave, and mental health support helped

them "recharge emotionally" and feel "healthier at work." For instance, Participant 1 shared that wellness checks and time off during maternity leave "gave peace of mind and helped me recover," reinforcing the sense of being cared for by the organisation.

Similarly, Participant 10 reflected that mental health support "gave me the chance to recharge," which ultimately made them feel "more positive and motivated overall." Participant 9 added that the ability to adjust working hours "reduced a lot of stress" and allowed greater control over personal and professional responsibilities. These observations strongly align with research by Aruldoss et al. (2022), who found that reduced work-related stress through supportive policies significantly enhances job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Viewed through Clark's (2000) lens, these initiatives reflect permeable and flexible work-life borders, enabling smoother navigation between professional and personal demands.

Subtheme 2: Improved Flexibility and Control Over Work Schedules

Flexibility in work scheduling emerged as another critical factor influencing job satisfaction. Participants frequently stressed the value of autonomy over their working hours, noting that it enabled them to manage their personal lives more effectively and reduced work-related pressure. Participant 7 articulated this clearly, explaining that flexible hours "lifted my mood and made me feel more engaged," while Participant 8 added that the ability to "adjust my hours or take a break when needed" made a "huge difference" to their well-being. Participant 9 similarly noted that schedule flexibility "reduced a lot of stress and allowed me to feel more in control." These findings reinforce previous literature (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018; Susanto et al., 2022),



suggesting that flexible arrangements are not merely conveniences but central to enhancing morale and job satisfaction. This finding again resonates with Clark's (2000) Work-Life Border Theory, as flexible work arrangements create permeable borders between work and personal domains, thereby fostering greater harmony and improving overall satisfaction.

Subtheme 3: Feeling Valued and Supported by the Organisation

The third sub-theme relates to employees' perceptions of being valued and supported by the organisation. Participants described how WLB initiatives made them feel respected beyond their work output, reinforcing their loyalty and emotional commitment to the company. For example, Participant 1 highlighted that maternity leave and wellness initiatives "*made me feel more valued by the company.*" Similarly, Participant 7 stated that flexible working arrangements "*help employees feel valued,*" and Participant 10 mentioned that mental health support initiatives "*made me feel more positive and motivated.*" These insights are consistent with social exchange theory (Cook, 2018), which emphasises that perceived organisational support engenders positive reciprocal behaviours, such as increased satisfaction and organisational commitment. Moreover, the findings reflect Clark's (2000) concept of the organisation as an effective "border-keeper," facilitating work-life integration and contributing to employees' psychological well-being.

However, it is important to note that some participants (e.g., Participant 9) highlighted inconsistencies in the delivery of these initiatives, suggesting that while the organisation acts as a supportive border-keeper in many cases, this role is not uniformly experienced across all employees. As Susanto et al. (2022) also

observed, inconsistent implementation can undermine the potential positive effects of WLB initiatives. Overall, the findings for this theme demonstrate that enhanced well-being, greater flexibility, and feeling valued are central mechanisms through which work-life balance initiatives influence job satisfaction at MTN Nigeria. These results are consistent with previous research (Aruldoss et al., 2022; Kasbuntoro et al., 2020) and support Clark's (2000) Work-Life Border Theory. Nonetheless, the data also highlighted the need for more consistent application of WLB policies to maximise their positive impact. As the study progresses, attention will turn to critically comparing these practices to international best practices to identify gaps and recommend improvements for the organisation.

Theme 2: Work-life Balance Initiatives of MTN Nigeria Vs International Best Practices

With respect to the work-life balance (WLB) initiatives implemented at MTN Nigeria, four key sub-themes emerged from the interview data including inconsistent implementation of work-life balance initiatives; lack of organisational support and cultural reinforcement; presence of some work-life balance elements in principle; and perceived benefits undermined by poor communication and follow-through. This section integrates discussion alongside the findings to critically analyse the case organisation's practices compared to international best practices.

Subtheme 1: Inconsistent Implementation of Work-Life Balance Initiatives

Participants frequently reported inconsistencies between the organisation's stated WLB initiatives and their actual implementation. As Participant 1 reflected, "*There are few initiatives here and sometimes health talk or wellness*



programmes. They also talk about work life balance in staff meetings and share policies on paper... The issue is implementation... and they don't always trickle down to every level of staff." Similarly, Participant 7 described the WLB initiatives as "feeling like an illusion," noting that although there was mention of "flexible hours and wellness programmes," these were rarely put into practice. Participant 8 reinforced this perception, commenting that the company had "made many promises about work-life balance initiatives, but there's been little action so far," while Participant 10 pointed out that "most times, it feels like work long hours and take [work] home, which defeats the whole idea of balance."

These accounts reveal a significant gap between rhetoric and reality, suggesting a symbolic rather than substantive commitment to WLB. In comparison, literature on global best practices emphasises that effective WLB initiatives are not only formalised but consistently implemented and enforced. For example, in developed economies such as Europe and North America, WLB policies like flexible work arrangements, wellness programmes, and mental health support are legally mandated and tightly integrated into everyday organisational practice (Stoilova, Ilieva-Trichkova and Bieri, 2020; Brown, Kim and Faerman, 2021). MTN Nigeria's inconsistent approach therefore falls markedly short of international standards.

Subtheme 2: Lack of Organisational Support and Cultural Reinforcement

Another prominent sub-theme was the perceived lack of organisational support and cultural reinforcement for WLB initiatives. Participant 9 articulated this challenge, stating, "I may say the company is not intentional about work-life balance

initiative. There are no clear structural policies in place. And it often feels like the focus is just on getting the work done, no matter the personal cost." Participant 6 echoed this sentiment, highlighting that aside from annual leave, "even during your leave, people are still going to call you," indicating that there was little opportunity to disengage from work. Participant 10 similarly lamented that, "it would really help if the company made these initiatives more consistent and support staff to use them without feeling guilty or judged."

These findings indicate that the organisational culture at MTN Nigeria does not adequately promote or normalise the use of WLB benefits, thereby discouraging employees from taking advantage of available support. In contrast, best practice organisations cultivate cultures that value work-life balance, where employees are encouraged to access WLB policies without fear of stigma or reprisal (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). Furthermore, leading firms actively manage workloads and provide mental health support to help employees maintain personal well-being without sacrificing performance (Gautam and Jain, 2018). The prevailing culture at MTN Nigeria, by normalising overwork and insufficiently reinforcing WLB initiatives, exacerbates stress and undermines employee satisfaction.

Subtheme 3: Presence of Some Work-Life Balance Elements in Principle

Despite the concerns highlighted above, several participants acknowledged the presence of certain WLB elements within the organisation. Participant 2 mentioned that, "we celebrate their days... end of year parties... also we also do travel. So, travel is a part of learning and also it helps you



to excuse yourself a little bit and see the other side of life," adding that there were opportunities for remote working through a "hybrid" model. Participant 3 noted that, "there are some initiatives like, wellness programmes, maternity leaves, and the others," and Participant 5 affirmed, "yes, they actually do that. They do give us extra benefits. We also have, leave insurance." These examples suggest that MTN Nigeria has introduced some initial WLB practices, such as hybrid working arrangements and wellness activities. However, these initiatives appear to be sporadic and lack full structural support. Compared to leading organisations globally, where WLB initiatives like compressed workweeks, generous parental leave policies, and formal mental health programmes are integrated into core operations (Brown, Kim and Faerman, 2021; Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva, 2019), MTN Nigeria's efforts seem fragmented and reactive. Rather than being part of a comprehensive strategy, current initiatives are isolated and unevenly applied, limiting their overall effectiveness.

Subtheme 4: Perceived Benefits Undermined by Poor Communication and Follow-through

The final sub-theme theme relates to the issue of poor communication and weak follow-through, which significantly undermines the effectiveness of existing WLB initiatives. Participant 1 noted that although WLB policies were discussed at staff meetings and "shared on paper," "the issue is implementation... they don't always trickle down to every level of staff." Similarly, Participant 9 stated that, "some benefits like flexible working hour intake [exist] but they are not always communicated well or encouraged," and Participant 8 highlighted that while the company mentioned "flexible working

hours and wellness programmes," it "doesn't really follow-up... it's just talk without real change." These findings point to critical communication gaps between management and employees, resulting in limited awareness, understanding, and uptake of available benefits. According to Kossek and Lautsch (2018) and Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva (2019), successful WLB initiatives require clear, consistent, and proactive communication, supported by leadership commitment. In leading organisations, extensive efforts are made to promote awareness of WLB options and to normalise their use. MTN Nigeria's failure to adequately communicate and support its initiatives considerably diminishes their perceived and actual value.

The findings show for this theme that although MTN Nigeria has made preliminary steps toward promoting work-life balance, these efforts are inconsistent, poorly supported, and inadequately communicated. Using Clark's (2000) Work-Life Border Theory as a lens, it is clear that the organisation provides unstable and unpredictable borders between work and personal life, complicating employees' attempts to manage both domains effectively. In contrast, best practice organisations foster flexible, permeable, and supportive borders that facilitate smooth transitions between work and home life. To close this gap, MTN Nigeria must focus on consistent implementation, cultural reinforcement, stronger leadership support, and improved communication strategies. Without these changes, the organisation risks continued work-life conflict, employee dissatisfaction, and diminished organisational trust.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study critically explored how work-life balance initiatives affect job satisfaction among operational staff at MTN Nigeria, drawing on qualitative insights and comparisons with international best practices. The findings revealed that while employees recognised the positive influence of WLB initiatives on their well-being, stress levels, and sense of being valued, these benefits were often undermined by inconsistent implementation, inadequate organisational support, and weak communication. The analysis highlighted that MTN Nigeria's initiatives, though present in principle, were frequently fragmented and lacked structural reinforcement, limiting their effectiveness in supporting employees' efforts to manage professional and personal roles. By applying the work-life border theory, the study demonstrated how unstable or poorly defined organisational borders complicate employees' transitions between work and personal life, ultimately affecting job satisfaction. In contrast, international best practices showed the value of clear, consistent, and culturally embedded WLB policies in enhancing employee outcomes. These findings deepen understanding of the lived experiences of Nigerian telecom workers and underscore the importance of cohesive, well-communicated, and culturally supported work-life balance structures for promoting sustainable employee well-being and positive organisational performance. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are presented:

1. The management of MTN Nigeria should ensure that all WLB initiatives, such as hybrid work arrangements, maternity leave, and wellness programmes, are applied consistently across departments.

This standardisation is crucial for fostering an environment of fairness and equity within the organisation. When employees perceive that they are being treated equally, regardless of their department or position, it not only reduces confusion but also mitigates feelings of perceived inequality. By ensuring that all staff members, irrespective of their role, have access to the same benefits, management can cultivate a more cohesive and supportive workplace culture. Such consistency can significantly enhance employee satisfaction by creating a sense of belonging and fairness, which, in turn, can lead to higher levels of engagement and retention.

2. It is crucial for the management of MTN Nigeria to establish clear communication channels to regularly inform employees about available WLB programmes and how to access them. This can be achieved through various communication methods, such as regular emails, training sessions, and staff handbooks. By actively keeping employees informed about the available benefits and the process for accessing them, the company can reduce misunderstandings or underutilisation of these programmes. Improving communication around WLB initiatives fosters transparency and trust, making employees feel more empowered and knowledgeable about their options. Effective communication also ensures that employees can make informed decisions that align with their personal and professional needs, ultimately enhancing job



satisfaction, productivity, and morale.

3. Senior managers at MTN Nigeria should actively promote and participate in WLB initiatives to demonstrate genuine commitment to the well-being of employees. By acting as “border-keepers”, leaders can model balanced behaviours and visibly embody the values of work-life balance. This role-modelling behaviour not only underscores the importance of WLB within the organisation but also creates a ripple effect where employees feel more encouraged to adopt similar practices. Furthermore, when senior leaders show that they prioritise their own work-life balance, it fosters a culture of mutual respect where employees feel supported in achieving a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives. This visibility of commitment from leadership can lead to increased employee trust, loyalty, and overall job satisfaction.
4. It is essential for the management of MTN Nigeria to integrate WLB principles into staff training, performance reviews, and team meetings. By incorporating WLB into these core organisational processes, the company reinforces the idea that work-life balance is not just a benefit or policy, but an integral part of the corporate culture. When WLB is embedded into the daily routines and operations of an organisation, employees are more likely to perceive it as a priority and value it in their own work-life practices. This cultural reinforcement ensures that WLB is not seen as a supplementary perk but as a central organisational value that influences

decision-making and the way work is approached.

Study limitations and further studies

This study was confined to a single data management company, MTN Nigeria, based in Calabar, Nigeria. By concentrating on only one organisation, the findings and insights may not be relevant to other telecom companies in Nigeria. Also, the research focused on employees of MTN Nigeria, meaning that the diverse perspectives and experiences of employees in other telecom companies were not considered. Additionally, the study employed a qualitative approach, which, while providing rich, in-depth insights, is limited in terms of generalisability to larger populations. The sample size and the specific demographic and organisational context of MTN Nigeria further restrict the transferability of the findings. Building upon the limitations outlined above, future research should seek to broaden the scope of study by including multiple telecom companies in Nigeria. This would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of work-life balance issues within the wider telecom industry. A larger and more diverse sample would allow for the identification of both commonalities and differences in work-life balance practices and employee experiences across various organisations, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings. Subsequent studies may also benefit from the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, thereby providing a more holistic view of the subject matter. For instance, surveys could be used to collect data from a broader population, while interviews or focus groups could yield deeper insights into the personal experiences of employees. Another promising area for future research involves conducting longitudinal studies to explore how work-life balance challenges and strategies



evolve over time within telecom companies. This would be particularly valuable in monitoring responses to technological advancements, shifts in labour market dynamics, and changes in workplace policies.

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