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Christoph Schädel

Work-life balance among cruise ship crews

A quantitative research approach

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Abstract

The concepts of work-life balance are a popular and in nowadays one of the most extensively discussed areas in organizational management as a consequence of its association with individual benefits, e.g. prevent burn-out, and organizational costs. The core aim of this study is to examine the impact of the unique working and living environment of cruise ships towards the physical and emotional exhaustion of their crews. In order to explain these, the study investigates traditional theories of Maslow and Herzberg, considers real life experiences of current and former crew members and takes a look on the most common statements of work-life balance. Although a lot of research work has been done in this field there seems to be a need to extend those to seafarers.

In this paper a quantitative research approach has been used to expose knowledge about which factors influence, and to what extent they influence seafarers' well-being in terms of the balance between work and life. 171 current and former crew members participated at an online questionnaire and four additional interviews have been conducted. Significant results were found throughout the study and its results indicated that even though some recreation facilities regulated by ILO, and provided by the cruise companies do already exist, there is a high need to continue developing practices to positively influence the relief of stress in order to ensure a balanced relationship between work and life at sea.

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> Blessed are those that can give without remembering and receive without forgetting.
>
> *Author Unknown*

> No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.
>
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List of Abbreviations

CLIA	Cruise Line International Association
FOC	Flag of Convenience
SIRC	Seafarers International Research Centre
ILO	International Labor Organization
ITF	International Transport Workers Federation
MLC	Maritime Labor Convention
SPSS	Statistical Program for Social Science
Ratings	All crew members without an Officer status
WLB	Work-life balance

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1. Introduction

Every cruise passenger experiences the ever smiling, friendly faces, which care for all and everything. Working where others experience adventures, relax, restore their energies, and enjoy world-class services, has to be fun. It seems that working on a cruise ship is a very enviable job. But is it really? This paper examines the impact on personal costs, in terms of physical and emotional exhaustion, of performing outstanding service and work on cruise vessels for several months a year.

"Work-life balance" meets many criteria of a popular common phrase: It seems that everybody has at least a rough idea what is meant by the term; its use is connected to positive association rather than negatives and so it is quite easy to attach many factors – old as well as new ones- to its meaning. Therefore it is no wonder to meet in many Companies – well known- job arrangements, which are titled now Work-life balance arrangements. The most common statements are: more flexible and family friendly working hours, followed by sport and leisure time offerings, nutrition counseling, further job training and a higher service for families to assist finding a child day-care. Nevertheless the general traditional academic discussion about the relationship between work and the "rest of the life" stands above the balance of job and family. So the scope has changed from (expectant) mothers and, especially younger, kids in former times, towards a higher concentration of diverse fields of life and job (Resch, 2003).

Since there is no unified definition of the term, and within the academically and popular-science literature a multitude of different explanations and description exist, it is needed to define it by its single facets, Work, Life and Balance. Afterwards combine those to get a clear idea of the whole term.

> *Work: "activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a result; such activity as means of earning income; treated as a place where industrial or manufacturing processes are carried out"* (Oxford dictionaries)
>
> *Life: "the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death; a particular type or aspect of people's existence; vitality, vigour or energy"* (Oxford dictionaries)

> *Balance: "an even distribution of weight ensuring stability; mental or emotional stability; a condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions"* (Oxford dictionaries)

If we take all the various statements of the terminus Work-life balance together, it becomes clear that we are far away from a unified and consistent definition about it. The appellation can be understood at most as an identification mark of a certain field of topic, meaning that work-life balance marks a set of questions and topics to define the scope, coordination and integration of different fields of life (Resch, 2003).

It might seem abstract to talk about the importance of balance between work and life in times of economic struggle, when the G 8's negotiating of how to minimize debts, but the current trend in all jobs points towards a higher performance with fewer resources. So work-life balance can be considered as a question of economical sanity rather than luxury during economically prospered times.

It also might be ways easier to consider the specialty of Work-life balance to any land based job rather than to the work onboard an ocean vessel.

Structure of study

This paper is divided into nine paragraphs. Including the main parts of an introduction to the field of study, a detailed literature review, an explanation and description of the actual study, certain practices of work-life balances, testing of the identified hypothesis, a discussion on the findings, identified limitations and a conclusion.

Aim of the study

This study's aim is to explore the balance between work and life for crew members on cruise ships, and to identify factors of motivation among those seafarers. Afterwards the author will provide some practical opportunities in how to improve the balance between work and non-work of seamen and –women. Being constantly surrounded by the working environment, which means that employees can not separate work and private life, creates a much higher need for physical and psychological opportunities for relief of stress and all factors that help to perform the job tomorrow as good as it was performed yesterday.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Meaning of Work

The facet 'Work' gains more and more importance in today's society. People spend ever more time learning for a certain job, train important skills and working itself. According to the definition of the Oxford dictionary 'Work' has a multitude of meanings and values to different nationalities and individuals. So for instance a working period of one year of an average German employee consists of 104 days off (considered a five-day working week), an average of 13 days of bank holidays and 30 vacation days, summing that up an average working year lasts 218 days – not included in this calculation are the days of sickness (Schaetzing, 2010), whereas a Japanese employee has the obligation of 236 days of full-time work, during a year (Gornick, Heron, & Ross, 2007). Also the average collectively agreed weekly working hours differ from nation to nation.

In comparison with that onboard it is of no meaning from which nation crew-members originate from. All have to perform a 7-day working week for several months.

According to Snir et al. "[…] work plays a central and fundamental role in the life of individuals[…]" (Snir & Harpaz, 2002). And since individuals are different from one another the degree of general importance of work differs from human to human. Work is important to the development and maintenance of a person's identity (Quintanilla-Ruiz & Wilpert, 1991). So success in a job can lead to an improved interpersonal relationship and mental health, within and without the working environment. Those relationships are part of most need theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which will be discussed later in this chapter. It also influences the perception of an individual within its social environment. Nevertheless working does not just represent the essential role of earning money to support the non-work part in a human's life (financial wealth), it contributes to one's sense of personal identity and gives individuals a sense of being tied into a larger society, of providing social contact and of having a purpose in life (Basini et al. in Kronberg, 2003). And it is also an important component of character traits, such as decision making, satisfaction, loyalty, commitment etc.

The importance of work as the central point of life can best be demonstrated by the 'lottery theory', where people have been asked to imagine the following:

> They would win a large sum in a lottery, enough to support themselves without any need to earn any more money. Than the question was raised, if they would continue working, or if they would not.

Depending on the different occasions and different nationalities the majority of interviewees, namely 65-95%, stated that they would continue working, because fulltime inactivity does not look very attractive in forms of self-actualization, which represent the highest human desire. Psychological literature accounts that outcome with "the importance of work to individual mental and emotional well-being" (Vecchio, 1980; Harpaz, 2002 in Kronberg, 2003, p. 1)

In the following two important theories concerning motivation at work will be examined.

2.1.1 Maslow's hierarchy of Needs

The American psychologist Abraham Maslow is considered to be one of the most important founders of human psychology, who aspired mental health and investigated the human 'self-realization'. His scientific work "Motivation and Personality", published 1943 and extended in 1970, contained the 5 level model of human needs. His approach requires progressive satisfaction of these hierarchical needs. Even if his whole work was by far more complex, the "Maslow's hierarchy of Needs" became very popular in order to illustrate the motivational factors of human needs. "This hierarchical approach is underpinned by rigorous psychological theory of human motivation" (Maslow cited in Clarke, Islam, & Paech, 2006, p. 934)**.** These needs are classified into a variety of categories, as shown in figure 1.

Each level builds up on the fulfillment of the level below. Considering this model, humans tend to satisfy their needs of the lowest level before reflect upon a level of higher needs. That means as long as a desire of a lower rank not meet its approval, the desire of a higher level need does theoretically not exist.

"Within the hierarchy of human needs, human well-being is bounded by the fulfillment of a given set of ascending needs. Human effort is exerted to achieve each level" (Maslow in Clarke, Islam, & Paech, 2006, p. 935). Physiological needs embody the basis of the hierarchy and are seen as essential to the existence of human beings, such as food, water and air. Maslow believed that, once a given level of need is satisfied, it does no longer act as a motivator. Therefore the highest need that humans aspire is self-actualization. "All behavior